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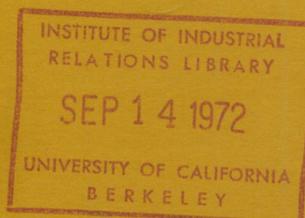
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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS ADMINISTRATIVE
IDEOLOGY: CONFLICT IN THE LEGITIMATION
OF AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

Conflict between administrative branches of a social action program (Model City) is examined within the rubric of organizational theory. Three areas of conflict are investigated: program content, power, and legitimation of authority. Greater conflict in the last of these three, when viewed in conjunction with other supporting data concerning citizen participation and program success, suggests that traditional bureaucratic rationalization of authority is insufficient in the administration of such programs; representativeness of a constituency may actually supplant efficiency as the essential element to the legitimation of authority in such action programs.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS ADMINISTRATIVE IDEOLOGY:
CONFLICT IN THE LEGITIMATION OF AUTHORITY*

Folklore of the War on Poverty programs contains many an epic narrative of organizational conflict, either at the federal level (Donovan, 1967; Marris and Rein, 1967; Rubin, 1967) and/or the local level (Clark and Hopkins, 1970; Clyde, 1971; Gilbert, 1970; Kramer, 1969; Marshall, 1971; Spiegel, 1969; Vargus, 1971; Zurcher, 1967). Everyone ever associated with those programs seems to have a favorite anecdote confirming internecine struggles described with more clinical detachment in investigative reports and Moynihanian essays.

The seemingly morbid fascination which such episodes hold for students of organizational pathology has obscured their meaning for administrative theory. In isolating one particular facet of conflict in the administration of the Model City program in a midwestern city, the research here reported illustrates how a classic theme in organizational literature—the legitimation of authority—was manifest in a context thusfar treated as organizational exotica. Furthermore, this study suggests that the concept of citizen participation has ramifications not only for the analysis of politics and ideology, but for formal administrative structures as well.

Organization Structure and Combatants

The program studied encompassed many aspects typical of "umbrella" urban poverty programs. Its goals were manifold, encompassing a broad

spectrum of community social and physical service needs. It involved a complex coordination of these services to be delivered to clients through contracts with existing and newly formed community social service agencies. Its administrative apparatus, like that of many such programs, appeared as an ad hoc appendage of City Hall, with a certain ambiguity as to its autonomy in every-day operation.¹ The portion of the formal structure focused upon in this research was the central administrative unit, comprised of a professional program staff and a citizens' board.

As its name suggests, the citizens' board was an instrument of citizen participation in the program, and as such, its members were to make inputs into decision making on the assumption of their having special familiarity with the needs of prospective clients. Two-thirds of the members of the citizens' board had been elected from among the citizen field. Those who were appointed by City Hall included others especially well acquainted with citizen needs, as well as the familiar complement of "blue ribbon" civic leaders.² The idea of citizen participation offered nothing new in the sense of democratic representation. What was new was the nature of the interests to be represented by the citizens' board—the class interests of the heretofore politically and economically disenfranchised citizens.

The professional staff was comprised largely of workers with experience in such fields as social work, education, law, and public administration. Although the professional staff, either by design or by default, actually initiated and executed much of the planning, the citizens' board was very actively involved in all stages of the administrative tasks.

Areas of Conflict

Differences in composition and roles existing between the citizens' board and professional staff would lead to the expectation of structurally engendered conflict within the organization. What forms might such conflict be expected to take? Among the areas in which conflict may arise, three were examined in this research: 1) program priorities and performance evaluation; 2) power relations within the organization; and 3) legitimation of authority.

Conflict over program performance usually reflects different criteria employed by divergent community or class interests. In establishing and evaluating program performance, the values of citizen representatives of an economically disenfranchised populace cannot be expected to always coincide with those of professional administrators. Expressed contention on a given issue may also be an indirect commentary about the action of one of these administrative components as viewed by the other. Thus, conflict displacement may be displayed when, in an attempt to discredit the professional staff, the citizens' board attacks a program which it identifies as essentially a product of the professional staff. Of course, the professional staff may employ the same strategy for criticizing the citizens' board.

