Prison Ombudsman Helps Solve Personal Problems of Inmates

"My job description is pretty simple. I help inmates solve their personal problems."

That's how LeRoy L. Oliver describes his new job as ombudsman at the Oregon State Penitentiary.

"The position was created to help inmates solve their problems. When they have gone through channels and come to a deadend—or can't get any answers—they get in touch with me," he said.

Oliver was appointed to the job March 1 by Superintendent Hoyt C. Cupp following a series of disturbances at the institution. Cupp said the job was established on a trial basis. "We will review it after 90 days to see if it should be continued."

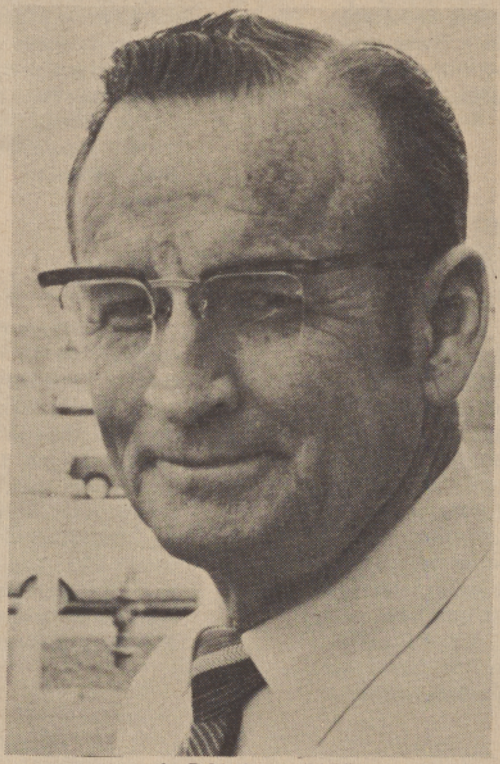
When he began the job, Oliver said he "was deluged with complaints." He thinks most of the early interest by inmates was simple curiosity. "At first I got numerous complaints on various subjects. Now it's beginning to level off," he said.

Oliver noted that most of the complaints he receives are minor. "Most of them stem from the fact that the men are locked up and can't use the telephone or other normal avenues of communication that you and I use every day and take for granted."

"Problems that wouldn't be considered important to us can become very important to a man who is locked up. When you are locked in a cell, even simple problems can grow out of all proportion."

Oliver said he makes himself available to the inmates each day by walking throughout the penitentiary—through the dining room and various shops—plus visiting the penitentiary annex and forest camp near Tillamook. In addition to seeing Oliver in person, many inmates write him letters about their problems.

Another important part of his job, Oliver said, is helping inmates communicate with



LeROY L. OLIVER

their wives and other relatives. "You can understand how worried and frustrated a man can get when he can't contact his wife or other close relative in an emergency."

Oliver, 55, has worked at the penitentiary 16 years. He is a correctional sergeant. Long active in OSEA, he started its local chapter at the institution—Prison Chapter 56—and served as its president and delegate to General Council. In addition, he has been active in OSEA's Collective Bargaining Council at the penitentiary.

From the Mailbag

OSEA Member Honored

To the Editor:

In this day of riots, troubles and grievances, I think something more cheerful would be good to read. I am enclosing a picture of one of the members of UO Medical School Chapter 41 who had an honor bestowed upon her very few people get.

Francisca Gabriel, an employe of the Medical School housekeeping department for 15 years, was named Oregon's "Woman of Achievement" for 1971 by the American Association of Catholic Women in recognition of her outstanding contributions to society.

She received a medal which has been blessed by the Pope. At a reception last Sunday she also received two plaques, a corsage and bouquet of red roses and many cards. President Marie Maynard presented her with a card and check in behalf of all Chapter 41 members.

Mary French
UO Medical School Chapter 41
Portland

Dollars are Shrinking

To the Editor:

Something has to be done about state pay.

The cost of living is shrinking the value of our dollars at an alarming rate, but our pay is remaining the same. It's time for our legislators to take a good, hard look at the state's salary situation. We need a raise of at least 10 per cent, and we need it on July 1.

Jeanette Simpson
Evergreen Chapter 28
Salem

Legislative Action on State Employe Bills Summarized

Meeting deadlines set by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House, most legislative committees (with the exception of the heavily burdened Joint Ways and Means Committee) have completed at least an initial hearing on bills assigned to them.

Following is a summary of legislative action on bills of interest to state employes that were listed in the March issue of the OSEA News:

HIGHER EDUCATION: HB 1010 ("super board") and HB 1011 (Board of Trustees) have both been heard. HB 1011 may get out of committee with an amendment changing "boards" to "advisory committees" at higher education institutions.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: HB 1044 is presently bogged down in Governmental Reorganization Subcommittee of the House State and Federal Affairs Committee. (See Executive Secretary column on page 4 of this issue.) HB 1286 regarding penalties was tabled at OSEA's request in favor of other bill provisions.

