

# Lack of Liaison Add Woes to NYC

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of a series of articles by Tim Bradner, Assistant Editor of Tundra Times, on problems in Alaska's Neighborhood Youth Corps program.)

The War on Poverty was a pipedream that came true.

A young Texas schoolteacher many years ago swore that someday he would do something to lift the conditions of utter, desolate poverty he saw in central and southern Texas.

His name was Lyndon B. Johnson, and when he became President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson did do something in an effort to help the poor.

His pipedream was the War on Poverty—a vast array of Federal programs designed to uplift the nation's poor in ways from education

to sparking industrial and commercial development in depressed areas of the nation.

Millions were appropriated

(Continued on Page 4)

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(Continued from Page 1)

to make Lyndon Johnson's dream come true. Vast organizations with desk-bound bureaucrats, in the way of Federal agencies, were necessary to administer the programs.

But the War on Poverty is running into trouble. High costs of a war in Viet Nam are channeling off money for bullets and combat boots that were meant for the poverty programs.

The fact that more of the poverty money is going to pay the salaries and administrative costs of the program organizations than is actually going to help the poor is resulting in an increasingly critical attitude among U.S. taxpayers—who have to foot the bill for the entire costs.

Alaska's Neighborhood Youth Corps program, one of the many parts of the federal poverty programs, is a model example of what can happen when confusion and misunderstanding result from lack of communication in the bureaucratic jungles of state and federal poverty organizations.

Appearances are that a wide gulf of misunderstanding has existed in the past between the villagers, who are supposed to be helped by the program, and the directors of the state agency and from there to the Washington level.

Last February the entire NYC program in Alaska was terminated abruptly with no explanation for the surprised villagers coming from Juneau.

Not only was there no explanation, but there was no pay for the village youths who had worked through sub-zero temperatures the two week pay period preceding the cut-off day.

Under considerable pressure from the villages and local newspapers, plus one NYC Field Representative who laid his job on the line arguing with his Juneau superiors to pay off for the time worked by the villagers, the state finally came out with paychecks.

Most of the NYC workers got paid, but many youths in Bethel and lower Yukon

areas are still waiting for their paychecks, according to reliable sources.

Most of the blame for the chaos apparent in the organization can be laid to pure lack of communication all the way from the villages to state officials in Juneau to the top levels of the organization in Washington D.C.

At the time of the mass-lay-offs of village youths Ransom Dick, Director of the Rural Development Agency, was new in the position and didn't even apparently know NYC workers under him were being laid off on a vast scale.

Mrs. Jean Graves in Bethel, then acting field coordinator for the NYC there, received word last Feb. 28 to terminate immediately all youth workers in her district.

There were about one-hundred of them, Mrs. Graves said, and the lay-off message came by telephone from Terry McLean, NYC coordinator in Nome.

Ransom Dick was in Bethel that day getting acquainted with his job and met with Mrs. Graves for lunch. According to her, Dick didn't seem to know that the youths were being laid off. The next day he flew to Nome to see McLean, two positions under him in the organization, to find out about the lay-off order.

McLean, of course, had gotten the order from the Rural Development Agency headquarters in Juneau.

Communication mis-cues of this type apparently extend all the way to the Washington level in the program.

The state NYC program has been criticized for initiating many village improvement projects but then failing to provide the back-up facilities to support them.

Many villages in treeless tundra regions needed boardwalks to allow villagers to walk around above summer-time mud. The labor to build the walks were available through NYC youths, the state was willing to pay the workers, but there was, no money to buy boards and have them flown in.

A chronic turnover problem in the agency may contribute to the communication problem.

John Cates, director of the RDA when NYC was established under the state agency, resigned his post last Jan. 1. He wasn't replaced until February, when Ransom Dick was named to fill the post. Dick was just learning his job when the no-pay situation developed with its resulting repercussions.

Out of three original Field Coordinators when the program started, only one is left—Terry McLean in Nome. McLean is leaving soon for military service and will be replaced by Willy Allen

Peter McManus, NYC coordinator in Bethel, resigned the middle of last November and was not replaced. Mrs. Graves acted as field coordinator with the help of McLean in Nome and Mike Bradner in Fairbanks.

Bradner resigned the Fairbanks post this spring because he would run for the state legislature, and because he was disillusioned with the way the program was being mishandled from Juneau, he said.

Several improvements are apparent for this year's NYC program, though, due to bitter lessons learned from last year.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK