

Ex-Aide Says Bell Firm Hid Political Fund

POST 11/29/74
DALLAS, Nov. 28 (AP)—A

former executive of Southwestern Bell has charged that the firm required its top officials to contribute \$50 or more each month from their salaries to selected politicians.

The charges were made by James H. Ashley, former commercial manager for Southwestern Bell in San Antonio and now a plaintiff in a \$29 million libel and defamation suit against the company.

The other plaintiff is the family of T. O. Gravitt, a former Southwestern Bell manager for Texas who committed suicide last month and reportedly left notes accusing the company of using deceitful rate-setting practices and making illegal political contributions.

Ashley said in an interview that the executives were told that money was included in their salaries for political contributions.

C. L. Todd, vice president and general manager of Southwestern Bell, said the charges and other accusations in the suit "wild and ridiculous."

Ashley said that "up until 1966, we gave \$50 a month in cash." He added that after that a "political contact man" for Bell would send notices to executives telling them where to send the contributions. The money then was paid by personal check, he said.

"We had no choice," Ashley said. "We were required to make those 'voluntary' contributions," which he said amounted to \$90,000 a year.

Ashley was fired by Southwestern Bell during an internal probe which the company said touched on Gravitt's area of responsibility. Ashley claims in the suit that he was fired and Gravitt "hounded into suicide" because they resisted "corporate rapacities."

Todd said the charges against the company "will be answered thoroughly and completely in court."

Referring to Ashley, he said some of the charges he has made, "are the very reasons for which he was dismissed."