

Is He Guilty Or Innocent?

Why Is Wilbur Hobby On Trial?

By Pat Bryant
Special To The Post
Wilbur Hobby, former president of the NC AFL-CIO, a federation of labor organizations, is soon to stand trial on charges that he defrauded the CETA program through contracts he negotiated with state government. The contracts were to train women and black workers as computer keypunch operators and offset printers. The process started when the Raleigh News and Observer published 96 articles about Hobby's contracts, not charging criminal acts, but questioning his propriety and insinuating his guilt. Hobby then became the target of the N.C. Congressional Club, Jesse Helms' political action group. During the last general election the Congressional Club whipped Hobby through attacks for unsuccessful gubernatorial candidate I. Beverly Lake and successful senatorial candidate John East. The Congressional Club also financed television commercials across the state which charged Wilbur Hobby with pocketing the taxpayers' CETA funds.

The following North Carolinians are active in the state's political life. They were asked, "Why is Wilbur Hobby on trial? Is he guilty or innocent?"

Carrie Graves, director of the Southern Organizing Committee's (SOC) N.C. Project on Military Spending Vs. Human Needs, is a Charlotte poor people's advocate who believes Hobby is trial because of his concern for women, blacks and the poor:

"Wilbur Hobby is really on trial because he made it possible for minorities, especially women, to become more a part of the economic clout in our state. He has helped women enter non-traditional jobs such as heavy equipment, engineering, etc. When you begin to do just a little bit too much good for those in need in our state, you are bound to be under attack. I don't think that he has done anything that folks in the political system have not done for hundreds of years. I think it's a political move against labor, and against women."

Leonard Dunston is president of the N.C. Association of Black Social Workers, an affiliate of the National Association of Black Social Workers. He, too, thinks Hobby is under political attack:

"I am not familiar with the charges against Hobby, but knowing as I do how individuals are opposed to the right to organize in this state, I am very skeptical about the extent to which he's guilty or that anyone with his background would be guilty. I think that the forces who are adamantly opposed to any effort to unionize exploited workers will continue to trump up charges to try to silence people like him."

Jennifer Henderson is executive director of the North Carolina Hunger Coalition, Fayetteville. She also believes Hobby is innocent of the charges and that his "crime" is social activism:

"Wilbur Hobby is guilty of being a labor organizer in the 80s in the rural South. That's what I think his crime is. It's as simple as that. I think that given the right set of circumstances, we all could be indicted for our social activism. He's being indicted for his trying to creatively use federal money to help black folks and poor folks. All of us share a part of that indictment."

Dr. Early Thorpe is professor of history at North Carolina Central University and national president of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. He also believes that the charges against Hobby are politically motivated:

"He is on trial, fundamentally, because he is a liberal white in the racist South, in racist America. Wilbur has identified with poor people, oppressed people, exploited people, those who are the most up against the wall. He's tried to help them. That is his fundamental sin in the eyes of those who are able to bring charges and make them stick even when they shouldn't. CETA work

through the nation has been under attack by Jesse Helms, the right wing and the whole conservative crowd. That is a part of the general attack on poor people."

Mrs. Virginia Newell is chairperson of the Mathematics and Computer Department of Winston-Salem State University and is a Winston-Salem Alderwoman. She is not sure of Hobby's guilt or innocence:

"I really don't know whether he is guilty or innocent. All I know is what I've read in the papers. You don't know that what the papers say is the truth. One

version that I have heard is when the feds send money down you're already late getting it, and then you have got to get into operation or you lose all of it."

Gordon Dillahunt, a postal worker, is an organizer of the Black United Front in Raleigh. He, too, thinks Hobby is innocent and the victim of political attacks:

"He is innocent. I have had access to all of the legal papers, but just from what is generally available it is clear that this is an attempt to discredit Wilbur and perhaps put him in jail for a while with the aim of beating organized labor to

the ground so that it cannot rise up. This is an important time for the enemy to do that because the conditions are calling for more activity. The black community is coming to life again. So here is the opportunity to squash that in the bud.

Reader reaction to the opinions expressed in this column are encouraged. Please indicate your willingness to have your views published. They should be sent to Pat Bryant, editor, Southern Exposure Magazine, P. O. Box 531, Durham, N.C. 27702.

A&T Alumni

The Queen City Chapter of A&T State University Alumni Association will meet Friday, December 4, 1981 at 8 p.m. in Parlor C of the Executive Inn.

All interested alumni are asked to attend.

NCCU Alumni

The regular monthly meeting of the North Carolina Central Alumni Association will be held Wednesday, December 9, at 7 p.m. at the Belmont Regional Center, located at 700 Parkwood Ave. All alumni are encouraged to attend.

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