ACADIANA NEUF

Director Denies Priest's Charges

By BOB ANGERS JR.

The poverty war director of Acadiana Neuf has denied that the poverty war treasurer has not been kept informed on the program and has issued an ultimatum that Southern Consumers Cooperative's own people have been auditing it into disrepute.

Roland Herbert, executive director, has issued the following reply to comments made by Rev. A. J. McKnight, treasurer, at the special meeting of Acadiana Neuf held in Lafayette Nov. 2.

"Regarding the controversy revolving around an audit of the Southern Consumers Cooperative, the non-profit organization, no one has accused Father McKnight or anyone else of attempting to hide anything from the public. I fail to understand just why he has upset the first place. As far as every responsible person will agree that a periodic audit is good business. If Southern Consumers Cooperative is financially sound, certainly its supporters have nothing to fear," Herbert explained.

"If, on the other hand, the reverse is true, an audit is just the thing to set the record straight. With all the publicity about Acadiana Neuf and its delegate agencies, especially Southern Consumers Cooperative appearing in the news media in recent weeks, I think it is the best interest of Acadiana Neuf and its subordinate agencies to show interested taxpayers specifically where the anti-poverty monies are being spent. Therefore, calling for an audit was basically sound, both financially and administratively."

On Rev. McKnight's query about being kept informed, Herbert had this to say:

"If I had to keep everyone informed who wanted to be kept informed, that is about all I would do all day. Strange to me, Father McKnight feels indignant when he is the uninformed party. However, he and his people at Southern Consumers Cooperative have bypassed Acadiana Neuf and went directly to Austin, Texas, on numerous occasions. I was not informed. This didn't seem to trouble the good priest too terribly," Herbert reported. "Since Father McKnight is treasurer of both Southern Consumers Cooperative and Acadiana Neuf and sits on both boards, he has unlimited access to information. Herbert added, "Surely Father McKnight must have been apprised of the fact that the War On Poverty is not a form of government bounty, but a program designed to assist the poor, to help them to help themselves."

As far as bringing Southern Consumers Cooperative into disrepute is concerned, Father McKnight's own people are doing just that with such denunciation slogans as "Burn, Baby, Burn!" and "We want the white bag" and suits filed for alleged breach of contract.

"Regarding Father McKnight's statement that 'vicious strategy' by power-hungry individuals is being used to maintain and augment their position, it would appear from this that, in all due respect to his office of clergymen, Father McKnight is perfectly willing to apply a double standard so long as it serves his ends," Herbert Alleged. "Just recently we received correspondence from the Office Of Economic Opportunity regarding re-estimation of Acadiana Neuf. This would undoubtedly place a good deal of the power Father McKnight so contemptuously speaks of in his or his supporter's hands. To date, we do not recall a statement from him affirming that this would be unfair or unjust or discriminatory to him."

Herbert said the special meeting was called Nov. 2 to "alert the taxpayers of how the anti-poor money is being spent.

Perhaps we should point out to some of the people connected with Southern Consumers Cooperative that the Office Of Economic Opportunity is making available federal funds and non-private funds for administration of poverty programs. The people of Southeast Louisiana are some of the taxpayers who are providing the tax dollars to finance the War On Poverty and are entitled to know how their tax money is being spent."

Herbert concluded, "Certainly board members of Acadiana Neuf and some members of Southern Consumers Cooperative are disturbed over the fact that they are not allowed to discuss all of the time how the federal monies are to be spent. So, let's get in the act so to speak; they try to display ham showmanship at the meetings, to confuse and delay issues and attempt to disagree with constructive ideas. Then there are those who profess to have the interest of the poor and minorities as their sole motivation, yet are totally blind to the fact that while people may also desire to help the poor and minorities."

"Naturally, I am aware that it is completely impossible to please all elements in a group and obviously I cannot give legal counsel in the Anderson case. However, when a private citizen, who is also a taxpayer, feels he has been treated unfairly, he is free to seek redress. Surely, Father McKnight and his associates do not feel the same when they have a grievance. That Mr. Anderson chose a court of law in no way alters the fact that he is free to seek whatever it is he feels he was deprived of," Herbert concluded.

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