

OEO Legal Services Chief Is Ousted

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By William Greider
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Theodore Tetzlaff was bounced yesterday as acting director of OEO's legal services program and he warned that the program may be headed for political dismantling.

He said that OEO Acting Director Howard Phillips "seems to be going back to a situation where he wants to make it difficult for poor people to get attorneys and, once they get them, to limit what they can do."

While Tetzlaff insisted that he had not resigned, Phillips accepted a resignation submitted to his predecessor in December, then he moved in

another man, Laurence McCarty, to take charge of the program, which provides 2,500 lawyers for the poor across the country.

Meanwhile, the American Bar Association's annual convention in Cleveland passed a resolution reaffirming its support for the program and urging Congress to set up an independent corporation to run legal services when OEO is phased out of business.

The resolution said that lawyers and the government "should take very step necessary to ensure that legal services lawyers remain independent from political pressures in the cause of representing clients."

Phillips, who could not be reached for comment, has differed publicly with Tetzlaff on what restrictions should be placed on the lawyers for the poor. Tetzlaff conceded that some of the government-financed lawyers have been guilty of partisan political activities, but he said state and local officials have also used

political pressure to try to squelch lawsuits filed in behalf of the poor.

"I think there's a serious question," he said, "whether anything is going to be settled on the merits any more or whether the sole consideration is going to be political."

Tetzlaff said he was told that Phillips "does not want to be locked into the idea of a legal services corporation and wants to be free to go to a revenue-sharing approach." President Nixon's new budget proposes a corporation to operate the program, but Congress must enact legislation first.

Meanwhile, Tetzlaff claimed that Phillips is making changes "that will have the effect of just emasculating the programs." The new OEO director issued an order restrict-

ing grant renewals to 30-day extensions which Tetzlaff said will make it impossible for lawyers to initiate any long-term litigation.

Furthermore, Tetzlaff complained that Phillips has appointed new legal-services officials who are hostile to the program, including a non-lawyer to head evaluation and a lawyer to head program development who does not believe the government-paid lawyers should handle any domestic divorce cases for the poor—the single biggest item of business.

"I'm afraid the program's going to be a political football and then it's just a fraud to say that the lawyers are representing the poor because they will be working under all sort of constraints," Tetzlaff said.