

California: Reagan and the Mental Health Controversy

California. During 1967, California's newly elected Republican governor, Ronald Reagan, became embroiled in a bitter controversy with the psychiatric profession and other supporters of mental health programs in the state. The controversy stemmed from the fact that Reagan, as part of a government-wide economy drive, imposed a stiff budget cut on the state Department of Mental Hygiene, a move which critics contended would return California mental institutions to the "snake pit" era of custodial care. The dispute became highly emotional, with the two sides trading wild charges and counter-charges.

Now, a year later, some of the dust has settled, and it is possible to begin to assess what actually happened. Evidence is at hand to indicate that the Reagan administration's economy moves did, at least in the short run, inflict damage on the state mental hospitals. In the long run, ironically, the state's mental health programs may not have been harmed, and may even have been helped, by the controversy and its aftermath.

Economy Pledge

One of Reagan's major campaign pledges had been that he would bring economy to state government and end years of Democratic "looting" of the state treasury. Shortly after taking office on 1 January 1967, Reagan announced plans to reduce spending for most state programs by about 10 percent from the levels proposed by the preceding Democratic administration for fiscal year 1968. The reductions were to apply to virtually all state agencies, including the Department of Mental Hygiene (DMH), which operates 14 hospitals for the mentally ill and mentally retarded and two neuropsychiatric institutes for research and training, and also provides primary support for 41 community mental health programs.

Two months later, in further detailing the cuts, the Reagan administration announced that the staff of DMH would be reduced by about 3700 positions—roughly one-sixth of the department's total personnel—over a 15-month period, and that 15 day-treatment centers,

aftercare clinics, and other state-operated facilities would be closed in advance of previously announced phasing-out plans. The bulk of the staff and budget cuts were to fall on the state's ten hospitals for the mentally ill.

Several prominent California psychiatrists have suggested that Reagan's budget cuts constituted an ideological attack on the mental health movement, consistent with the extreme "right wing" view that mental health is a Communist plot to brainwash Americans, but there seems to be no evidence to support this charge against Reagan. Indeed, Eugene Bardach, assistant professor of politics at Brandeis University, who has made a study of the controversy, told *Science* there is inferential evidence to the contrary: namely, Reagan has publicly pronounced himself a friend of mental health. Moreover, Bardach notes, Reagan once characterized mental hospitals as "hotel operations," an appellation which indicates that Reagan was concerned with waste and economy, whereas the far right would tend to characterize the hospitals as "political prisons."

Though Reagan received a barrage of criticism for his mental health cuts, the idea of reducing support for the mental hospitals was not uniquely his. The Legislative Analyst's Office, which makes budget recommendations to the legislature, had advocated such reductions for several years, and in early 1967 actually recommended the closing of three hospitals and the elimination of 3100 positions in the hospitals in line with declining patient populations. Nor was Reagan the first governor to attempt to implement cuts. The outgoing Democratic governor, Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, had himself recommended a drop of \$2.5 million in the budget for the hospitals, clinics, and day care centers for the mentally ill, from \$128.2 million in fiscal 1967 to \$125.7 proposed for fiscal 1968. However, Reagan imposed a much more drastic cut—first reducing Brown's proposed budget by 10 percent, to \$113.2 million, then chopping it down still further, to \$111.1 million.

The chief justification given for re-

ducing the budget was that the daily patient population in the state mental hospitals had dropped sharply (from 32,622 on 30 June 1964 to 21,966 three years later) while the size of the staff had remained more or less level, a trend which meant that the patient-staff ratio was being automatically "enriched" every year. The Reagan administration proposed to end this enrichment—at least temporarily—by reducing the staff in line with anticipated further declines in the patient load. The result, Reagan said, would be a constant level of care, not a reduction in the level of care. As the debate developed, Reagan pledged that, if the patient load (in terms of population, admissions, or degree of illness) exceeded expectations, he would ask the legislature for additional funds to hire more staff—but many mental health professionals expressed doubt that Reagan's promise would be carried out.

Arguments Against Cuts

Opponents of the cuts generally argued that conditions in the state mental hospitals, though improving, were still so deplorable that any reduction in personnel was unwise. As evidence they cited a February 1967 staffing standards report, commissioned by the legislature, which rated California's mental hospitals at only 68 percent of acceptable standards, and the hospitals for the mentally retarded at only 62 percent.

The debate quickly escalated into bitter warfare. Lining up in opposition to the cuts were local associations of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses; various mental hospital administrators; citizen groups concerned with care for the mentally ill or mentally retarded; numerous legislators and politicians; a state employees' association whose members stood to lose jobs; and civic and business leaders from communities that benefited heavily from hospital payrolls.

Many of the opposition forces banded together in an *ad hoc* group that raised more than \$40,000, put out a weekly newsletter, hired a public relations firm, and sponsored radio and television commercials ending with the tagline "Cutting the mental health budget sounds crazy to me."

