Acadiana Neuf Plan ‘Unfeasible’

Reorganization of the anti-poverty program in the Lafayette area on a parish-by-parish basis is unfeasible, the Advertiser was told today.

The information was relayed by W. Astor Kirk, director of the regional office of Economic Opportunity in Austin, Tex.

Kirk has called a meeting of Acadiana Neuf Board officers, the local executive director, and the state director next Tuesday in Austin to discuss the matter.

"The ceiling on community action agencies nationally for fiscal 1967 is 500," Kirk said in a telephone interview with the Advertiser. "This is the figure approved by the Bureau of the Budget. At present there are a total of 1,196 agencies. This means that OEO has to roll back to 500.

Kirk said that under the existing guidelines from the Washington OEO, none of the regional offices can fund new agencies.

The board of directors of Acadiana Neuf, official anti-poverty agency for the six-parish area around Lafayette, voted Wednesday to dissolve itself and recommended six separate parish community action agencies.

Kirk said that an agency in which the surplus of 1,196 community action agencies around the country is being reduced by terminating "weak and ineffective community action agencies where there is little prospect of making them effective.

Kirk said that in his region, termination of two such agencies is under consideration.

"The only realistic thing to talk about is continuation of the Acadiana Neuf Board," he added.

In a statement issued yesterday to news media, Kirk said that the proposed set-up whereby new parish boards would be composed of an equal number of representatives from the police, jury, school board and poverty-stricken residents would not meet Congressional standards.

Today's Standards

Asked today what these standards are, Kirk replied that Section 202 of Economic Opportunity Act Amendments of 1965 requires that one-third of the membership of the governing body of a community action agency shall consist of representatives of the poor.

Kirk explained that although the representatives of the poor do not have to be poor in each instance, they must reside in a poverty target area.

The director said that Acadiana Neuf came under his jurisdiction on Dec. 12, and that while the present judgment of the Austin staff is that Acadiana Neuf's method of selection of representatives of the poor does not meet Congressional standards, he is "keeping his mind open" and is willing to negotiate as long as the one-third representation of poor is preserved.

Kirk's staff had recommended that the board have one-third representation from public bodies, including both the police jury and school boards, one-third from the poor and one-third from the minority.

Kirk said that he had sent telegrams to board members prior to the last meeting indicating that he considered these recommendations merely a basis for discussion.

Kirk expressed disappointment in the outcome of Wednesday's board meeting. "The board has rejected as a basis of discussion the principles incorporated in our staff's suggestions, and the board has proposed no plan of its own.

Commenting on the meeting which he has called for 10:30 a.m. Monday in his office in Austin, Kirk said, "I continue to be hopeful that all outstanding issues can be resolved in a manner consistent with the requirements sent by Congress with respect to representation of the poor on Acadiana Neuf's board.

Invited to the meeting are Champ Baker, director of the Louisiana Office of Economic Opportunity, and Acadiana Neuf officials Dr. James B. Oliver, president; Dr. Joseph Kite, vice-president; H. E. Kirk, secretary; Father A. J. McElveen, treasurer; and Rolland and M. Hebert, executive directors.