STATE PAY PERIODS: HB 1274 authorizing bi-monthly pay was heard by the House State and Federal Affairs Committee. HB 1901, now in the Joint Ways and Means Committee, removes requirement of "monthly" pay and leaves determination of pay periods to the Executive Department. The bill, which also revises the provisions relating to centralized payroll procedures and payroll deductions, has not yet been scheduled for a hearing.

CREDIT UNIONS: SB 125, introduced by Sens. Don Willner (D-Portland) and Kenneth Jernstedt (R-The Dalles) at OSEA's request, passed the House April 8. The bill allows payroll deduction for credit union payments beginning July 1, 1972.

TRAVEL: HB 1234, which would raise private car mileage allowance from 8-cents to 10-cents and establish a travel advance system, was heard by the Joint Ways and Means Committee April 1. There is a problem, however, because the increased costs are not provided for in agency budgets. OSEA testified for the bill and said that if the fiscal crisis will not allow an increase in mileage, at least the travel advance system should be established.

PUBLIC EMPLOYE STRIKES: OSEA's SB 104 is scheduled for a hearing by the Senate Judiciary Committee on Friday, April 16, at 1:00 p.m. in room 315 of the Capitol.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION: There are a number of bills to repeal exclusion of higher eduation employes from unemployment compensation benefits. This will be taken care of in engrossed HB 1294, given a "do pass" recommendation on April 7 by the House Judiciary Committee. The bill also repeals the section which presently excludes employment credit gained in public service prior to PERS retirement.

MEDICAL-HOSPITAL CONTRIBUTION: Approved in principle at a hearing of the Joint Ways and Means Committee's salary subcommittee. It has been referred to a subcommittee of Reps. Philip Lang (D-Portland) and Hugh McGilvra (R-Forest Grove) and Sen. George Eivers (R-Milwaukie) for technical amendments. A $10 contribution would start July 1, 1972.

RETIREMENT: There are about 30 different retirement bills, of different merit. OSEA is concentrating on HB 1397, an omnibus benefit bill sponsored by the Public Employe Retirement Conference. The bill was given initial discussion by the Joint Ways and Means Committee, at which time an endorsement was given by the PERS Board. Action is being withheld pending a cost study now in process by PERS actuaries. There are indications that the benefits can be funded at only nominal increases in employer costs because of increased investment earnings.

PERS INVESTMENTS: HB 1166, which would increase the amount of PERS funds which can be invested in common stocks, from 10 per cent to 25 per cent, has passed both houses and will become law immediately upon being signed by the governor.

STATE FAIR BILL: Marion County legislators have indicated they were misled on the purpose of HB 1794, which they sponsored and which would place so-called "part time and seasonal" employes in the exempt service. They have been receiving letters from affected employes. The bill is in the Joint Ways and Means Committee but has not been scheduled for a hearing.

TAX BILLS: The very deserving HB 1730, which would provide tax exemption for care of children and spouses necessary to enable an employe to be able to work, was heard by the House Revenue Committee. It runs into the problem of reducing state revenues in a time of fiscal crisis. HB 1283, relating to tax exemption of $2,400 of retired military pay, breezed through the House but may have the same kind of trouble in the Senate, where it was referred to the Taxation Committee with a re-referral to the Joint Ways and Means Committee.

EMPLOYE BOND: HB 1236, which authorizes the Executive Department to procure a blanket bond on all state officers and employes, passed the House and has been given a "do pass" recommendation by the Joint Ways and Means Committee on the Senate side.

MERIT SYSTEM BILLS: A story on the front page of this issue relates OSEA's position on HB 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905 and 1908, introduced at the request of the Executive Department. OSEA supports HB 1907, which limits retention in employment after age 65. These bills are expected to be heard by the Joint Ways and Means Committee's salary subcommittee on Thursday, April 15, at 4:00 p.m. in room 118 of the Capitol.

WAGE AND HOUR BILLS: Although not specifically applicable to state employment, SB 526 (allowing the Wage and Hour Commission to make rules regarding hours of work, overtime, rest periods, etc.) and SB 527 (which requires rest periods for all employes) would have "pattern" effect on all employment. The bills result from a 1969 sex discrimination law, sponsored by OSEA, which requires equalizing for all employes the protections formerly only given to women and children. Hearings have been held by the Senate Labor and Industries Committee.

NEW BILLS: The House State and Federal Affairs Committee will hear HB 1974 and HB 1982 soon. HB 1974, regarding investing state funds in Oregon, appears to threaten PERS investment yeild. HB 1982 would give welfare recipients a five-point preference for civil service and merit system employment. The latter bill, a product of the Special Committee on Welfare appointed by the Speaker of the House, will bear watching.