

Wood: Ombudsman can't investigate custodian's charges

By Gordon Johnson

Negotiations are being held between state ombudsman Murrell McNeil and NU attorney Richard Wood in an attempt to settle a dispute about whether the ombudsman has authority to investigate charges of racial discrimination filed by a former UNL custodian.

Girlean Woods, a black custodial team leader, said Tuesday, she believes she was fired from her job because she is black.

McNeil said Monday he had gotten no cooperation from the university in investigating the charges, adding that he might subpoena UNL employees to help solve the matter.

Attorney Wood contends that the ombudsman's office does not have authority to investigate the charges.

"It is not a matter of whether or not I want the matter investigated; at issue is the procedure for investigating those charges," Wood said.

Wood said that Woods has channels at the university from which an investigation can be handled, but that she did not follow those procedures so the university could resolve the matter.

Even though Wood has been negotiating with McNeil on the issue, he said he has not changed his opinion.

WOODS BROUGHT the case to State Sen. Ernest Chambers because she was afraid that she would not get a fair hearing at the university, Chambers said.

Chambers referred the case to the state ombudsman for investigation.

Since the university has not been cooperative with the ombudsman, Chambers said his only choice was to make the case known through the press.

According to Woods' letter of dismissal, the reason she was fired was because of "willful disobedience." The letter stated that Woods over-extended her coffee break by 45 minutes and that she allowed unauthorized personnel to stay in Oldfather Hall past the 11 p.m. deadline.

Since then, Woods said she has applied for several jobs through a job service, but that once they contact the university, they became disinterested.

SHE HAD NOT received prior warning and had not been counseled about breaking rules, she said.

Woods claims that her supervisors, Heinz Matthiesen, the custodial division supervisor, and John Marker, the assistant custodial manager, spied on her. She said that as a result of the spying they fired her for doing many of the things her white co-workers did.

A supervisor's Daily Activities report dated Sept. 6, 1979 details the surveillance on Woods and her co-workers during a two hour period.

According to the report, while Woods was working in Oldfather Hall, both Matthiesen and Marker watched her from the second floor of Bessey Hall, an adjacent building. When Woods went to Bessey Hall to clean, both men moved to Oldfather Hall to watch.

Marker would not comment when asked if surveillance of employees is normal procedure.

According to the report, both Matthiesen and Marker knew that the unauthorized men (a co-worker's husband and a minister) were in the building and that they finally called the campus police to have them ejected.

WOODS SAID that many of her co-workers knew about the unauthorized people being in Oldfather, and that it is the responsibility of each worker to report infractions, but only she was fired.

Woods claimed that before Sept. 6, a co-worker often took a young girl to work with her, and Matthiesen knew. According to Woods, no action was taken against the white co-worker.

In a statement taken by the deputy ombudsman for corrections, Hasan Muhammed, and obtained from Chambers, Woods said that she was fired for being on a break too long and that other white workers were on break with her.

"And I can't understand why I am getting fired; terminated. All of us take breaks the same time," Woods said.

She said that when the breaks were ended, many of the workers would not go

back to work, but they were not fired.

WOODS ALSO claimed that she was discriminated against when her supervisors changed her duties and seemed to expect more work out of her than others.

Her work schedule was changed and a job that normally required four hours for two workers was changed to three hours and 45 minutes, and Woods was expected to do it alone, she said.

In the statement to the ombudsman, Woods said she felt she was being discriminated against because she was fired for doing many of the same things as her white co-workers.

Some of her former co-workers were contacted, but refused to comment.

Woods contends that she was a good worker who did her job and that she had been commended many times for her good work.

In January of 1979, James C. Van Horn, assistant dean of the college of Arts and Sciences, wrote a letter of commendation to her supervisor, commending her for outstanding work.

Before coming to UNL, she said she had been a supervisor of a group of 27 custodians in Kansas City, Missouri.

Matthiesen and Marker said they were instructed by Wood not to comment.



Photo by M. Billingsley

With a full day's work behind him and the sun setting, this area farmer still has more milo to harvest.

Charges filed in abortion case

The Douglas County attorney's office has filed two charges against a doctor who performed an abortion at University Hospital in Omaha in which a fetus was expelled alive and subsequently died.

Criminal charges of unlawful abortion and of failure to treat a child born alive as a result of an abortion were filed Tuesday in Omaha Municipal Court against Dr. C.J.

La Benz, who performed a saline-induced abortion resulting in a fetus being born alive on Sept. 6.

A preliminary hearing was set for 9 a.m., Oct. 29 in Omaha.

The NU Board of Regents prohibited non-therapeutic abortions at the NU Medical Center's Hospital at their monthly meeting Friday on a 7-0 vote.

Students for Reagan gathering endorsement signatures

By Mike Sweeney

A campus organization has reached half its goal of recruiting 1,000 UNL students to endorse or work for the 1980 presidential campaign of former California governor Ronald Reagan.

Students for Reagan chairman Brad Ross said Wednesday that volunteers have collected 500 signatures of endorsement from students in fraternities, sororities and dormitories since the organization formed last month.

Ross, a sophomore, said he plans to present the signatures to the media when Reagan announces his candidacy. The signatures will help show the nation how popular Reagan is with youth, he said.

A Reagan campaign worker in 1976, Ross said he has learned the Republican publicly will announce his candidacy Nov. 13.

To coincide with Reagan's announcement, Ross said he hopes to organize a rally at the Nebraska Union.

Ross said student support has been more than he anticipated.

"We expected support, but not as much as we're getting," Ross said. "I know we'll have 1,000 signatures, and we'll probably get close to 1,500 or 2,000."

About 125 people called his home phone number last week to offer their support, he said.

Ross said he thinks Reagan has more support among UNL students than Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), but he intends to conduct a presidential preference survey on campus in the next few weeks to get a clearer picture.

A good yardstick of Reagan support was the Students for Reagan meeting last Thursday, attended by more than 100 people, Ross said.

At the meeting, members discussed the signature drive and formed financial and advertising committees to promote their candidate, Ross said. The committees probably will not become active until next semester, Ross said.

Other Students for Reagan plans include getting recognition as an official UNL organization, he said. Students for Reagan cannot raise funds until it gets a faculty sponsor and has a constitution ratified by ASUN, Ross said.



Daily Nebraskan Photo

Ronald Reagan