

August 11, 2003

## **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

in support of a complaint under 28 U.S.C. §351 submitted to the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit concerning the Hon. John C. Ninfo, II, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge and other court officers at the U.S. Bankruptcy Court and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York

### **I. The court's failure to move the case along its procedural stages**

The conduct of the Hon. John C. Ninfo, II, is the subject of this complaint because it has been prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the court's business. This is the result of his mismanagement of an adversary proceeding, namely, Pfuntner v. Trustee Kenneth Gordon, et al., dkt. no. 02-2230, which derived from bankruptcy case In re Premier Van Lines, Inc., dkt. no. 01-20692; the complainant, Dr. Richard Cordero, is a defendant pro se and the only non-local party in the former. The facts speak for themselves, for although the adversary proceeding was filed in September 2002, that is, 11 months ago, Judge Ninfo has:

1. failed to require even initial disclosure under Rule 26(a) F.R.Civ.P.;
2. failed to order the parties to hold a Rule 26(f) conference;
3. failed to demand a Rule 26(f) report;
4. failed to hold a Rule 16(b) F.R.Civ.P. scheduling conference;
5. failed to issue a Rule 16(b) scheduling order;
6. failed to demand compliance with his first discovery order of January 10, 2003, from Plaintiff Pfuntner and his attorney, David MacKnight, Esq.; thereafter, the Judge allowed the ordered inspection of property to be delayed for months; (E-29<sup>1</sup>)and
7. failed to ensure execution by the Plaintiff and his attorney of his second and last discovery order issued orally at a hearing last April 23 and concerning the same inspection, while Dr. Cordero was required to travel and did travel to Rochester and then to Avon on May 19 to conduct that inspection. (E-33)

Nor will this case make any progress for a very long time given that a trial date is nowhere in sight. On the contrary, at a hearing on June 25, Judge Ninfo announced that Dr. Cordero will have to travel to Rochester (E-42) in October and again in November to attend hearings with the local parties. At the first hearing they will deal with the motions that Dr. Cordero has filed -including an application that he made as far back as last December 26 and that at Judge Ninfo's instigation Dr. Cordero resubmitted on June 16 (A-472)- but that the Judge failed to decide at the hearings on May 21, June 25, and July 2. At those hearings Dr. Cordero will be required to prove his evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. Thereafter he will be required to travel to Rochester for further monthly hearings for seven to eight months! (E-37)

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<sup>1</sup> This Statement is supported by documents in two separate volumes, namely, one titled Items in the Record, referred to as A-#, where # stands for the page number, and another titled Exhibits accompanying the Statement of Facts, referred to as E-#.

The confirmation that this case has gone nowhere since it was filed in September 2002 comes from the Judge himself. In his order of July 15 he states that at next October's first "discrete hearing" –a designation that Dr. Cordero cannot find in the F.R.Bkr.P. or F.R.Civ.P.- the Judge will begin by examining the plaintiff's complaint, thereby acknowledging that he will not have moved the case beyond the first pleading by the time it will be in its 13<sup>th</sup> month! (E-60)

Nor will those "discrete hearings" achieve much, for the Judge has not scheduled any discovery or meeting of the parties whatsoever between now and the October "discrete hearing". He has left that up to the parties. However, Judge Ninfo knows that the parties cannot meet or conduct discovery on their own without the court's intervention. The proof of this statement is implicit in the above list, items 6 and 7, which shows that even when Judge Ninfo issued not one, but two discovery orders, the plaintiff disregarded them. Not only that, but the Judge has also spared Plaintiff Pfuntner and Mr. MacKnight any sanctions, even after Dr. Cordero had complied with the Judge's orders to his detriment by spending time, money, and effort, and requested those sanctions and even when Judge Ninfo himself requested that Dr. Cordero write a separate motion for sanctions and submit it to him (E-34).

