

and Congress authorized funds for studies leading to modernization of the remaining ten hospitals. No funds for construction have since been requested, however, and two more hospitals were closed in 1969. The latest attempt to get rid of the Public Health Service came in this year's budget, which simply contained no request for funds to operate the hospitals. The idea was to close the eight Public Health Service hospitals and thirty outpatient clinics, and to turn the Public Health Service Beneficiaries over to the Veterans Administration, severe pressure on the VA's already overburdened facilities notwithstanding.

Although Congress has restored the funds to the Public Health Service, to bring the appropriations up to last year's level, the upshot of the Administration's repeated attacks on the system is that the facilities are rapidly becoming outdated and that the whole system has deteriorated through lack of finance. Repeated recommendations that the hospitals be modernized have been largely ignored, staff levels at the establishments have been allowed to fall and repeated threats of closure have done nothing to stimulate the morale of the Public Health Service's 5,000 doctors. But this deterioration of physical facilities has become one of the Administration's strongest weapons. The pattern is clear: by maintaining the funding for the Public Health Service at minimum levels, the facilities are allowed to deteriorate and the deterioration is later used as an argument for closing the hospitals.

As far as Fort Worth is concerned, there is no doubt that the threat of transfer to the Bureau of Prisons has had a deleterious effect on the staff. As one member said last week, of the 135 who have left during the past year, 85 have retired but expressed their willingness to return if the hospital carries on discharging its present functions.

DDT on Mock Trial

by our Washington Correspondent

A FULL-SCALE public inquiry, billed as the final trial to decide whether or not DDT should be banned from all use in the United States, opened last week in Washington. Chemical manufacturers, in alliance with the US Department of Agriculture are appealing against a cancellation order which the Environmental Protection Agency was forced by federal courts to impose on the pesticide in January this year. Ranged against the Department of Agriculture and the representatives of the chemical manufacturers is the Environmental Protection Agency itself and a variety of environmentalist groups headed by the Environmental Defense Fund.

On the face of things, the hearing could condemn DDT as a hazardous chemical only to be used outside the United States in countries where it is still regarded as an essential weapon in the armoury against malaria. On the other hand, the pesticide could be acquitted and freed for use on certain crops in the United States itself. But the issue is, unfortunately, not that simple. A decision against DDT will in effect only prevent the agent from being sold across state boundaries, and the whole history of the in-fighting and delaying tactics that have accompanied moves to ban DDT in the US shows up the federal pesticide regulatory mechanism for the cumbersome and unsatisfactory procedure that it has become.

Opening shots against DDT were fired in November 1969, ironically by the Department of Agriculture, one of the principal protagonists in the fight to defeat the present cancellation order against the chemical. Amid a blast of publicity, President Nixon then announced that the agriculture department had cancelled four of the existing uses of DDT: spraying tobacco crops and shade trees, use around the home and over water. Thirty days later, however, several producers of the pesticide exercised their rights under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to request that a scientific advisory committee look into the cancellation order, and thereby set in motion the mills of the pesticides regulatory machinery.

Under the provisions of FIFRA, once an appeal has been filed against a cancellation order, companies are allowed to carry on manufacture and sale of the material under examination. After 1969, pesticide manufacturers were allowed to do this for the seven months that it took for the department of agriculture to set up the appeals committee. Four of the appealing companies withdrew their request for an advisory committee, however, and in July 1970, the Lebanon Company requested a public hearing, but this request was also later withdrawn. What usually happens is that an advisory committee has sixty days in which to file its report, an order either confirming or setting aside the cancellation order is made within ninety days of receipt of the report and sixty days are then available for objections to the second order. An objector has the right to insist on a public hearing on the second order, and a final order is then issued within ninety days of the completion of the public hearing. During the whole proceeding the product can still be legally marketed.

The next step in the campaign against DDT was taken by the Environmental Defense Fund, an environmentalist

group, which on October 1, 1969, filed a petition with the Secretary for Agriculture, requesting cancellation and suspension of all uses of DDT. A suspension order would prevent the product from being sold until the whole regulatory process had been completed. This request was, however, ignored for six months, until the Environmental Defense Fund got a court ruling ordering the Secretary for Agriculture to reply, which he duly did, saying that he refused to cancel all uses of DDT. This decision was challenged by the Environmental Defense Fund in the courts.

In the meantime, the pesticides regulatory machinery was taken out of the hands of the Department of Agriculture and placed under the control of the newly-created Environmental Protection Agency, headed by William D. Ruckelshaus. On January 7 this year, a court in Washington DC ordered the EPA to cancel all uses of DDT, and to re-examine the decision not to suspend its use pending a final decision. Ruckelshaus duly cancelled all remaining uses of the chemical on January 15, but after seeking outside advice he decided not to suspend its use. It is that cancellation order which is now being appealed against in the public hearing which opened last week, and which will probably continue into 1972. Nearly two years after the initial moves against DDT, the pesticide is still being legally manufactured and used in the US, chiefly by the Montrose Chemical Corporation and some thirty other companies which buy from Montrose and process DDT for use. Eighty per cent of the DDT manufactured in the United States is exported for use against malaria, however, and this activity is not being contested.

What are the chances that DDT will be acquitted by the public hearing? At present, it is difficult to judge, but protagonists for the chemical will argue that apart from the value of DDT for controlling pests on cotton crops, a decision against the pesticide could have international repercussions which may slow down the eradication of malaria in underdeveloped countries. Already, Dr Marshall Laird, a member of the World Health Organization, has warned the public hearing of this possibility. The hand of the DDT protagonists will also be strengthened by the difficulties in controlling the recent spread of mosquitoes of equine encephalomyelitis in some Southern states. But on the other hand, four government committees which have studied DDT between 1963 and 1969 all recommended phasing out its use, and the Mark commission recommended elimination by December 1971 of all uses of DDT not essential to public health.