

The Secret Plan To Discredit OEO

Two secret documents that have come to light set forth in vivid detail the Nixon administration's strategy for dismantling the present war on poverty organization.

The first, a 20-page memorandum made available to The Chronicle, spells out the administration's plan to persuade Congress to abandon the anti-poverty Office of Economic Opportunity.

The second consists of in-

structions to poverty program auditors to collect information which will show defects in the OEO.

The memorandum acknowledges that a successful attack on the OEO depends in large part on exaggerating the agency's shortcomings and failures.

The auditors were ordered to obtain any indication of "criminal activity, political activity, or the spreading of class or racial antagonism"

by poverty officials.

Among other sources, it directs the auditors to obtain "the reaction of local police" in assembling the information against poverty programs and their administrators.

The strategy memorandum was apparently intended for use by administration lobbyists. The OEO spokesman in Washington said it was written by William Plissner, a former budget official for the poverty program who has since been transferred to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The spokesman said acting OEO Director Howard Phillips saw the memo and "rejected" it.

But the set of instructions to auditors, dated January 26 and signed by Eric Biddle, head of OEO's Office of Inspection, spells out how to obtain the information wanted.

It said that if OEO is to be junked, the administration must be able to characterize its Community Action agencies as sources of "agitation, destructive unrest, diversion of federal funds to support partisan political activity, administrative waste, criminal use of funds" and seed beds of racial conflict.

It orders that auditors seek information about "power struggles within the board or the staff," evidence on any, "improper use" of money and failure to follow OEO regulations.

The latter includes violating guidelines against "broad dissemination of birth control information" or against union organizing among migrant workers.

"Just as the administration understands (or should understand) the hyperbole of its criticisms, it should not underestimate the strength of support acquired with local leaders over the last four years," the memo warned.

"The administration must expect strong endorsements and case histories from governors/mayors/business leaders marshalled by the opposition, which will 'prove' the worth and effectiveness of Community Action in this or that community," it adds.

The memo recommended that the administration reply to this by emphasizing the "years of notice and careful preparation" for shifting poverty program responsibility to the states and local government.

It says the government can accurately claim it will be spending more on the poor even without the action agencies, and to have reduced the numbers of poor through economic growth, reduced unemployment, and higher Social Security benefits.

It urges that debate on the future of OEO "should be steered to the appropriations committees in Congress, "whose interests most closely align with the President's and, unlike their legislative committee counterparts, have few members with strong feelings for OEO."

In particular, the memo warned that the battle against OEO must not be waged in such sympathetic forums as the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Labor and Public Welfare committee.

It recommended delaying tactics which could be used to block a continuing resolution which would keep the OEO in business.

The memo urged that administration strategists "play on the penchant of each liberal to protect only the program which interests him" and to plan for developing "adverse reaction to the inevitable counter-demonstrations" of poor people.

It even offers the administration's capsule personality portraits of the friends of foes of OEO in Congress. Democratic Senator Alan Cranston of California, for example, is grouped with those who:

"Derive from same general liberal tradition and most associated with early legislation and creation of agency. Can be expected to be highly vocal, threatening and derogatory. However, the depth of expressed concerns can be questioned because primary interests lie elsewhere now."