

Strictly Political

# Budget paring hurts the helpless

By MICHAEL AZZARA

Already there are shops around Staten Island that are decorated for Christmas. The airwaves are ringing with the familiar holiday jingles that tell us where to do our Christmas shopping this year.

Pretty soon the Salvation Army will be out shaking its tambourines and with just the right amount of snow, all will be right with the world.

At no other time of the year does the American Dream flourish as it does during the approaching season. The American Dream, based as it is on religion, the work ethic, the history of the frontier folk, the idea that the poor man may become a rich man if he just applies himself and that his son may some day be President of the United States, is a good dream.

It's a good dream, a decent dream — we are essentially a good, decent people — even if it is utterly blind.

For a good part of our history, our leaders talked about democracy and universal rights and hardly noticed a couple of million enslaved

blacks. The capacity for such self-deception is, perhaps, necessary to the maintenance of the Dream.

It survived the Civil War though it was jolted and maybe it will survive Vietnam and the Atomic Age, yes, the Willowbrook.

The tragic thing about



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Willowbrook is that the conditions described there by the Advance during the past week are the rule rather than the exception.

Sen. Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota has described the average residential institution for the mentally retarded and mentally ill in this way:

"Typically, it is old, crowded, understaffed, filthy, sterile, strewn with feces, filled with blank faces. There are children

there who are educable, if the special services were available. There are disturbed children who are curable, given psychiatric help."

Even a society that dreams the American Dream consigns some of its people to the scrap heap. Even while we, the taxpayer-dreamers, pay Sen. James Eastland \$160,000 a year not to grow cotton on his Mississippi plantation, we can't come up with enough money to provide even the minimum care for those in institutions like Willowbrook.

I mention the Eastland situation only because the federal government spends 20 times as much on cotton supports alone as we spend on mental hygiene throughout the country.

There are more than 7 million young people in such institutions and no one to speak for them. That's why while Gov. Rockefeller is building a \$1-billion mall in Albany and asking us to let him borrow \$2.5 billion for highways and mass transit, Assemblyman Lucio F. Russo can say that a reduction of \$37 million in state's mental hygiene appropriation is

matter of cutting the fat out of the budget.

We can't even plead ignorance about Willowbrook. Bobby Kennedy went there in 1965 and talked publicly about neglect and abandonment and all the other things reporter Jane Kurtin found there again last week.

But the dream persists and now let's enjoy the holidays.

After December, the reality will be another austerity budget. Gov. Rockefeller and the Legislature will be facing the task in December of closing a budget gap that may reach \$1 billion.

Our legislators, reflecting our preferences, no doubt will cut even more fat out of the budget.