Acadiana Neuf Charged With Discrimination

April 23, 1945

Lafayette—The local, six-parish community action War on Poverty unit, Acadiana Neuf has been charged with discrimination against Negroes by the St. Landry chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

In a wire to Sergeant Shriver, head of the national Office of Economic Opportunity created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, NAACP requested that the board's policy regarding Negroes be examined and that funds be withheld until Acadiana Neuf has proved itself properly disposed to Negroes in its policies.

Last week two new members were introduced to the board, Newman Brand, St. Martin parish school principal, and David L. May, Acadiana parish school principal. Both Negroes were appointed to "insure proper representation of every segment of society in the six parishes," a board member said.

Appointments were made following letters to Washington by Father Albert McKnight, C.S.Sp., head of the interracial and non-sectarian Southern Consumers Cooperative, in which he said the board could not truly represent all people since there were no Negroes on the board. Officers of the board of directors met with Father McKnight and other group representatives after receiving a carbon copy of the letter.

No direct appeal to the board as a body had been made prior to sending the letter to Washington. Several other letters from different groups were reportedly sent to Shriver’s office, Dr. Louis Courville, University of Southwestern Louisiana and president of Acadiana Neuf board of directors, said the board’s composition as present meets with both Washington requirements and practical considerations in combating poverty.

Washington approved the method of selecting the board in the initial proposal which stipulated two Negroes would be appointed from each parish. One by the school board and one by the police jury.

According to Father McKnight, spokesman for a group of Negroes and Whites interested in civil rights, the decision to accept two Negroes as representatives on the board was a compromise from their first proposal to have appointed one Negro from each parish. This would have increased board membership of 14 (two from each parish and two from U.S.L.) to 24, one third of which would have been Negro — a percentage considered generally representative of Negro population in the area.

Within the compromise, according to the Holy Ghost priest, was the agreement Negroes themselves would choose their representatives. The board said this was not so. The Acadiana Neuf board made the actual appointments and the NAACP wire resulted.

Father McKnight, who had withdrawn from the controversy three days prior to public announcement of NAACP’s wire to Shriver’s office, said he did not know about the wire until news releases appeared in the daily press and that he had been representing Southern Consumers Cooperative in the meetings with the Acadiana Neuf officials and in his letters to Washington.