

Paul Booth

# Deinstitutionalizing the public health system: fiscal conservatism in new left clothes

A romance between fiscal conservatives and social reform do-gooders has led to the birth of a new movement for the "deinstitutionalization" of publicly-operated mental hospitals and other health and social service facilities.

The deinstitutionalization movement fueled by an enthusiasm of the '60s—the search for more humane means of social-problem-solving. Buttressed by an academic and new-left consensus that sees existing public institutions as "snake pits," "totalitarian," etc., the movement began as a drive for community health centers and halfway-houses for rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. These programs, launched under President Kennedy, grew up alongside existing systems. But as the "fiscal crisis" hit state governments in the mid-'60s, community-based programs began to be counterposed to state institutions and a forceful movement to close the latter developed.

In the case of mental hospitals, a harsh financial rationale lurked behind the oft-stated humanitarian motives. The present federal law provides funds for patients in private facilities but not for those in the public institution. The burgeoning Medicaid program could not be used for state hospital residents between 21 and 65. The federal 50-72 percent share of welfare payments is not available for wards of the state.

Finally, Supplemental Security Income, the welfare program for the aged, pays 100 percent of costs for residents of private board-and-care homes, but nothing for residents of public facilities. Little wonder that the states would seek to get their patients "out of their beds and into the streets." And waiting eagerly were

the fast-growing nursing home and halfway house industries. In less than 15 years, state mental hospitals have been cut back by 75 percent, nursing homes have grown by 1300 percent.

Without a reformist rationale, the profit-hungry beneficiaries of deinstitutionalization wouldn't have gotten far. Welfare professionals traditionally shunned profit-making in the social services, and only recently began to experiment with lucrative enterprises. Jerome Miller, the nation's most enthusiastic deinstitutionalizer, has filled a real need, first in Massachusetts, then in Illinois and currently in Pennsylvania. He has been candid about his purpose:

One of the great challenges to our society in the remainder of the 20th century is to dismantle state government agency and distribute the responsibility and financial resources to new mechanisms for the organization and delivery of human services. (From Miller's paper, "A Strategy for Youth in Trouble.")

Miller has applied his philosophy both to juvenile corrections and to child welfare, substituting contracts with profit-making halfway houses and group homes for state facilities.

In California desinstitutionalization was the program of the Reagan administration, whose plan, now sidetracked, was to close all mental hospitals by 1977 and retardation centers by 1981. As the state evicted its patients, thousands were left incapable of caring for themselves; the population of the mental hospitals

went from 55,000 in 1955 to 7,000 in 1973. One of those discharged was Charles Richard Soper, certified in May 1973 as no longer "presenting a danger to himself or others." Two weeks later he killed himself, his wife and three children with a .22. John Philip Bunyard, released in 1967, begged his social worker—"I don't want to go out there. I feel like a puppy you're putting on the freeway." Six years later he committed two murders, two rapes, and several kidnappings on a 500-mile chase through California. Newspaper morgues from coast to coast are now bulging with post mortems of cases like these or of the victims of criminal neglect in nursing homes.

In Illinois the mental hospitals do little to keep track of discharged patients or to track down those who walk away—after 30 days an AWOL patient is officially discharged. This looks good in the statistics, in which "discharged" implies "cured."

Psychotropic drugs play a large role in the deinstitutionalization movement in mental health, by taking the edge off dangerous behavior. Typically, the discharged mental patient is unconditionally released because his behavior is no longer dangerous to self or others. With a supply of pills and the address to get more—a community health center—the discharged adult re-enters society—often to go on welfare.

Others, who can't take care of themselves, enter nursing homes—900,000 as of 1974. Compared to under 400,000 mentally ill and retarded at state hospitals and schools, it is obvious that private nursing homes are the real locus of institutionalization.

Currently 77 percent of the country's nursing homes are privately owned and

operated for profit. The profit-motive doesn't square easily with the responsibilities of safeguarding health for dependent people. The industry is notorious for the low wages it pays to its nursing aides—the front-line of care. Low wages cause high turnover, which leads to inferior care—and high profits.

The industry is also known for shady accounting practices and patient neglect. Hardly a month goes by without some new regulatory initiative by state agencies that foot the bill, by Congress, or HEW. Yet the system continues to place more mentally ill at the mercy of nursing home proprietors.

Today's favorite reform strategy is the promotion of home health care. Visionaries—and employers of homemakers—see hundreds of thousands of patients moved out of nursing homes into their own apartments, with services brought directly to them. Late in the Ford administration HEW held hearings to sanction the entrance of proprietary home health services and to amend Medicaid, Medicare and SSI regulations to facilitate reimbursement.

