

RIGHTS COMMISSION ARGUES

Bill Vaudrin Queries Ak Unions on Alleged Racism and on Sexism

By MARGIE BAUMAN

FAIRBANKS—Alaska Human Rights Commissioner Bill Vaudrin is challenging arguments by an Alaska labor group on the jurisdiction of civil rights law over the National Labor Relations Act.

"The contention is ridiculous," said Vaudrin Saturday, after meeting with Bob Johnson, a Teamsters union representative from Anchorage who appeared before the Human Rights Commission on behalf of Western Alaska Building and Construction Trades Council and the Teamsters.

Vaudrin and other commission members attending the Fairbanks session took on their argument with the unions after two complaints concerning alleged racism and alleged sexism were filed with the commission in Anchorage.

The commission requested information from the Teamsters Local 959 in Anchorage which to date has not been provided.

At issue, basically, is the Human Rights Commission demand that union membership show parity with the state's population—that is 23 per cent minority membership.

While both sides contend that

they want to cooperate with each other, the unions point to federal laws which say unions can't ask an employee what race he or she is. Vaudrin says the civil rights legislation takes precedence over any other act.

"It is safe to say that total membership of unions in Alaska is at least 10 per cent off of parity with population, although individual unions and some locals do better," said Vaudrin.

"We are also interested in patterns and practices that tend to exclude minorities," he said.

Vaudrin points to the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Griggs vs. Duke Power Co.*, a unanimous decision in which the court held that any employment practice which operates to exclude minorities (regardless of intent) if it can not be tied to job performance, is prohibited.

He is critical of employers who demand a 50-week work year of all employees, on

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grounds this discriminates against Native peoples.

Johnson said he was quite aware that the problem existed but questioned Vaudrin's solution of job paring; also known as cluster hiring. Under such a plan two or more people might be hired to take turns on a year-long job, allowing each to work only several months.

Job-paring would improve morale and get the job done, argues Vaudrin.

"You're not necessarily doing a favor by offering a \$20,000 a year job to one man." In some villages, it might create a lot of problems if one man came home very rich and the rest had none, "but if four guys get \$5,000 apiece, they have a lot more in common," he said.

Johnson contends that while his union has a positive plan it is just about impossible in some seasons to keep people from walking off the job.

"Trouble is, the work is in the summer and fall and if you think men won't walk off the job to fish and hunt, you are wrong. They will and they do," he said.

"We do have a positive plan," Johnson said. "We are going to train them. We are committed and we're going to do it. We want to work with the Native corporations. It's just common sense."

Johnson argues that working relationships between the unions and the Native population have been good, but stuck to his argument that the Human Rights Commission did not have jurisdiction.

"All we want is one boss, one set of rules and one direction," he said, at the same time contending that international unions

do not fall within jurisdiction of the law forcing unions to meet parity with the population.

If the Teamsters local resents pressure from the Human Rights Commission, it has no beef with the issue of Alaska hire.

A day before the Fairbanks meeting, Secretary-Treasurer Jesse Carr of Teamsters Local 959 in Anchorage came out strongly in favor of local hire before the addition of any non-Alaskans.

The Teamsters use four lists in determining who goes on the job first; the "A" list for Teamsters with 400 hours or more construction work to their credit in Alaska the previous year; the "B" list for less than 400 hours Alaska work experience as Teamsters in Alaska; the "C" list for those with Alaskan work experience not as Teamsters and the "D" list for all those (including Teamsters) who have not worked previously in Alaska.

"What we can't qualify, we'll train, but we will train Alaskans first," Johnson told the commission.

The commission, meanwhile, wants more than Alaskan hire - it wants minority Alaskan hire in line with the percentage of minorities in Alaska.

"They (the unions) are used to dealing with the Human Rights Commission as a social service agency," said Vaudrin.

"We are asserting ourselves as a law enforcement agency rather than a social service agency."

"Our motto for this year is 'law and order in civil rights,'" he said. "We have requested information from the Teamsters and if they refuse we have to go on what we have," he said.