Conflict over power involves the failure of the professional staff and the citizens' board to agree upon their decision-making roles in relation to each other. Such conflict ultimately raises the issue as to which component is superordinate and under what conditions, although it may not be articulated as such.

Conflict over the legitimation of authority arises out of disagreement as to what sanctions support and legitimate decision making by either the citizens' board or the professional staff. The challenge to be answered is by what right are decisions being made by either the citizens' board or the professional staff?

It would be expected by its very composition that the citizens' board would claim authority on the basis of representing the interests of program clients. On the other hand, bureaucratic administration, such as the professional staff represents, has been described by social scientists from Max Weber forward as deriving authority from norms of rationalized efficiency borne from expertise.³ Thus, in many organizations, each administrative component would have its own criteria for legitimacy relating to its position in the political division of labor. Conflict would be expected to revolve around the extent of agreement between the citizens' board and the professional staff concerning the degree to which each meets its appropriate criteria in deriving its authority. Thus the citizens' board's decisions would be legitimated by its representativeness. The decisions of the professional staff would be legitimated by its efficiency in administration.

Among the goals of the research conducted was the attempt to reveal the relative salience of each of these three possible areas of conflict, and to consider organizational properties which might predispose that conflict which was revealed.

Procedures

The subject of this study is a federally sponsored multiple goal social action program (Model City) in a midwestern city within the 100,000 to 500,000 population range. At the time the study was performed the program had been in operation for one year. As one phase of a larger research project, members of both the citizens' board and the professional staff were interviewed with an instrument investigating interagency cooperation and citizen participation.

Some past studies have analyzed in depth members of citizens' boards (cf. Bowen and Masotti, 1968; Marshall, 1971; Zurcher, 1970). However, in his study of the Pittsburg Community Action Agency, Gilbert (1970) gathered data from both citizens' board members and agency staff. The rich yield of information obtained by Gilbert was one of the factors leading to the decision to interview both citizens' board participants and professional staff employees in the present study. All sixteen of the professional staff and nineteen of the twenty-three citizens' board members were interviewed.

The survey instrument was composed mainly of closed ended items developed after review of previous works, including Cahn and Cahn (1968), Clark and Hopkins (1970), Gilbert (1970), and O'Donnell and Chilman (1969) among others. Attitude items utilizing a four-point agree-disagree format were developed on perceptions of power, authority, and the effectiveness of ongoing action programs. Additional items measuring possible levels of power and participation were constructed. Interviews conducted required respondents to evaluate not only the administrative component to which they belonged but also to respond to

a comparable set of questions pertaining to the other administrative component.⁴

The tables displayed below represent composites of replies which have been analyzed to disclose variation in intra-administration conflict between the citizens' board and the professional staff in the areas of program performance, power relations, and legitimation of authority. Finney et al. (1963) is used to test for significant relationships; this method provides an appropriate test in instances where cell frequencies are relatively small.

Results

Performance. Goals for the program under study are met through the letting of service contracts with a variety of community agencies. Therefore, success of the program can be evaluated largely in terms of the adequacy with which agencies have delivered contracted services.

Table one indicates strong agreement between the citizens' board and the professional staff on items appraising agency performance, and

(Table 1 about here.)

on one item which summarizes evaluated total program success. Although some differences appear between the two administrative components in evaluating the local Model City program, these differences are not such as to explain conflict between these two entities. Both groups participate in a strong trend of acceptance of the present performance as adequate.

Power. Sharp conflict does not exist between the citizens' board and the professional staff over how much power each possesses or should

possess as Table 2 indicates. In only one case is the difference so

(Table 2 about here.)

great as to be statistically significant. The professional staff agrees with the citizens' board in a tendency to emphasize the power which the citizens' board should hold, in comparison with its own. An overview of this table tends to suggest that although the professional staff is ambivalent in appraising the appropriate power role of the board, they are clearly hesitant to assert their own power role, and actually imply that it should be muted.

Although a relatively small percent of the professional staff peg the citizens' board as actual or potential leaders, as a group they do recognize a need for active involvement by the members of the citizens' board in decision making. As Table 3 indicates, 50% of the

(Table 3 about here.)

professional staff perceive the citizens' board as either leaders or decision-making team members, and 60% state that the citizens' board should hold such power. Only 38% suggest that the citizens' board should be relegated to positions of less power (e.g., "advisors," "information sources," "information receivers").