Nor has Judge Ninfo imposed any adverse consequences on a party defaulted by his own Clerk of Court (E-17) or on the Trustee for submitting false statements to him (E-9). Hence, the Judge has let the local parties know that they have nothing to fear from him if they fail to comply with a discovery request, particularly one made by Dr. Cordero. By contrast, Judge Ninfo has let everybody know, particularly Dr. Cordero, that he would impose dire sanctions on him if he failed to comply (E-33). Thus, at the April 23 hearing, when Plaintiff Pfuntner wanted to get the inspection at his warehouse over with to be able to clear his warehouse to sell it and remain in sunny Florida care free, the Judge ordered Dr. Cordero to travel to Rochester to conduct the inspection within the following four weeks or he would order the property said to belong to Dr. Cordero removed at his expense to any other warehouse in Ontario, that is, whether in another county or another country, the Judge could not care less where.

By now it may have become evident that Judge Ninfo is neither fair nor impartial. Indeed, underlying the Judge's inaction is the graver problem of his bias and prejudice against Dr. Cordero. Not only he, but also court officers in both the bankruptcy and the district court have revealed their partiality by participating in a series of acts of disregard of facts, rules, and the law aimed at one clear objective: to derail Dr. Cordero's appeals from decisions that the Judge has taken for the protection of local parties and to the detriment of Dr. Cordero's legal rights. There are too many of those acts and they are too precisely targeted on Dr. Cordero alone for them to be coincidental. Rather, they form a pattern of intentional and coordinated wrongful activity. (E-9) The relationship between Judge Ninfo's prejudicial and dilatory management of the case and his bias and prejudice toward Dr. Cordero is so close that a detailed description of the latter is necessary for a fuller understanding of the motives for the former.

## **II. Judge Ninfo's bias and prejudice toward Dr. Cordero explain his prejudicial management of the case**

### **A. Judge Ninfo's summary dismissal of Dr. Cordero's cross-claims against Trustee Gordon**

In March 2001, Judge Ninfo was assigned the bankruptcy case of Premier Van Lines, a moving and storage company owned by Mr. David Palmer. In December 2001, Trustee Kenneth Gordon was appointed to liquidate Premier. His performance was so negligent and reckless that

he failed to realize from the docket that Mr. James Pfuntner owned a warehouse in which Premier had stored property of his clients, such as Dr. Cordero. Nor did he examine Premier's business records, to which he had a key and access. (A-45, 46; 108, fnnts-5-8; 352) As a result, he failed to discover the income-producing storage contracts that belonged to the estate; consequently, he also failed to notify Dr. Cordero of his liquidation of Premier. Meantime, Dr. Cordero was looking for his property for unrelated reasons, but he could not find it. Finally, he learned that Premier was in liquidation and that his property might have been left behind by Premier at Mr. James Pfuntner's warehouse. He was referred to the Trustee to find out how to retrieve it. But the Trustee would not give Dr. Cordero any information at all and even enjoined him not to contact his office any more. (A-16, 17, 1, 2)

Dr. Cordero found out that Judge Ninfo was supervising the liquidation and requested that he review Trustee Gordon's performance and fitness to serve as trustee. (A-7, 8) The Judge, however, took no action other than pass the complaint on to the Trustee's supervisor at the U.S. Trustee local office, located in the same federal building as the court. (A-29) The supervisor conducted a pro-forma check on Supervisee Gordon that was as superficial as it was severely flawed. (A-53, 107) Nor did Judge Ninfo take action when the Trustee submitted to him false statements and statements defamatory of Dr. Cordero to persuade him not to undertake the review of his performance requested by Dr. Cordero. (A-19, 38)

Then Mr. Pfuntner brought his adversary proceeding against the Trustee, Dr. Cordero, and others. (A-21) Dr. Cordero cross-claimed against the Trustee (A-70, 83, 88), who countered with a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss (A-135, 143). The hearing of the motion took place on December 18, almost three months after the adversary proceeding was brought. Without having held any meeting of the parties or required any disclosure, let alone any discovery, Judge Ninfo summarily dismissed Dr. Cordero's cross-claims with no regard to the legitimate questions of material fact regarding the Trustee's negligence and recklessness in liquidating Premier (E-11). Indeed, Judge Ninfo even excused Trustee Gordon's defamatory and false statements as merely "part of the Trustee just trying to resolve these issues", (A-275, E-12) thus condoning the Trustee's use of falsehood and showing gross indifference to its injurious effect on Dr. Cordero.