These regulations are now being considered by the new HEW officials. They contain the same dilemma present in all aspects of Medicaid—we want the best kind of services available, but the character of the organizations delivering them needs scrutiny, too.

A new reform strategy must be launched, and its hallmark should be that providers guilty of exploitation of patients should be suspended and their programs taken over by the public sector.

Paul Booth is a trade union official in Chicago.

Simon Rosenblum

## Socialism and social democracy, in Canada's New Democratic party

A debate concerning socialism vs. social democracy has begun to engage the American left. Across the border one expects to find substantial discussion regarding the New Democratic party but the Canadian left is surprisingly uninvolved in the NDP. The NDP is a social-democratic labor party, partly based on and largely financed by the trade unions. Contrary to most Canadian leftists, I believe that the NDP, whatever its past and present shortcomings, can eventually be turned into a socialist party genuinely committed to the creation of a radically different social order.

Before discussing working within a social-democratic party, the question of whether there can be an electoral transition to socialism must be dealt with. Many leftists argue that the parliamentary "road to socialism" is not a road at all; it is a deadend. The most common complaint is that the capitalists would never permit it and the Chilean tragedy is used as a definitive example. It is true that ruling classes don't just fold up their tents and slink away. Capitalists, if ever decisively threatened, will put up the strongest possible resistance, by whatever means they have on hand, to prevent their own extinction or harassment. But it is not true that this inevitably means armed resistance by capitalists and their military forces. Democratic traditions in advanced Western countries seem strong enough to allow one to envisage a major onslaught against the power of capital without risking the survival of democracy.

Although often dismissed as "revisionist" such an analysis was made by Marx and Engels who suggested that a socialist transformation in such countries as England and Holland, with their deep-rooted democratic traditions, might be relatively peaceful. The electoral alliance between the French Socialist and Communist parties may favorably resolve this question in the 1980s.

The electoral arena must be entered if socialism is to be put on the agenda of Canadian politics. The alternative is a politics outside the established formal democratic framework that continues to occupy a mystical never-never land. Such theorizing may intoxicate the militants, but it remains a fantasy. As long as the parliamentary route is available, a party that does not attempt to gain power through it will not be taken seriously. As a recent *ITT* editorial maintained: "A movement that does not submit itself publicly to the judgment of the people can never hope to gain their confidence and loyalty." It is a tragic irony of 20th century history that the socialist and democratic traditions became to a significant extent, divorced. Against the words of an *ITT* editorial: "To reject 'bourgeois democracy' not only confuses substance with form, but also implicitly or explicitly rejects democracy itself."

Following from this orientation is the question for Canadian socialists of whether to work within the NDP or form a socialist party. The latter might seem like an attractive option but the close relationship

of the labor movement with the NDP makes it extremely difficult for such a party to gain any constituency. It is by no means accidental that such attempts inevitably end up as small fringe groups lacking the strength to be taken seriously. Unlike the Democratic party in the U.S., the NDP is clearly a "workers" party and enjoys deep loyalties as a result of this attachment. It is of little use to claim that the dispersion of illusions about the NDP will produce a climate in which a new party could take root: established parties are not disestablished that way. Only after an alternative has emerged do masses of people change their allegiance. Consequently, a meaningful socialist force can only be built through working to transform the NDP into a socialist party that can be the instrument for socialist victory in Canada. As indicated by efforts to transform the English, German and Swedish labor parties, the task is not an easy one and failure is at least as likely as success. Social-democratic parties have a striking tendency toward increasing conformity but there is no immutable law that says the NDP must always oppose socialist politics. Difficult or not, it is clear that if socialists cannot win over the membership of social-democratic parties they are unlikely to influence the general population. Since the NDP (at least, on the national level) is far removed from the seats of power, there is a much greater opportunity of changing both its policies and leaders than has been the situation in England, Germany and Sweden.

It is true that there can be no purely parliamentary approach to socialism. Fundamental political change occurs only after a prolonged period of ferment and conflict within the principal cultural, social, and economic institutions of society. This necessitates what German student leader Rudi Dutschke called "a long march through all the institutions of society." The radical transformation of the existing social order in a socialist direction will require a lot more than electoral legitimation and, within a complex and diffuse scenario, must include many different forms of action, pressure and struggle. The NDP must be transformed so that it actively intervenes in the day-to-day struggles of working people. The problem is to make the NDP capable of giving institutional expression to greater participation, to make it the leader and not the controller of—or substitute for—participant and democratic action. A reformed NDP must be present at every contradiction and conflict in society, and at every effort at invention and creation. The NDP must learn the necessity of making the question of socialism vs. capitalism central to all its public activity. This is the only way in which the consciousness of people, rather than the opinions of voters, can finally be changed.

