

Firing of NIMH Director Bert Brown Reflects Califano Policy and Style

When Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr., discussed the dismissal of Bertram A. Brown from the directorship of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) at a 22 December press conference he went beyond the bounds of a pro forma hail and farewell. Brown is a "first-class man and he's done a first-class job," said Califano. "I have no criticism of the job he has done or anything else. It is my policy that it's for the good of the government and good of individuals for us to turn over these posts when people have been in them for a number of years."

The removal of an official heading a federal science agency tends to cause an anxiety reflex in the scientific community, which likes to think of such posts as nonpolitical. But the Brown firing appears to have promoted few public protests either among NIMH's constituents in the universities and medical schools or on Capitol Hill, where Brown had friendly bipartisan connections. However, among federal officials and some Washington government watchers there was alarm about the implications of Califano's new principle of administrative obsolescence, because Brown occupies a post at a level heretofore generally immune from "political" firings.

Brown, 46, a psychiatrist by training and a regular in the quasimilitary Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service, served for 7 years as director of NIMH and for 4 years before that as deputy director. In Washington, Brown has been known for his political savvy and survival skills. As a registered Democrat who weathered a Republican administration he was regarded as leading a politically charmed life, and there is some irony in his being sacked by Democrats.

Perhaps unfairly, judgments of Brown's performance as NIMH director dwell on his successful Horatio-at-the-Bridge efforts at defending NIMH against Nixon budget cutters. Brown's key involvement, after all, was in development of the community mental health centers (CMHC's) which have had a transforming effect on the structure and rationale of mental health care.

Personally, Brown is known as a witty and engaging man who does not stand on formalities—he seems to be almost uni-

versally known as "Bert." As NIMH director he has had a reputation for taking firm, sometimes unpopular, policy stands, a quality not widely shared among federal science administrators. Perhaps as a result, leaders of the research community for several years were unhappy with what was happening to NIMH research funds and laid the blame at Brown's door.

The NIMH directorship, it should be noted, is a more exposed position than the top job in most other federal science agencies. NIMH not only supports research and training activities as do the institutes of the National Institutes of Health, for example. But NIMH also provides major funding for programs which deliver services to the public, particularly through the CMHC's. More than half of NIMH's one-half billion dollar budget goes for support of mental health services, with all the opportunities for competition and controversy that implies. For all of these reasons, even Brown's friends and admirers concede that it would be more difficult to proceed with the reassessment the administration is now asking for with Brown in office.

There was a flurry of attention during the holidays when Brown was reported in the press to have said he would fight the ouster. Brown says that he was not questioning the authority of his superiors to move him from the NIMH job, only pointing out that as a career official in good standing, and an assistant surgeon general at that, he was entitled to a post of equivalent responsibility.

The timing of the firing also caused comment because it came nearly a full year after the Carter Administration took office and a few days before Christmas when, all through Washington, hardly a creature was stirring. The action did come when Congress was fortuitously out of town—Senator Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the subcommittee which handles much NIMH legislation, was in fact on his way to China. It is also true, however, that the firing came some 2 weeks after Brown's immediate superior, Gerald L. Klerman, director of the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration, was sworn in. It is not surprising that HEW brass wanted Kler-

man officially in place when he asked for Brown's resignation.

Of more than passing interest, however, was Califano's enunciation of a turnover principle for top HEW jobs. His statement on the subject sent tremors through the upper stratas of the HEW bureaucracy. At a press conference on 29 December a reporter asked if Califano cared to "detail your guidelines for seeing who has been in a job too long," and noted "uncertainty among your troops on the point."

Califano replied that he thought "one of the tragedies" at HEW is that lower and middle level managers haven't been given "an opportunity to have two or three careers over the course of their stay at HEW."

"One of the things I wanted to offer next year was to put in place a plan that will allow that to happen." He said he thought people under such a plan worked more effectively and enjoyed it more and "the institutions benefit tremendously." Califano observed that "the management and public policy problems and techniques are simple enough so that people can move from education to health or welfare or what have you, and I hope we can encourage that [kind of flexibility]."

Califano's comments were consistent with views he has expressed and actions taken since he went to HEW. In his original announcement of Brown's firing he noted that early in his regime he made a clean sweep of occupants of top health posts in HEW except for Donald Fredrickson, director of the National Institutes of Health. He said at the time that Fredrickson was staying because he was fairly new to the job, and was performing well and that NIH needed a period of stability. Those in the federal health and science establishment who react negatively say that Califano has changed the accepted rules by including a lower strata of administrators among those to be hired and fired on "political" grounds. The assumption in the past has been that subcabinet officials and agency heads and a relatively small number of other officials in policy-level jobs are "political," that is, part of the Administration, while other officials are promoted or displaced according to the rules governing the career bureaucracy.