That dismissal constituted the first of a long series of similar events of disregard of facts, law, and rules in which Judge Ninfo as well as other court officers at both the bankruptcy and the district court have participated, all to the detriment of Dr. Cordero and aimed at one objective: to prevent his appeal, for if the dismissal were reversed and the cross-claims reinstated, discovery could establish how Judge Ninfo had failed to realize or had knowingly tolerated Trustee Gordon's negligent and reckless liquidation of Premier. (E-11) From then on, Judge Ninfo and the other court officers have manifested bias and prejudice in dealing with Dr. Cordero. (E-13)

#### **B. The Court Reporter tries to avoid submitting the transcript of the hearing**

As part of his appeal of the court's dismissal of his cross-claims against the Trustee, Dr. Cordero contacted the court reporter, Mary Dianetti, on January 8, 2003, to request that she make a transcript of the December 18 hearing of dismissal. Rather than submit it within the 10 days that she said she would, Court Reporter Dianetti tried to avoid submitting the transcript and submitted it only over two and half months later, on March 26, and only after Dr. Cordero repeatedly requested her to do so. (E-14, A-261)

**C. The Clerk of Court and the Case Administrator disregarded their obligations in handling Dr. Cordero's application for default judgment against the Debtor's Owner**

Dr. Cordero timely submitted on December 26, 2002, an application to enter default judgment against third-party defendant David Palmer. (A-290) Case Administrator Karen Tacy, failed to enter the application in the docket; for his part, Bankruptcy Clerk of Court Paul Warren, failed to certify the default of the defendant. (E-18) When a month passed by without Dr. Cordero hearing anything from the court on his application, he called to find out. Case Administrator Tacy told him that his application was being held by Judge Ninfo in chambers. Dr. had to write to him to request that he either enter default judgment or explain why he refused to do so. (A-302) Only on the day the Judge wrote his Recommendation on the application to the district court, that is February 4, 2003, did both court officers carry out their obligations, belatedly certifying default (A-303) and entering the application in the docket (A-450, entry 51).

The tenor of Judge Ninfo's February 4 Recommendation was for the district court to deny entry of default judgment. (A-306) The Judge disregarded the plain language of the applicable legal provision, that is, Rule 55 F.R.Civ.P., (A-318) whose requirements Dr. Cordero had met, for the defendant had been by then defaulted by Clerk of Court Warren (A-303) and the application was for a sum certain (A-294). Instead, Judge Ninfo boldly prejudged the condition in which Dr. Cordero would eventually find his property after an inspection that was sine die. To indulge in his prejudgment, he disregarded the available evidence submitted by the owner himself of the warehouse where the property was which pointed to the property's likely loss or theft. (E-20) When months later the property was finally inspected, it had to be concluded that some was damaged and other had been lost. To further protect Mr. Palmer, the one with dirty hands for having failed to appear, Judge Ninfo prejudged issues of liability before he had allowed any discovery whatsoever or even any discussion of the applicable legal standards or the facts necessary to determine who was liable to whom for what. (E-21) To protect itself, the court alleged in its Recommendation that it had suggested to Dr. Cordero to delay the application until the inspection took place, but that is a pretense factually incorrect and utterly implausible. (E-22)

**D. District Court David Larimer accepted the Recommendation by disregarding the applicable legal standard, misstating an outcome-determinative fact, and imposing an obligation contrary to law**

The Hon. David G. Larimer, U.S. District Judge, received the Recommendation from his colleague Judge Ninfo, located downstairs in the same building, and accepted it. To do so, he repeatedly disregarded the outcome-determinative fact under Rule 55 that the application was for a sum certain (E-23), to the point of writing that "the matter does not involve a sum certain". (A-339) Then he imposed on Dr. Cordero the obligation to prove damages at an "inquest", whereby he totally disregarded the fact that damages have nothing to do with a Rule 55 application for default judgment, where liability is predicated on defendant's failure to appear. Likewise, Judge Larimer dispensed with sound judgment by characterizing the bankruptcy court as the "proper forum" to conduct the "inquest", despite Colleague Ninfo's prejudgment and bias. (E-25)

After the inspection showed that Dr. Cordero's property was damaged or lost, Judge Ninfo took the initiative to ask Dr. Cordero to resubmit his default judgment application. He submitted the same application and the Judge again denied it! The Judge alleged that Dr. Cordero had not proved how he had arrived at the amount claimed, an issue known to the Judge for six months but that he did not raise when asking to resubmit; and that Dr. Cordero had not served

