

Legal Assistance Aides Here Fired

By *Tim Findley*

Antipoverty programs in this region were given another blow yesterday with announcement of the firing of the top two administrators of legal assistance programs.

The terminations of Legal Services Director Tom Mack and Deputy Director H. Tim Hoffman were the first such regional actions taken as part of the proposed dismantling of the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity. Like his counterparts in all other Federal regions, Mack had been stripped of all practical authority since January 31.

Mack and Hoffman oversaw administration of \$11 million a year in Federal funds for legal assistance to the poor in California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii and Micronesia — about \$10 million of that going to California alone.

CLASHES

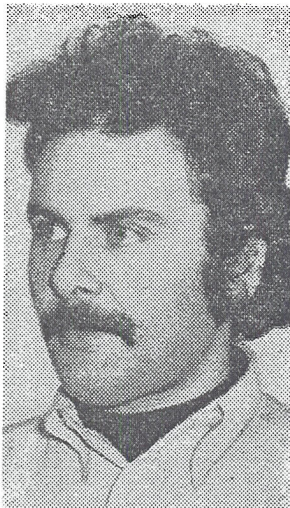
In the three years the two have been in the San Francisco headquarters of the region, a few of the 35 legal assistance programs in California have been under fire from Governor Ronald Reagan — notably California Rural Legal Assistance.

But antipoverty officials here and in Washington did not offer that or any other reason for the firing of Mack and Hoffman at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday.

The two said yesterday they were called into OEO Regional Director Tom Mercer's office, given their walking papers authorized in Washington and told to clean out their desks by 5 p.m. A custodian followed behind them to change the



TOM MACK
Director



H. TIM HOFFMAN
Deputy

locks on their offices.

FUTURE

While their firing did not mean an immediate end to legal services for the poor in this region, the future of those programs seemed in serious doubt yesterday.

President Nixon's 1974 budget proposals eliminate the Office of Economic Op-

portunity, ending altogether some of the antipoverty programs and transferring others to other agencies. Money is allocated for a legal services program, but what agency will administer that money has not been made clear.

Howard Phillips, chosen by the President to oversee the dismantling of OEO, began his duties by saying it was founded on a "Marxist notion," and leveled his biggest complaints at poverty lawyers who he said operated for "political ends." Phillips cited charges that poverty lawyers "have been distributing radical literature in the prisons."

ACTION

Phillips then put legal assistance and other poverty programs under his direct control, ordering that as their funds ran out, they could apply for new financing to cover a period of only 30 days.

Stewart said at least two programs, those in Bakersfield and San Diego, will have to shut down at the end of this month and that programs in Los Angeles are already closing up.

"What all this amounts to is conscious harassment of legal assistance programs, and they know it," Mack said sharply yesterday.

Hoffman also charged that he had been fired because of his activities as president of local 3009 of the American Federation of Government Employees. His union has passed a censure resolution against Phillips for his statements about the old OEO and is threatening a lawsuit to protect jobs of OEO workers who are not protected by civil service regulations.