

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

The swan song of the ancien régime

There has been a good deal of discussion concerning the budget proposed by President Reagan, but not because of its own merits or significance. Since Reagan will be leaving office on Jan. 20, his budget is considered a non-starter. But it has provided a focal point for the real discussion, the nature of the budget proposals which George Bush will soon be presenting.

The Reagan budget, a collaborative effort between aides of the outgoing and incoming Republican Presidents, was, indeed, crafted to give Bush a tactical edge in negotiating for his own budget, with \$17.5 billion in deficit reduction leeway.

Eyes are focused anxiously on Bush to see what the actual budget is going to look like. Bush called the Reagan budget proposals "an excellent budget" and said that he supported "its intent." The massive cuts in domestic spending are perhaps to his liking, although he may feel that they don't go far enough. An analysis of the budget by the Senate Budget Committee said the budget proposed nearly \$25 billion in domestic spending cuts, including the elimination of 82 programs.

House Agriculture Committee chairman Kika de la Garza (D-Tex.) said the budget took a "punitive attitude" toward agriculture programs, but admitted that it was "probably dead before arrival." Senate Budget Committee chairman Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.), while himself calling for a tougher hand on the budget deficit, characterizes the Reagan proposals as "a formula for a meaner, harsher America rather than a kinder, gentler one."

According to a Bush transition team source, Bush plans to call a joint session of Congress in February to seek

more spending authority for education, energy, and the environment. Bush's planned amendments include a reduction in the capital gains tax and a restoration of tax incentives for oil and gas producers. The President-elect may be considering some cuts in defense and other areas of the Reagan budget to use as bargaining chips with Democrats who want more spending in other areas. If Bush agrees to the austerity packages mandated by the budget deficit "mandarins," the *ancien régime* of the Reagan era could be transformed into the Reign of Terror, with Bush fitted for the role of Robespierre.

Aspin proposes freeze on new strategic weapons

Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, in remarks critical of President Reagan's record on strategic modernization, on Jan. 11 called for a long-term bipartisan consensus to ensure a 10-year spending freeze on new strategic weapons. Aspin said the change in administrations and a stagnant Pentagon budget represent opportunities to make choices about which long-range missiles and bombers the United States needs most.

Under Aspin's approach, money for all new strategic nuclear weapons and missile defenses would be put in a single pool, which would grow only with inflation. Aspin recommended that Congress "put our strategic forces on a fixed income" of \$31 billion a year, after allowing for inflation, for the 10 fiscal years from 1990 to 1999. He said he would try to force the new arrangement into being this year through language in the defense authorization bill.

The Strategic Defense Initiative would be relegated to research for several years, while research funding for it would be held at about \$4 billion through 1996. Aspin said production of the Air Force's new B-2 Stealth bomber could be delayed a few years. Aspin also wanted to postpone the rail-based MX deployments until 1996.

Aspin said that future Pentagon budgets will not contain enough funds to begin large-scale production of all planned strategic weapons, many of which are scheduled to reach their peak funding between 1991 and 1993.

Aspin described new Secretary of Defense John Tower as "a Weinberger kind of personality in a Frank Carlucci budget era." He added, however, that Tower's "conservatism" gives him sufficient credibility to enact the deeper defense cuts that Aspin deems are necessary.

Democrats did very poorly in the South

A study conducted by the Institute for Southern Studies, analyzing the results of the 1988 elections, came up with more bad news for the Democratic Party. The Republicans did best in the fastest growing areas of the South, while the Democrats' best showing came in counties with zero or little population growth. Also, there was a much higher rate of voter participation in GOP-leaning counties than in those that voted Democratic.

The data signify that the Republican Party's hold on the Sun Belt will be even stronger in 1992 after congressional redistricting moves seats from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West. The study shows that the Southern counties that favored Bush by more than 2-to-1 margins are

growing much faster than those that backed Dukakis.

"It poses serious problems for the Democrats," said Bob Hall, research director for the institute.

Johnston rejects Defense Science Board plan

In a commentary in the *New York Times*, on the page opposite an attack on the Defense Science Board, Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.), a member of the Senate Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, added his voice in criticism of the Board's recommendation to have the Department of Defense play a greater role in the development of national economic policy.

The *Times*, undoubtedly upset by the Science Board's criticism of the Wall Street speculators, formally acknowledged the warnings raised by the Science Board with regard to the erosion of our military industrial base. The editors nevertheless attempt to make a case for shifting the blame from the Wall Street get-rich-quick mentality, attacked by the Science Board, to the Pentagon's "gracing" the fat cats with its "largesse."

Johnston finds the Defense Science Board's recommendations "ironic," since he claims that government-supported research tends to cut back on production when it starts to produce a technology with some "commercial potential." Therefore, he maintains that the Department of Defense involvement in R&D is inherently unproductive or possibly counterproductive.

"In the past," says Johnston, "military technologies spun off a host of civilian products, such as computers, semiconductors, and commercial jetliners. But today the spinoff has re-

versed direction. Commercial technology is now driving military innovation."

Johnston agrees with the Science Board that there is a need for "rejuvenating the civilian technical base," although he sees no use for an increased role of the Defense Department in working out such a policy, since budget restraints will mean a tight defense budget, giving them little ability to "boost civilian R&D." Johnston also argues that tax credits to spur corporate research and development, a part of the Science Board's proposals, "have proved difficult to target on vital technologies."

Johnston then falls into the favorite pastime of many congressmen, engaging in a bit of ally-bashing, demanding that the Japanese and Europeans pay more for their own defense so that the United States can put more into R&D.

Soviets deny access to missile plant

In a letter to President Reagan, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reported that American inspectors assigned to a Soviet missile plant have failed to verify whether or not the Kremlin is building SS-20 missiles banned by the INF Treaty.

"Due to Soviet intransigence," writes Helms, "the United States has been totally unable to monitor effectively or verify whether the Soviets have continued to manufacture and deploy perhaps dozens of banned SS-20 missiles from the Votkinsk factory for the last eight months the treaty has been in force."

In his letter, Helms urges president Reagan to address the issue of

why the Soviets have not agreed to the installation of special x-ray equipment permitted by the treaty. The equipment is needed to verify whether a missile leaving the factory is, indeed, an SS-25 ICBM, which is permitted by the treaty, or a medium-range SS-20, which is banned.

"The U.S. inspection rights at Votkinsk factory portal," says Helms, "were correctly proclaimed by your administration as the heart or keystone of the INF verification regime." Failure to permit the United States to x-ray the missile cannisters, the senator concludes, "constitutes the most serious Soviet violation of the INF Treaty so far."

Austerity for all but members of Congress

The budget-cutting hysteria now widespread on Capitol Hill, has not seemed to affect the survival instincts of U.S. congressmen. Under the pretext of eliminating outside income, e.g., honoraria for speeches and other engagements, which congressmen normally use to supplement their income, the Congress has allowed itself a considerable pay raise—which will also go to top-level government civil servants and federal judges.

Not that our legislators should be deprived of a "fair days' pay for a fair day's work," but there is indeed a supreme irony in the fact that Congress will slash Medicare and other expenses while looking out for number one. Perhaps if our lawmakers got a better taste of an "austerity diet," they might begin to look for other solutions to our economic problems than "curing the disease by killing the patient," their prescription for America's poor and elderly.