Simon Rosenblum is a Canadian and was active in the Canadian left during the late '60s and early '70s. After four years in the U.S. he will be returning to Canada in the near future.





Frances Moore Lappe / Joe Collins

# World recession improves the Jamaican diet

Changes in Jamaica in the early 1970s, including a shift toward greater food self-reliance, higher wages for workers and more national revenue retained from foreign investment, were ridiculed by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1976. According to the *Journal*, such policies must have been dreamed up by a coalition of "Yuppies, Jane Fonda and the most adventurous liberals in the U.S. Congress." But those who have studied the effects on the welfare of Jamaicans perceive the shift differently.

By the early '70s Jamaica had become dependent on imports for almost one-half the calories its two million people consumed. Over two-thirds of the country's protein supply was coming from imported food, primarily from the U.S. When international food prices began to climb in 1973 many feared nutritional disaster for the people of Jamaica. Banana export revenues, a primary source of foreign exchange with which to import food, remained virtually constant. Thus between mid-1973 and 1975 food prices within Jamaica doubled.

What was the impact on the majority

of rural Jamaicans who spent 70 to 90 percent of their income in 1973 on food? Nutritional surveys in the parish of St. James by Dr. Thomas Marchione of the University of Connecticut's department of community medicine found the impact to be the opposite of what many feared. Based on a sample of 300 households, Marchione concluded that, contrary to expectation, serious forms of malnutrition in children had been cut in half, from 9.5 percent of the population to 4.5 percent during the period 1973 to 1975. Improvement in nutritional well-being appeared to be the greatest in the semi-substance households, where improvement was on the order of 66 percent. Malnutrition dropped from 14.4 percent to 4.3 percent. Indeed, the poorest families benefitted the most.

How does Marchione explain the improvement in the nutritional well-being of the people when food prices were rising so rapidly and export income from a major export crop, bananas, was stagnant? "The soaring costs of imported foods, the shortages of imported foods, and perhaps to a small degree, banning

import of some nonessential foods created a favorable local market for the locally produced foods. At the same time, the banana export market became less attractive, encouraging a shift in land utilization away from the export crop" and toward more production for local consumption.

Through Marchione's research in Jamaica we learn that because the economic crisis forced increased attention to production for local consumption, it had "positive consequences" for Jamaicans.

In homes not producing food for their own consumption Marchione also found no deterioration in the nutrition status of children. He explains this phenomenon, in large part, by the government's tacit support of aggressive unionism. Between 1972 and 1975 labor contract settlements resulted in substantial increases in wages for workers all over the island. Unemployment and underemployment were reduced as well by government public works programs financed through increased levies upon the bauxite industry, owned by North American companies.

Not all, of course, share a positive in-

terpretation of Jamaica's policy changes. The *Wall Street Journal* entitled its scathing editorial attack on Jamaican policies, "Dismantling an Island Paradise." But what one can discern with the help of research such as Marchione's is that dismantling the neo-colonial dependency both on export crops and food imports is a first step in addressing the causes of hunger.

Source: Thomas J. Marchione, "Food and Nutrition Policy in Self-Reliant National Development," University of Connecticut Medical School, prepared for the American Anthropological Meeting, Washington, D.C., Nov. 9, 1976.

Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins co-direct the Institute for Food and Development Policy (2588 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94110). Lappe is the author of *Diet for a Small Planet*. Collins assisted Richard Barnett and Ronald Muller in researching and writing *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporation*. Their new book, *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity* will be published in June. The authors are grateful to David Kinley III for assistance in preparing this article.



Salvador Luria

# Smoking causes cancer, so might table salt

In my column of April 13 I explained that, from the point of view of cellular pathology, both cancer and circulatory diseases are "diseases of development." This means that cancer and probably also arterial diseases involve the abnormal development of certain cells, which fail to respond to the developmental controls that keep the cells of the body in their normal functional state.

Jim Schlosser correctly point out (*ITT*, May 3) that my statement could be interpreted as meaning that cancer and circulatory diseases are *caused* by abnormalities in the development of the organism, whereas it is now believed that most cancers are due to environmental factors.

His point is well taken. One must distinguish between the pathology of cancer cells, which is pathology of cellular development, and the initial causes of cellular cancerization.

The evidence for environmental causation of cancer is circumstantial but powerful. It ranges from the proved roles of cigarettes and of asbestos in producing lung cancer (most effectively when both are present together) to the dramatic incidence of stomach cancer in those Japanese that emigrated to the U.S., to other evidence of regional incidence of specific cancers. As Jim Schlosser wrote, it is believed that environmental factors are involved in the production of as many as 80 or 90 percent of all cancers.