Psychiatrists generally led the publicity offensive (or "offensive publicity," as the Reagan administration viewed it). One psychiatrist predicted that clumsy implementation of the budget cuts would mean that "some patients

will die"; another told a press conference that a patient had killed himself in discouragement over the proposed closing of a day treatment center; and a third asserted that staff reductions would soon make it necessary to place hospitalized children in straitjackets.

The Reagan administration was equally vitriolic. Reagan called the opposition's commercials "vicious," and prepared a television and radio spot accusing his opponents of "blackmail" and of conducting "a high-powered propaganda campaign." Reagan later laughingly dismissed the leading spokesman for the opposition as "a head-shrinker" who was "probably sitting there looking at the pupils of my eyes on television." Reagan's health and welfare administrator, meanwhile, charged that some opponents of the budget cuts were planning to sabotage patient care

in order to create "I-told-you-so" statistics to prove they had been right in saying that the budget cuts would be harmful.

Caught in the middle of the battle was James V. Lowry, the state director of mental hygiene, who told the legislature that, "from a professional standpoint," he could not recommend the level of care that Reagan sought to maintain in the mental hospitals, but who noted that "fiscal necessity may dictate undesired economies." Some California psychiatrists have charged that Lowry "sold out" to the Reagan administration by putting his obligations as a loyal administrator ahead of his obligations as a professional psychiatrist. They believe Lowry should have protested loudly against the cuts, and they lament the fact that Reagan was able to claim, somewhat misleadingly, that the

reductions had the "support" of Lowry. However, other participants in the battle believe Lowry pursued a sensible course by yielding to the inevitable and then working effectively within the administration to strengthen mental health programs in the long run.

Reagan Unconvinced

When the battle subsided, after roughly 4 months of intense struggle, the opposition forces had won over the people (to judge from opinion polls), most of the state's editorial writers, and a majority of the state legislature—everyone but Reagan, the man who counted. Though the legislature restored most of Reagan's cuts, the governor in turn vetoed most of the restorations.

As it turned out, however, the Department of Mental Hygiene did not suffer the grievous cuts that at first seemed likely. Reagan delayed closing various threatened facilities when local officials were unable to assume immediate responsibility for providing the services, and he approved additional funds and staff to meet a greater-than-anticipated patient load in the hospitals, as he had promised he would. These actions, coupled with a hefty pay increase and other factors, resulted in an increase in appropriations for the department as a whole in fiscal 1968—not a decrease as originally seemed likely. Within the department, the research institutes, the hospitals for the retarded, and local mental health programs all ended up with more money than they had the previous year, while the mental hospitals, the nub of the controversy, dropped from \$128.2 million to \$124.1 million—much less than the drop to \$111.1 million originally threatened. Bardach the political scientist, believes the mental hospitals lost out because the people they serve lack political influence. Lowry, the department director, believes the hospitals lost out because the violent attacks on the governor made compromise difficult.

What has been the impact of the cuts on the state mental hospitals, the institutions which suffered the most? "Generally adverse," according to a paper presented at the May annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association by Bardach and Alfred Auerback, a San Francisco psychiatrist who played a prominent role in the struggle. The department of mental hygiene's own surveys of ward nursing care, which are prepared by Aerojet General Corporation, using techniques of systems analysis, show that the level

Pentagon Policy on War Dissent

The Pentagon last week issued a policy memorandum laying down guidelines for dealing with university scientists conducting research for the Defense Department who are publicly critical of the Vietnam war. In recent weeks two defense research agencies have sent out letters to several mathematicians (Science, 20 September) questioning whether it is consistent for them to continue their basic research for the military in view of their publicly expressed attitudes on the war. The memorandum was signed by John S. Foster, director of defense research and engineering. The text of the memorandum follows.

SUBJECT: Consideration of Non-Technical Issues in Research Contract Management

Recent concern regarding the views taken on non-technical issues by the principal investigators under certain DoD contracts warrants our careful attention. In general, I believe we must be confident about the willingness of principal researchers to receive DoD support, consult on appropriate DoD problems, and bring to our attention any findings relevant to national security. Thus I ask you to take the following steps in instances where the situation is uncertain:

1. Review all such contracts for quality and productivity.
2. Do not emphasize non-technical issues in your evaluation of the desirability of terminating or renewing research contracts. These are subtle issues which require careful, consistent, and sensitive treatment. Clearly, some members of the R&D community have disagreed with governmental decisions while they contributed significantly to the country.
3. Request principal investigators to re-examine their intent and desire to receive continued DoD support. To ensure a consistent DoD-wide policy, please consult with the office of the Deputy Director (Research and Technology) in my office on any such written requests to your contractors.
4. Take all necessary actions to preserve our mutually beneficial relationships with the academic research community during this period when there are potentially divisive pressures.