Legitimation of authority. Two important findings are apparent in each group's appraisal of representativeness as legitimating the authority of the citizens' board and the professional staff. First, noticeable conflict appears between the citizens' board and the professional staff in their evaluations of the representativeness of

each group, as Table 4 illustrates. Clearly each of the two groups suspects that the other is not representative of "the people." Since

(Table 4 about here.)

representativeness is particularly crucial in rationalizing the authority of the citizens' board, in effect the professional staff is rejecting the legitimacy of the citizens' board's authority by denying endorsement of the citizens' board as representative.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the value of representativeness has become detached from the specific role and function of the citizens' board, and has been accepted as a generalized value for the entire administrative unit, including the professional staff. This staff appraises itself quite favorably in its representativeness of clients, as the third column of Table 4 illustrates. In fact, in two significant areas (the first and third items) the professional staff sees itself as more representative of clients than the citizens' board.

This finding indicates that the professional staff has adapted the value of representativeness in legitimating its own authority, when in terms of the recruitment procedure, role, and composition of the professional staff, representativeness is not the most immediately appropriate criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of the professional staff's authority. It is consistent with the organizational status of the citizens' board for that body to appraise itself as more representative than the professional staff; but usually it would not be expected, in terms of their bureaucratically rationalized functions,

that the professional staff would evaluate itself so highly as representative of clients in comparison to the citizens' board.

The degree to which the professional staff accepts itself as representative of clients is evident in the closing of ranks on this issue across dissident factions within the staff. The most apparent of such divisions is between senior and junior professional staff. Although only 17% of the senior staff indicated any dissatisfaction with the overall program performance, 71% of the junior staff register some degree of dissatisfaction. Yet the junior staff joins with senior members in their estimation of the representativeness of the staff to the extent that 86% of the junior staff members view the entire professional staff as representing citizens solely rather than any other interests.

The Ideological Significance of Citizen Participation. The findings reported above indicate that the legitimation of authority, and not the distribution of power or the quality of program performance, is a source of conflict in the administration of the program. Strongly evident in this conflict is the impression that citizen participation in the sense of representativeness of citizen interests is not agreed upon by the professional staff as legitimating the authority of the citizens' board, but has been embraced by the professional staff as a property it perceives itself to represent.

This raises the question of just how citizen participation functions in the perception of program decision makers. First, it must be noted that citizen participation is taken very seriously as a value by both groups, as Table 5 indicates. Second, this research indicates

(Table 5 about here.)

that despite this value placed upon it, citizen participation is honored more in the breach than in the practice. That is, the concept has greater salience as an ideological tenet than as an administrative necessity. Comparing reported satisfaction with participation and satisfaction with total program success suggests this is the case. Both the citizens' board and the professional staff evince their dissatisfaction with the amount of citizen participation current in the program, as Table 6 reveals. Yet both groups are relatively satisfied

(Table 6 about here.)

with the overall accomplishments of the program, as indicated by the final item in Table 1. If citizen participation were really instrumental to the program's success, such reported satisfaction with the program would grossly contradict the consensus that citizen participation is lacking.

In observing that citizen participation is primarily an ideological value it is not being suggested that the concept is simply being given hypocritical lip service, and is otherwise ignored in the conduct of program administration. Indeed, it is being suggested that citizen participation as a means of legitimating authority is so important in the life of the organization that disagreement over representativeness of a constituency is more obviously the seat of conflict than are substantive issues of program performance or political issues involving the distribution of administrative power.

Conclusion

Under the conditions described above, citizen participation becomes an ideological test of virtue between components of the program's central administration. Each component wields authority to the extent that it is perceived by itself and by the other component as truly representative of "the people."

It is the lack of agreement on just this issue which may lie behind so much of the bitter conflict manifest in interaction between the citizens' board and the professional staff. Surely the casual observer of meetings between citizens and professional staff—if any such observation can remain casual—is frequently struck by the rancor which seemingly permeates every act within such episodes, and which destroys opportunity for open and public decision making.