From recognizing the role of environmental factors, however, to finding ways of preventing cancer there is a long way to go. Testing chemicals for ability to produce cancer requires complicated studies on many animals and the results, even when positive, may be difficult to interpret in relation to humans. The recent controversy about saccharin is an example: what do the animal tests mean?

Quicker and more sensitive tests have been devised, especially by Dr. Bruce Ames at the University of California. These rapid tests use bacteria, whose genetic response to chemicals appears to parallel quite well the ability of chemicals to produce cancers. This and other ap-

proaches promise to reveal that certain chemicals are potential causes of cancers.

How far can this go? What we want to know is what are the environmental factors that cause the millions of cancers that already appear every year. Until now the tests have confirmed the potency of known carcinogenic chemicals such as tar derivatives, but have discovered no new factors that could contribute more than a minimal fraction to the current incidence of cancer. It may well be that many or most cancers are produced by environmental factors over which we have little control: some components of common foods, some common salts in water, or even combinations of many innocuous factors.

What I am trying to say is that we are probably farther from environmental prevention of cancer than we are from effective cancer therapy. The hope that cleaning pollution from cities or streams could wipe out cancer is probably an illusion, as are most simplistic approaches to technical problems.

The demand for the elimination of polluting wastes is much more important from the social and political view than from the medical one. Especially the elimination of exposure to noxious and dangerous substances in factories and other work places must always be a prime demand of the working class. Likewise, the industrial pollution of air or water by private interests represents capitalistic oppression and must be fought.

I have wondered, however, whether the environmentalists' vision of the evils of pollution—for example, by car exhausts or by urban crowding—may not sometimes reflect an underlying bourgeois ideology, which cherishes an ideal of unpolluted, clean (suburban) communities and is repelled by the esthetic rather than the social conditions of urban life in America.

Salvador Luria is a Nobel laureate in biochemistry and a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His column appears regularly.

## Incest

### Across:

- 1 Weekly delight, with 8A
- 8 See 1A
- 13 Soviet columnist
- 14 Covered by Naison
- 16 Oswald et al.?
- 17 Oil used in medicine
- 18 Literary initials
- 19 Tanner or Solomon
- 20 Tanner's specialty
- 21 Political columnist
- 25 European nat.
- 26 Noun suffix
- 27 Depression traveler
- 28 Watergater
- 30 Arithmetic preposition
- 31 Marxist—
- 33 Difficult, in Soho
- 34 Gov't agency
- 35 Road or way: Abbr.
- 36 Numero —
- 37 Heel
- 40 West
- 41 Ellsberg, Garson & Radosh
- 43 Weinstein & Carter
- 44 Suffering
- 46 Pine, in Malaga
- 47 Geometric solid
- 48 Be ill
- 49 Financial event of 1819
- 50 Viper
- 51 Followed HST
- 52 Recallable item
- 54 Open market operator
- 56 Helmet
- 60 Spiritual meeting
- 61 Regular columnist
- 62 Associate editor
- 63 When — cried —, article, with 21D

### Down:

- 1 Little devil
- 2 Educ. organization
- 3 Explosive
- 4 Waste maker
- 5 Suffix of Gr. origin
- 6 Irish fairies
- 7 Shoe sizes
- 8 Ivan & Peter
- 9 — facto
- 10 Extinct bird
- 11 Roving
- 12 Type of plaster
- 15 Fictional pirate
- 19 Opposite of call
- 21 See 63A
- 22 All right: Var.
- 23 Oscar nominee
- 24 Polyn. banana
- 25 Insect
- 26 Conclusion
- 28 Report panned by Ehrenreich
- 29 employ
- 30 Fe
- 32 New Deal agency, et al.
- 33 Soon
- 34 Cape
- 36 News service
- 37 Nickel or dime
- 38 Indian buffalo
- 39 Convention covered, Vol. 1, No. 15
- 40 French Mrs.
- 41 Science columnist, to friends
- 42 Resort
- 43 Legal columnist (to friends), et al.
- 44 — season
- 45 — in the sky
- 47 Felines
- 48 Snake
- 49 Light reflector
- 51 Numerical prefix
- 52 Tend
- 53 Glacial ridge
- 55 Viet revolutionary org: Var. order
- 56 — Lie
- 57 Federal agency
- 58 Time period
- 59 Endeavor

Answer to last week's crossword puzzle:

KARL NEEDS PEAT  
EBRO AN'OU LAIR  
RIEN SANER ARMY  
REV PAM SPRAY  
OPAL LEASES  
EPLUR VIRUS ONE  
NOUS AROSE UBE  
GOTHA LAP TITLE  
EPI ROUTE ARROY  
LOO GREED PLACE  
SONTAG SAUF  
SOAP SAT RAS  
ULNA NIGER MINT  
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