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Legal action threatened over Hinds investigation

By SUE EMMONS
News Tribune staff writer

NEW BRUNSWICK — Attorneys for JoAnne Chesimard reacted angrily yesterday and threatened new legal action because of a legal ethics investigation of Lennox Hinds, executive director of the National Conference of Black Lawyers.

Attorney William Kunstler opened the protest at the outset of Mrs. Chesimard's trial session yesterday, arguing that Hinds had a right to his first amendment privilege of free speech. The probe by the Middlesex County Ethics Committee, a 10-member organization appointed by the N.J. Supreme Court, arises from remarks made by Hinds at a January press conference.

At that time, he referred to the Chesimard trial as a "legalized lynching" and "kangaroo court" while claiming presiding Superior Court Judge Theodore Appleby did not have the judicial temperament to afford the defendant an unbiased trial. The remarks were widely quoted in the media, the factor that apparently touched off the ethics inquiry.

"I think it's the greatest thing that ever happened," Judge Appleby said in re-

sponse to Kunstler's comments. He said he had nothing to do with the ethics committee probe.

The committee operates in secrecy, investigating various complaints from disgruntled clients and other citizens. Its action may result from either an outside complaint or be engendered internally as is apparently the case in the Hinds investigation.

The ethics committee first investigates, then, if a hearing is warranted, one is held with a recommendation then being forwarded to the statewide ethics committee.

Kunstler contended that Judge Appleby was "laughing at the first amendment. This is inhibiting the defense of this case."

He called the judge's remarks "horrendous" and contended they were "designed to hurt JoAnne Chesimard's chances which are small enough now."

Judge Appleby told the veteran defense lawyer that he was "tired of your slanderous remarks. I have tolerated a lot of insults by you and Mr. Stern." Lawrence Stern is a member of the team of defense lawyers and has tangled verbally with

Judge Appleby during the proceedings.

As Kunstler continued to protest, Judge Appleby commented, "I get a kick out of you. I really enjoy you."

Lewis Myers, another member of the defense team and a BLC attorney, held a press conference to protest the action against Hinds although he conceded the complaint could be dismissed at an initial session with the ethics committee. He said they will ask a speedy hearing since Hinds is the chief fund raiser for the defense.

Hinds is not defending Mrs. Chesimard in her murder trial, but did bring civil action to have her transferred from the Middlesex County Jail to the Middlesex County Workhouse — litigation still in the courts.

Myers said he was considering a federal court action on his colleague's behalf, claiming the ethics probe was "denying him any forum to articulate his beliefs."

He called the ethics action "part of an over-all attack on the Chesimard defense," citing harassment of Angela Davis when the BLC sponsored her appearance at Rutgers University last summer as another instance of community bias against the defendant.