Such an observational experience might erroneously lead to the conclusion that there are no areas of agreement between the citizens' board and the professional staff, and that conflict pervades with equal massiveness in all areas of administrative activity. Yet this study indicates that in very crucial aspects, such as evaluation of program performance, relative power, and even the importance of citizen participation itself, the citizens board and the professional staff are largely in agreement. Other data not reported in this study indicates that despite the vehemence of their public discussion of these matters, agreement in these areas is probably greater than even the members of the citizens' board and the professional staff themselves recognize (Richards and Goudy, 1971). Perhaps the sharp conflict over representativeness as a legitimation of authority has had

a halo effect clouding areas of agreement between the citizens' board and the professional staff.

Because of the significance citizen participation has attained in legitimating administrative authority, resolution of resulting organizational conflicts poses new problems within recent social action programs. The problem of representation of group interests in bureaucratic administration is far from new. Any number of earlier agencies have incorporated some form of "grass roots democracy," and have met with various obstacles to successful operation (Martin, 1964). Resolution of this conflict has often been met by simply packing, coopting, disempowering, or dissolving the direct citizen input, permitting traditional administrative orders to quietly operate according to their own norms. Truly enough, all these mechanisms may be employed, either by design or by default, to disengage the subjects of poverty programs from the administrative apparatus (Arnstein, 1969; Van Til and Van Til, 1970).

But two factors seem to mitigate against any such easy resolutions of the problem of democratic intervention in the administration of poverty programs. First, tremendous publicity and official sanction was given to the concept of citizen participation through the federal government. As Van Til and Van Til (1970:320) along with others have pointed out, the government has retreated in its promotion of citizen participation, and many of the later campaigns in the War on Poverty have been seriously compromised in this regard. But this did not detract from the ideological impact of citizen participation even in these programs, as the research of the Department of Housing and Urban

Development (1969, 1970) has demonstrated. Many citizens otherwise denied routes to economic and political power have grasped this officially sanctioned opportunity to gain recognition, and they have not relinquished that opportunity even though supportive sanctions have been weakened.

Second, citizen participation became significant in the legitimation of authority within an organizational context in which no other criteria could be effectively employed in rationalizing authority. As citizen participation became valued for its own sake, so did groups become likely to legitimate their authority through claims to represent such participation. In the face of official sanctions supporting citizen participation, the professional staff could hardly flaunt their professional expertise or their support from establishment authorities in resolving a dispute when pitted against the claims of the citizens' board that its position represented "the will of the people." The only recourse of the professional staff is to adopt the same criteria of representativeness and to reply to the citizens' board in defense of professional staff program goals, "we represent the people better than you do in our recognition of their needs and goals."

Rein (1969:236-242) has suggested that the administration of social planning will require employing both rational efficiency and representativeness in legitimating the authority of administrators. The thrust of the findings here reported suggest, however, that legitimation of authority is not simply an instrument of strategy in implementing goals, but creates demands of ideological commitment within an organization. Thus in organizations such as the one studied,

representativeness may become an existential legitimation of authority transcending issues of strategy.

The findings of this research pose an interesting question for the future of authority structures, especially in the quasi-governmental organizations such as Model Cities which have become popular vehicles for dealing with social problems. Might it be that Weber's criteria for the legitimation of administrative authority, believed to be so crucial to bureaucratic organization, will no longer be accepted as sufficient?

FOOTNOTES

- * Based upon research conducted under contract with the City Demonstration Agency of Des Moines, and under supplemental assistance from the Industrial Relations Center of Iowa State University. We are indebted to Rita Braitto for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
- ¹ For further discussion of Model City organizational structures see Sundquist (1969:79-129) and Department of Housing and Urban Development (1969, 1970).
- ² Model City boards must contain members appointed by local city officials (Burke et al., 1970:17). Differences between elected and appointed members have been studied by Marshall (1971:46-49) and Zurcher (1970), among others.
- ³ Rein (1969:233-236) has offered a useful elaboration of legitimation motifs, distinguishing expertise, bureaucratic position and professional values as distinct themes, which are subsumed under the "rationalized efficiency" legitimation rubric in this research. Rein's discussion of legitimation based upon reference to "consumer preferences" approximates the representativeness theme utilized in this study.
- ⁴ Selected similar items were asked of two additional samples: residents of the Model City area and clients of agencies providing services contracted through the Model City program. Analysis of these responses is reported in Richards and Goudy(1971).

