

Poverty War's Use of Newsmen as Consultants Described

By Ward Just

Washington Post Staff Writer

The complaint and compliance bureau of the poverty program was run "just like the night desk on an afternoon newspaper," William F. Haddad, former inspector general of the Office of Economic Opportunity asserted yesterday. Newsmen, he said "were the best sources" of information we had."

On Monday, Rep. John Bell Williams (D-Miss.) criticized newspapermen moonlighting on the OEO payroll. "Can they do an honest job of reporting while receiving a Government salary?" Williams asked.

Williams cited three writers in the Washington Daily News, each of whom earned more than \$3000 from March to July of this year as consultants with the OEO. The three men are George Clifford, Don Maclean and Tom Kelly. Kelly now works at the poverty agency fulltime.

From other sources, it was learned yesterday that three New York newsmen were also employed by Haddad's office of inspection. They are Woody Klein, a prize-winning investigative reporter for the New York World-Telegram and Sun; F. J. Prial, also of the World-Telegram; and Gerson Jacobson, a reporter for the New York Journal Day, a Jewish daily. Klein received \$1260; Prial, \$1103; and Jacobson \$2071.

Marie Ridder, the wife of the Washington Bureau chief of the Ridder newspapers, received a \$50-a-day fee for a total of \$3250 during fiscal 1965. Mrs. Ridder is accredited to Congressional press galleries.

Haddad, who has since left the OEO to become a New York management consultant, disclosed that last spring his office hired ten Baltimore Sun reporters to investigate Head Start programs in the

South. At the time, the Sun was closed by a strike. The reporters, who quit the OEO after their paper resumed publishing, were paid by the day, at a rate equal to their newspaper salaries.

None of the reporters queried would give details on their reporting assignments from the OEO.

In an interview, Woody Klein told The Washington Post he prepared two reports for OEO Director Sargent Shriver on Haryou-Act and Mobilization for Youth, two controversial poverty programs in Harlem. "I considered it a professional service," Klein said. "I didn't consider myself under the thumb of anybody."

Klein said that his editor, Richard D. Peters, knew of the arrangement and approved. At the time Klein was preparing the reports for Shriver, he was also reporting on civil rights, housing, and social welfare for the World-Telegram.

Asked why the information was not available to Shriver in the World-Telegram for a dime rather than in a confidential report at \$60 a day, Klein said that his OEO reports were more detailed.

Haddad described Klein's report as "an invaluable document," and added that he doubted there was a conflict of interest. "I don't see where all the influence comes in," he said. Haddad said it might be different if a reporter were covering the poverty program.

When it was pointed out that Klein had written a number of pieces on the poverty war, Haddad said that his case was "unique."

According to Haddad, most

of the newsmen were used on reporting assignments out of Washington. "We would get a complaint and ask the guy, 'Could you go out to Carbondale or wherever and see what's going on.' He would go out there and report."

Haddad, himself a former prize-winning reporter for the New York Post, said that newsmen were admirably suited to ferreting out corruption, controversy or confusion in poverty projects. There were "hundreds of cases, literally hundreds," he said, where the inspection office discovered a problem before it became a headline.

Almost more surprising than the newspapermen who were paid for reporting to poverty headquarters were those who were unpaid. Haddad said the "first thing" inspectors would do on arriving in a town was to talk to local newspapermen. After awhile, reporters returned the favor.

"They got into the habit of calling us up," Haddad recalled. "He's a local newsman, he covers the damn thing. So he calls us up and says, 'Hey, something's about to blow.' And then we would look into it."

Sometimes Haddad's people would call local newsmen, if the OEO clipping service brought an unfavorable or potentially disruptive item to light.

"A guy is writing a story in a small town in California," Haddad said. "He gets a call from Washington and he likes it. We tell him the call is off the record. Hell, if you don't do that you're liable to get a headline the next day."