

# THE CHARACTER OF THE 1967 SESSION

It would be a bad year from the standpoint of FCL legislative goals. That was clear long before the 1967 session started. The November, 1966, election had brought into office a new Administration with an orientation far different from the FCL's. Reapportionment of the Senate, combined with the same conservative upswing that gave Ronald Reagan a sweeping victory, had had a hurricane effect on both houses of the legislature.

Though many of those working in the legislative field with FCL seemed to find no bottom to their despair — this was the period of "Chicken Little was Right" buttons — others anticipated that the worst predictions would not be realized, at least not in 1967. The elements of power in the legislature were too evenly balanced, both along party lines and ideologies, for any radical shifts to take place in legislation.

Those who saw the Sacramento sky filled with menacing clouds but still not falling proved to be right. What happened in the capital in 1967 that was truly harmful to the people of the state came not from the legislature, which knocked down almost all legislation which any substantial number of legislators might consider extreme.

## HAIRBREADTH ESCAPES

Not that constant vigilance was not necessary. There were hairbreadth escapes from passage of bad bills. On the whole it can be said that this was a session in which progress consisted of not going backward.

As can be seen from the pages that follow, however, not all of the action of the legislative session was defensive. The 1967 legislature, to give praise where due, should be credited with enactment of major changes in our methods of bringing treatment to mentally disturbed citizens, the liberalization of the abortion law, new protections for juveniles accused of crime, and many other positive achievements. Not the least of these achievements was that of keeping the Rumford Act, the state's fair housing law, intact.

The Assembly had lost 15 of its members to the Senate, and 20 others failed to return for other reasons. Yet the Democrats maintained a 42-38 majority. Assemblyman Jesse Unruh (D., Inglewood) remained secure in his position as Speaker of the House, the powerful appointer of its committees, the chooser of its committee chairmen, the assigner of bills to committees.

## POWER IN THE SENATE

In the Senate a majority of the members — 22 of them — were new to that house. The party division was 21 Democrats, 19 Republicans.\* Numerical power now lay with new members, with the big population centers and with Southern California.

Yet the old power structure from the days when the Senate was controlled by the rural areas in Northern California survived the session. Senator Hugh M. Burns (D., Fresno) remained as the almost all-powerful President Pro Tem. He still dominated the Rules Committee, which assigns all bills

to committees. Chairmanships of the four most important committees all went to Northern Californians: Finance (George Miller, D., Martinez), Revenue and Taxation (Walter W. Stiern, D., Bakersfield), Governmental Efficiency (J. Eugene McAteer, D., S.F.), and Education (Albert S. Rodda, D., Sacramento). A sizeable majority on each of those committees, except Education, were from the north.

## SENIORITY STILL RULES

The reason that the old group still stayed in command was the Senate's seniority system. A list of the top Senators in seniority, with minor shifts, can also be read as a list of top Senators in power. If the seniority system continues to determine the pecking order in the Senate, it will be some years before the numerical strength of the south will be reflected in real strength.

Reapportionment did not improve this year's Senate performance. If anything, its level of performance in behalf of the people of California deteriorated, judged in terms of FCL concerns.

A big contributor to the character of the 1967 session was, of course, the new Administration with its emphasis on economy and limitation of government and with its lack of experience. The session got off to a slow start largely because the Governor, as well as the many freshman legislators, were learning how things work in the Capitol.

The Governor's budget was presented late and in what Senator McAteer (D., SF) described in a Finance subcommittee hearing as a "hashed up, mixed up, lousy" form. The Governor presented his own legislative program in only a few areas, leaving the legislators to guess what he wanted in others.

## NEW ALLIES

One notable development in the session from the standpoint of the FCL was the appearance of a large number of allies on the scene. For the first time the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Mexican-American Political Assn., the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, the northern and southern Councils of Churches, the Association of California Consumers, and some other groups with interests overlapping the FCL's interests, had representation in Sacramento on an every-day basis. There seemed also to be a larger number of individual citizens who decided to come to Sacramento to express their concerns to legislators.

With the Democrat-Republican division now at 20-20, and with Republican Lieutenant-Governor Robert Finch, as presiding officer, holding the tie-breaking vote, a shift in Senate control when the legislature convenes in January is almost certain. It is doubtful that this shift in partisan control will mean any change in the non-partisan conservatism that has marked the Senate. What happens beyond the 1968 session will depend on the survival of the seniority system and voter choices in the November, 1968 elections.

\*Senator McAteer, one of the most forceful and powerful members of the Senate, the author in recent years of major legislation on compensatory education and on alcoholism, died of a heart attack on May 26, 1967. His seat was filled in a special election in which Milton Marks (R.), a judge and former Assemblyman, defeated Assemblyman John Burton (D).

Another loss to the legislature in 1967 was the death of colorful Assemblyman Charles Chapel (R., Palos Verde), a veteran legislator of strongly conservative views and a strong sense of humor.