Mr. Palmer properly, an issue that Judge Ninfo had no basis in law or fact to raise since the Court of Clerk had certified Mr. Palmer's default and Dr. Cordero had served Mr. Palmer's attorney of record. (E-26) Judge Ninfo had never intended to grant the application. (E-28)

**E. Judge Ninfo has allowed Mr. Pfuntner and Mr. MacKnight to violate his two discovery orders while forcing Dr. Cordero to comply or face severe and costly consequences**

Judge Ninfo has allowed Mr. Pfuntner and Mr. MacKnight to violate two discovery orders and submit disingenuous and false statements while charging Dr. Cordero with burdensome obligations. (E-29) Thus, after issuing the first order and Dr. Cordero complying with it to his detriment, the Judge allowed Mr. Pfuntner and Mr. MacKnight to ignore it for months. However, when Mr. Pfuntner needed the inspection, Mr. MacKnight approached ex parte the Judge, who changed the terms of the first order without giving Dr. Cordero notice or opportunity to be heard. (E-30) Instead, Judge Ninfo required that Dr. Cordero travel to Rochester to discuss measures on how to travel to Rochester. (E-30) In the same vein, the Judge showed no concern for Mr. MacKnight's disingenuous motion and ignored Dr. Cordero's complaint about it (E-31), thus failing to safeguard the integrity of the judicial process.

**F. Court officers have disregarded even their obligations toward the Court of Appeals**

Court officers at both the bankruptcy and the district court have not hesitated to disregard rules and law to the detriment of Dr. Cordero even in the face of their obligations to the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Thus, although Dr. Cordero had sent to each of the clerks of those courts originals of his Redesignation of Items on the Record and Statement of Issues on Appeal neither docketed nor forwarded this paper to the Court of Appeals. (E-49) Thereby they created the risk of the appeal being thrown out for non-compliance with an appeal requirement that in all likelihood would be imputed to Dr. Cordero. Similarly, they failed to docket or forward the March 27 orders, which are the main ones appealed from, thus putting at risk the determination of timeliness of Dr. Cordero's appeal to the Court of Appeals. (E-52)

**III. The issues presented**

There can be no doubt that Judge Ninfo's conduct, which has failed to make any progress other than in harassing Dr. Cordero with bias and prejudice, constitutes "conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts". Actually, his conduct raises even graver issues that should also be submitted to a special committee to investigate:

Whether Judge Ninfo summarily dismissed Dr. Cordero's cross-claims against the Trustee and subsequently prevented the adversary proceeding from making any progress to prevent discovery that would have revealed how he failed to oversee the Trustee or tolerated his negligent and reckless liquidation of Premier and the disappearance of Debtor's Owner Palmer;

Whether Judge Ninfo affirmatively recruited, or created the atmosphere of disregard of law and fact that led, other court officers to engage in a series of acts forming a pattern of non-coincidental, intentional, and coordinated conduct aimed at achieving an unlawful objective for their benefit and that of third parties and to the detriment of non-local pro se party Dr. Cordero.

Respectfully submitted, under penalty of perjury, on  
August 11, 2003, and, after being reformatted, on August 27, 2003

*Dr. Richard Cordero*

Sept 10, 2003

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT**  
Thurgood Marshall United States Courthouse  
40 Centre Street  
New York, N.Y. 10007

**John M. Walker, Jr.**  
**Chief Judge**

**Roseann B. MacKechnie**  
**Clerk of Court**

September 2, 2003

Richard Cordero, Ph.D.  
59 Crescent Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11208-1515

Re: Judicial Conduct Complaint, 03-8547

Dear Dr. Cordero:

We hereby acknowledge receipt of your complaint, dated August 27, 2003, received in this office on August 28, 2003.

The complaint has been filed under the above-captioned number and will be processed pursuant to the *Rules of the Judicial Council of the Second Circuit Governing Complaints Against Judicial Officers Under 28 USC § 351*.

You will be notified by letter once a decision has been filed.

Sincerely,

Roseann B. MacKechnie, Clerk

By: Patricia Chin-Allen  
Patricia Chin-Allen, Deputy Clerk