

Section 8 (b)

**Regionalism Revisited
Don Bell Reports
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ACIR

REGIONALISM REVISITED

Federal Urban
and System

ACIR'S NEW APPROACH

When President Carter announced his new urban program, it became obvious that he had adopted and was following the guidelines laid down by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. ACIR had "restructured" its campaign to attain total control over local government and to concentrate all political power at the Federal level; and Carter was issuing his Executive Orders in accordance with ACIR's "Comprehensive Development Guide."

In the beginning; that is, when President Nixon divided the Nation into Ten Federal Regions and established Ten Regional Capitals from which all directives, permits and grants were to be issued; a very radical political program was adopted. Wherever possible, County Governments were to be abolished in favor of "Regions" or "Areas" comprising two or more counties, with these Regions or Areas crossing State boundary lines wherever geographically feasible. Also, the fifty States were to be liquidated through the adoption of a new United States Constitution and the dividing of the Nation into a set of Newstates.

However, these plans proved to be far too radical for acceptance by the people of the United States; the plans involved what the chairman of ACIR called "intolerable political breakage." There was yet another obstacle which gave the change agents great difficulty: the original plan called for the elimination of elected officials; they were to be replaced by appointed officials. This proved to be almost impossible at the local governmental level. The Mayor might be just an agent of the Federal government; but he was going to be an elected agent, not some stranger brought in from out of town to run their city.

Because of these unacceptable conditions, Robert E. Merriam, chairman of ACIR admitted that except for a few scattered examples:

"There has been a total resistance to the concept of even limited governmental author-

ity to deal with urbanized problems of both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas."

So, said Merriam, "ACIR forged a new approach to this complex problem: The (ACIR) Commission said, 'accept the facts of life about annexation and metropolitan government and consolidation, and find a mechanism which will achieve important results without intolerable political breakage.' This proposed policy needed action by the Congress, the President, governors, state legislators, and local officials, but it represented—in the (ACIR) Commission's views—a doable, workable set of actions."

Then, in an official report to all the agents and promoters of Regional Government, the chairman of ACIR outlined the new policy that would be adopted for the promotion of Regionalism at the State, sub-state and local levels. There were ten principal steps to be taken. Briefly, they were as follows.

1. Activate the state-created substate districts (only on paper in a majority of the states) through state legislation and gubernatorial action;
2. confer legal status on these districts as an agency of local government;
3. Require by state law that all local governments within the district belong to it;
4. specify that at least 60% of the district membership be elected officials of general purpose local governments;
5. provide the optimal one-person, one-vote procedure;
6. designate the district as the A-95 review agency—with the power to "resolve" local differences;
7. provide state funding, at least in part, of the district;
8. require that state capital improvements and local programs affecting the region, i.e., waste disposal, be reviewed;
9. give the district a policy role over all multijurisdictional special districts;
10. authorize the district to assume an operating role, when the majority agree, in areawide activities such as waste disposal, transportation, sewage treatment, water supply, etc.