The distinction being made in respect to Brown's firing as NIMH head and Califano's dismissal last spring of David Sencer, director of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, is that both were career officials and heads of operating agencies and were one step below the level usually reached by "political" de-

cisions on top level personnel changes.

If Califano's principle were rigorously applied, it would be reasonable to expect, say the critics, that directors of every institute of the National Institutes of Health who had been in the job for a few years would be replaced when a new HEW secretary came in. This would certainly be upsetting to NIH's research constituency and, at least under present conditions, would create a kind of job insecurity unlikely to enhance federal service for able administrators.

To an outsider, the distinctions between policy and operating jobs can seem finely drawn. The main question raised by critics of Califano's action is that of how far down into an organization the relieving of managers should go, particularly when the criterion for dismissal is the rather arbitrary one of time in the job rather than the accepted one of poor performance.

Califano's argument for flexibility is not implausible. Over a period of years, the head of a federal agency becomes identified with particular programs, appoints people to jobs, forms alliances, and strikes bargains. Not all decisions

work out brilliantly, circumstances change and the administrator, inevitably, is to some extent "locked in." It is hard for the veteran administrator in the federal bureaucracy to change direction himself and, perhaps more important, to get his agency to change.

NIMH does face fresh issues, a point made by ADAMHA head Klerman, who seconds Califano's rationale for the no-fault firing of Brown. Klerman says that the overriding issue for NIMH is the need for further integration of mental health services into the general health care system. The community mental health centers supported by NIMH have provided an alternative to treatment in state mental hospitals and made mental health services available more widely, but there has been criticism that the centers have been "separationist," in the sense that many centers chose not to cooperate closely with other public health care institutions.

Klerman also indicates that NIMH and its sister agencies in ADAMHA, the Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the National Institute on Drug Abuse, have tended to go their separate

ways and an effort will be made to achieve closer collaboration. Some observers are waiting to see whether the Califano rule will be applied to the directors of the alcohol and drug abuse institutes.

One of Califano's major priorities has been to prod the health agencies in HEW into preparing for the advent of national health insurance. President Carter has indicated that he wants provisions for substantial mental health care included in the program and Klerman says that NIMH will be expected to come up with practical proposals for mental health coverage.

The interest of President and Mrs. Carter in mental health problems is well known and there is a prevailing assumption that the Administration will launch a major mental health initiative after the President's Commission on Mental Health finishes its work this year. NIMH would play a leading part in such an effort.

As for Brown's firing, most informed observers are convinced that personalities as well as principles figured in the action. ADAMHA director Klerman,

Briefing

NIH Considers Animal Rights

The National Institutes of Health is gingerly inspecting the question of animal rights. Inspired chiefly by Christine Stevens of the Animal Welfare Institute in Washington, D.C., an in-house NIH group has prepared minor revisions to the animal use principles imposed on NIH grantees.

The ethics of animal experimentation was a question addressed in a recent speech by NIH deputy director Thomas E. Malone. Noting that the public's interest is shifting from animal welfare to animal rights, Malone said that "it behooves us to ask the same questions of ourselves—before they are asked of us. Does the potential good justify the use of an animal in an experiment? Will the research yield fruitful results which cannot be obtained by other means? Is the research necessary? Are we prepared to terminate an experiment whenever its continuation may result in unnecessary suffering to an animal? If the answers to these questions are 'yes,' then I for one have no difficulty in supporting the research."

Malone said he did not fear greater public scrutiny of science and scientists; if scientists fulfill their responsibilities to the environment, "then science has nothing to fear but much to gain from greater public interest and involvement in scientific endeavors."

The NIH's revised principles for animal use have not yet been published, but they have the support of the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science.

A New Militancy in England

The animal rights movement in England has moved into the guerilla phase. Animal welfare has always played a large role in English sensibilities, particularly among the gentility and the intelligentsia. The cause is supported by numerous groups and by public figures such as novelist Brigid Brophy. Another writer, Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down* and *Shardik*, has chosen two experimentally altered animals as the central characters of his latest work, *The Plague Dogs*.

The conventional espousers of animal

rights in England have now been joined by a quite different group. Militant activists known as the Animal Liberation Front, they argue that a century of peaceful campaigning has gotten nowhere. They are prepared to go to jail for their beliefs, and several have done so.

Over the last 18 months the militants have conducted a campaign of violence and sabotage against laboratories and animal breeding plants. They have freed animals, damaged property, and even burgled the offices of their chief opponents, the Research Defense Society. A few days after the break-in the secretary of the society was telephoned by a man who said, "This is the Animal Liberation Front. We have your files. We think you're pretty sick people."

The front claims a hard core membership of 150 people organized into small bands of activists. It is probably too early to say whether its illegal methods will prove productive. One of its most successful bids for public attention was the freeing of beagles being used by Imperial Chemical Industries, the English DuPont, in experiments to test the safety of an artificial cigarette the company had developed. After a nationwide debate, the company abandoned its experiments.