/s/ John S. Foster, Jr.

of nursing care dropped from 85 percent of the desired standard in May 1967 to 77 percent in September 1967 and then partially rebounded to 80 percent in January 1968. The results of a more recent survey are currently being tabulated, and while DMH officials are cautiously optimistic that the latest survey will show further improvement, no one is predicting that the mental hospitals have yet returned to the level they were at in May 1967.

Another outside survey, completed by the California Medical Association (CMA) last February, made numerous critical comments about the hospitals, though the CMA's report was carefully worded so as to placate both sides in the controversy. The CMA generally tried to remain neutral during the budget fight, partly because the organization had other political problems to worry about, partly because its conservative leadership was suspicious of the motives of the more liberal psychiatrists in attacking Reagan. CMA officials say Reagan asked them to conduct the survey to deflect renewed criticism after a Danish mental health

official visited a California hospital for the retarded and declared, "I could not believe my eyes. In our country we would not treat cattle like that."

Though the evidence seems clear that Reagan's budget cuts caused at least temporary deterioration in the level of care at the mental hospitals, some participants in the budget battle believe the hospitals will fare quite well in the long run. They base their optimism partly on the fact that Reagan has pledged himself to a 14-point program to improve mental health care, including the adoption in principle of new staffing standards recommended to the legislature in 1967, partly on the fact that Reagan's budget for fiscal year 1969 makes amends for some of the previous cutbacks and provides the initial money required to reach full implementation of the new staffing standards within 5 years. (CMA officials claim they "negotiated" Reagan's 14-point program in return for giving Reagan an advance peek at their survey of the state hospitals, a deal which enabled Reagan, who then had presidential ambitions, to head off possible ad-

verse publicity by announcing his proposal at 62, just 4 days before the scheduled

Another encouraging sign to many of the combatants is the fact that the legislature this year passed—and Reagan signed—a number of "good" mental health bills, including landmark legislation to strengthen the role of local communities in providing mental health services. The publicity generated by the budget battles, and the anger at Reagan's cuts, are said to have helped in getting the legislation through.

"We had a fair-sized panic, but in the long run the budget cuts have actually generated, in my opinion, more pluses than minuses," says Stuart C. Knox, head of the CMA's mental health committee. And even Irving Philips, a psychiatrist who was considered the chief spokesman for the anti-budget cut forces, now believes that "things are a little better than when Reagan came into office—though to some extent it's in spite of him." It remains to be seen whether Reagan will fully implement his announced programs but some mental health leaders are cautiously optimistic.—PHILIP M. BOFFEY

James E. Webb: NASA's Chief Organization Man Departs

The departure of James E. Webb from the top post of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration comes at a time when NASA is building steadily to Project Apollo's grande finale of putting men on the moon, but when the agency faces real uncertainty about what to do for an encore.

Webb came to NASA shortly after the Kennedy inauguration and presided over the expansion of the space program into a scientific-technical-managerial undertaking unparalleled in peacetime. Relatively speaking, Webb's time as NASA Administrator amounted to 7 years of plenty for the agency, although the Vietnam war and the urban crisis have cost NASA a decline in budget and in public attention. His successor will have to deal with the question of a mission for NASA in the 1970's, and also with reviving pressures to merge NASA with the Air Force or subordinate the civil agency to the military.

On Capitol Hill Webb has earned a reputation as an energetic administrator and as a well-informed witness in the cause of the space program. His low point personally and as administrator probably came in early 1967 in the wake of the Apollo accident in which three astronauts died. Hill observers say that his sorrow and his effort to defend the program brought out the best and worst in him, as he told legislators more than they wanted to know about the detail of the accident and not enough about who was to blame. The lasting impression, however, seems to have been respect for Webb's shouldering of responsibility and a feeling that effective action would be taken to prevent repetition of the fatal incident.

Webb will leave NASA on 7 October, at 62, just 4 days before the scheduled manned Apollo test flight (NASA Deputy Administrator Thomas O. Paine

has been named acting administrator). Announcement of Webb's retirement was made in a rather offhand way as Webb left a White House meeting with the President. In an exchange with reporters, Webb conceded that he thought NASA has been used "as a sort of whipping boy" by Congress, and that the present pace of the U.S. space program "will not bring parity" with the Soviet Union. At the same time Webb said his decision to retire was not linked to cuts in the space program budget, noting that other programs had also suffered deep budget cuts.

Webb became NASA Administrator in the days of the Kennedy "talent hunt," but he seems to have been Vice President Lyndon Johnson's nominee. An attempt was being made to expand the scope and influence of the Vice Presidency, and picking a new NASA Administrator devolved on Johnson, who was head of the Space Council. Webb had spent most of the 1950's as an executive for Kerr-McGee Oil Industries, built by Oklahoma Senator Robert Kerr. Since Kerr had succeeded Johnson in the chairmanship of the Senate Space Committee and moved into a power vacuum in the Senate left by the ex-Majority Leader's departure, there was some criticism that Webb's