Table 1: Percent Agreeing with Statements on Program Performance, by Respondent Affiliation.

STATEMENTS ON PROGRAM PERFORMANCE	RESPONDENT AFFILIATION	
	Professional Staff (16)*	Citizens' Board (19)
a. moderate or great agency improvement since initiation of Model City program..	75%	76%
b. increased agency sensitivity to citizens since initiation of Model City program..	94%	65%
c. increased agency accessibility to citizens since initiation of the Model City program.....	80%	84%
d. more citizens being served since initiation of Model City program.....	93%	82%
e. moderate or great success of the Model City program.....	62%	83%

*Percentages are based on the number responding to each item, rather than the total sample; however, responses were obtained to all items from most respondents.

Table 2: Percent Agreeing with Statements on the Power of the Professional Staff and the Citizens' Board, by Respondent Affiliation.

STATEMENTS ON POWER OF THE RESPECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENTS	EVALUATION OF THE POWER OF THE CITIZENS' BOARD, as seen by the:		EVALUATION OF THE POWER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF, as seen by the:	
	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board
a. holds great power.....	81%	72%	47%	50%
b. holds sufficient power to effectively function.....	88%	72%	75%	84%
c. influences program development.....	94%	89%	94%	89%
d. has most internal administrative control....	44%	59%	25%	47%
e. leaders in decision making.	19%	50%	38%	41%
f. should hold great power....	62%	78%	31%	17%
g. should hold most power.....	31%	28%	6%	0%
h. should be leaders.....	31%	69%*	31%	25%

*Difference significant at the .05 level.

Table 3: Perceptions of the Actual Power Held by the Citizens' Board and the Power the Citizens' Board Should Hold, by Respondent Affiliation.

LEVEL OF POWER IN THE PROGRAM	ACTUAL POWER THE CITIZENS' BOARD HOLDS, as seen by the:		DEGREE OF POWER THE CITIZENS' BOARD SHOULD HOLD, as seen by the:	
	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board
Leader.....	19%	50%	31%	62%
Decision-making team member.....	31	6	31	6
Four categories of progressively less power.....	50	44	38	31
Percent Totals (N)	100% (16)	100% (18)	100% (16)	100% (16)

Table 4: Percent Agreeing with Statements on the Representativeness of the Professional Staff and the Citizens' Board, by Respondent Affiliation.

STATEMENTS ON THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE RESPECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENTS	EVALUATION OF THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE CITIZENS' BOARD, as seen by the:		EVALUATION OF THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF, as seen by the:	
	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board
a. represents "ordinary citizens" exclusively.....:	25%	63%*	69%	32%*
b. represents citizens better than most groups can.....	50%	83%*	25%	26%
c. composed of people representing citizens rather than own interests.	44%	67%	69%	26%*

*Difference significant at the .05 level.

Table 5: Percent Agreeing with Statements on the Evaluation of Citizen Participation, by Respondent Affiliation.

STATEMENTS ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	RESPONDENT AFFILIATION	
	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board
a. citizens hold great power in the Model City program.....	20%	28%
b. citizens should hold great power in the Model City program.....	73%	65%
c. citizens are involved in the Model City program at a high level.....	25%	11%
d. citizens should be involved in the Model City program at a high level.....	71%	72%
e. participation provides for influence and control in programs.....	73%	76%
f. participation in the Model City program is occurring.....	69%	56%
g. participation provides opportunity for change and is not a euphemism.....	75%	68%
h. participation strengthens the Model City program.....	75%	94%

Table 6: Degree of Satisfaction with the Results of Citizen Participation in the Model City Program, by Respondent Affiliation.

DEGREE OF SATISFACTION	RESPONDENT AFFILIATION	
	Professional Staff	Citizens' Board
Very satisfied.....	0%	0%
Satisfied.....	31	17
Unsatisfied.....	38	50
Very unsatisfied.....	31	33
Percent Totals (N)	100% (16)	100% (18)

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