Nicholas Wade

himself a psychiatrist and well known in the field (*Science*, 26 August), is regarded as tough and aggressive and as a man who would be uncomfortable with the directorship of NIMH occupied by Brown, who has not only dug in deeply at NIMH and on Capitol Hill but also has been highly influential in the national mental health network.

Brown's case is unusual. He was exceptionally young—under 40—when he was appointed to the NIMH job. A directorship would cap the career of many a health administrator, but for Brown there is the problem for what to do for an encore. And Brown is a PHS regular officer who signed up to spend a minimum of 20 years and now has 17½ years of service. That means he has 2½ years to go before he can qualify for pensions and other benefits and move out of government as many of his colleagues have done. Reassigning Brown has presented HEW with an awkward problem. Brown has been named a special assistant with still unspecified duties to Julius B. Richmond, assistant secretary for health.

Brown has been told he would have until early spring to wind up at NIMH, but after the press report that he was resisting the firing the word came to clean out his desk and vacate his big corner office; he is now somewhat in limbo.

Brown's dismissal is being interpreted by some as a sample of Califano's hardball management style. When he took the job he made no bones about his intention to master the bureaucratic behemoth of HEW. His vigor has prompted Washington jokes such as that about an "imperial secretaryship." The fact that Brown seems to have been anything but out of favor at the White House doesn't appear to have helped. In fact, it was reportedly a White House contact who told Brown that his firing was imminent and said that the White House had not been consulted and didn't approve. This is not to suggest that the President is offended. Carter said at the beginning of his Administration that he wanted his Cabinet officers to run their departments. Califano is certainly doing that and is said to continue on good terms with Carter.

There is no real sign of a backlash from the Brown firing. The typical reaction in the mental health community is to say that Brown did a great job and express the hope that a capable successor will be found—the search for one has just been launched. Califano's policy on turnover of administrators seems to be the major question produced by the incident.

It seems reasonable to question whether federal managers should expect tenure in top jobs. Given human nature and the civil service system, excessive insulation of the status quo in the upper echelons has a sedative effect on individuals and agencies. Because of the Carter penchant for government reorganization, bureaucrats are perhaps extra sensitive these days, despite the President's reassurances that there will be no downgradings or firings. But Califano's formula of several careers for upper echelon federal executives seems to have shaken up a fair number of people outside of government as well as inside.

—JOHN WALSH

India Bans Monkey Export: U.S. May Have Breached Accord

Safety testing of polio vaccine and several kinds of biomedical research in the United States and other countries may be seriously impeded by a recent decision of the government of India to ban further export of rhesus monkeys after April this year.

Reasons for the edict are still unclear but one factor may have been reports in the Indian press that the monkeys have been used for weapons-related research conducted by the U.S. Defense Nuclear Agency.

The use of the monkeys could contravene the letter, not to say the spirit, of a 1955 agreement between India and the United States. The Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute, a branch of the Defense Nuclear Agency, uses about 50 rhesus monkeys a year in weapons-related radiation experiments, according to the institute's research program coordinator E. T. Still. Yet the agreement states that "because of the Indian gov-

ernment's opposition to the use of Indian rhesus monkeys in military experiments, they will not be used in atomic blast experiments or for space research."

Health authorities are so concerned about the embargo that they asked the White House if President Carter could seek reversal of the Indian decision during his recent visit to Delhi. It is not yet known if Carter raised the issue.

Without some new supply of monkeys, the Indian embargo "could very seriously affect our vaccine program," says James H. Vickers of the Bureau of Biologics. The bureau has been planning to breed its own monkeys but will not be able to fulfill its needs from its own production for another 2 years. An available alternative species, the long-tailed macaque, is not as good as the rhesus for safety testing, Vickers says. Defense scientists will also have difficulty in switching to another species and their experiments, according to Defense Nuclear

Agency director R. R. Munroe, are "vital to our national security."

India, which now supplies about 12,000 of the animals a year to the United States, is the principal commercial source of wild rhesus monkeys. Indian sensitivities to the export trade have always been extremely delicate. The monkey is a sacred animal to many Indians—the monkey god Hanuman is a member of the Hindu pantheon. An earlier embargo on rhesus export was imposed in the 1950's for a mixture of religious and political reasons.

The new embargo, announced on 2 December, seems to have been triggered at least in part by a Berkeley based animal rights group known as the International Primate Protection League. Recent press articles about the neutron bomb described certain radiation tests conducted with rhesus monkeys by the Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. League co-chairwoman Shirley McGreal brought the experiments to the attention of the Indian press. The *Times of India*, in an article of 4 November, quoted her as saying, "I am appealing to [Prime Minister] Mr. Morarji Desai and the new government of India either to ban the export of Rhesus monkeys to the United States or to insist on strict enforcement by the U.S. of India's conditions of export."