

Sloan EI gets term for bribes

The ex-Camden councilman was given 20 months - less than what he could have received. He says he took the \$36,000 to fight local Democrats.

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BONNIE WELLER / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Ali Sloan EI and wife, Beverly Jackson, and lawyer, Rocco Cipparone, after the sentencing. Sloan EI told the judge he was ready to start his sentence.

In Camden, which has its own sad legacy of wayward politicians, the former councilman seemed to have been one of the least likely candidates to join that disgraced lineage.

Yet, there he stood yesterday before a federal judge in Camden, awaiting sentencing for taking \$36,000 in bribes from a contractor in an FBI sting.

Dubbed "the people's champ" for his social justice stances, Sloan EI made his name and career outside of the political establishment from which corruption often arises.

And, unlike many convicted politicians, Sloan EI was never known for having money or clout. In the state's most destitute city, Sloan EI wore his own poverty - his car was once repossessed and he bummed rides to Council meetings - as a badge of honor.

Instead, he was known for his charity, for walking his Second Ward district like a beat cop, for taking strangers down on their luck into his own home.

All of which the judge took into consideration when he sentenced Sloan EI to 20 months in prison - less than

the 24 to 30 months recommended under the federal sentencing guidelines.

"It's unusual," Sloan El's lawyer, Rocco Cipparone, said of the lighter sentence. "Especially in a case with a public figure."

Sloan El, 53, even had an unusual explanation for why he took the money: He said it was to fund his fight against the Camden County Democratic "machine" and not to line his own pockets.

He also said he had to pay back bills from his unsuccessful 2003 run for State Senate. In that race, Sloan El switched parties to run against Sen. Wayne R. Bryant, a Democrat who was indicted last month on his own political corruption charges.

Sloan El took the bribes from a contractor, Terry Jacobs, in exchange for steering construction work on Camden's waterfront to Jacobs.

Jacobs, who faces sentencing on federal drug charges, cooperated with the FBI sting, which also brought down three Atlantic City Council members, including former Council President Craig Callaway.

Sloan El's friends and allies, who packed the courtroom yesterday, seemed to accept his explanation for why he took the money, judging by their continued support.

When he was nabbed in 2003, Sloan El immediately confessed to the FBI, then cooperated with the government for a year and a half before even asking for a lawyer, Cipparone said.

Weeks before the charges against him became public, Sloan El confessed again, this time to reporters, and said he would plead guilty rather than "waste the government's money on a trial."

A contrite and emotional Sloan El told the judge yesterday that he was ready to do his time.

"I'm ready, your honor," he said, "so I can get it done and get back here."

He pledged to return to Camden and continue working with the community, particularly with the youth through his coaching of Little League and football teams. But he said he was done with politics.

"I'm going to die here. . . . But I'm not going to die with your sentence," he said. "I'm going to move on. I have some good left in me."

Sloan El's long statement drew an occasional, mumbled "amen" from the back benches.

Sloan El grew up in Camden one of six children, including five boys, in a home on Ninth Street that his brother, David, described as "one-and-a-half bedrooms." Five boys were crammed into one bedroom.

Even at a young age, Sloan El was mentoring his brothers and others at Camden High, bringing home troubled youths to try to get them back on the right path, said David Sloan El.

"The fight he had to fight started at a young age. It wasn't something that started when he became a politician," David Sloan El said. "Ali probably could have left Camden and done a lot of things. But he chose to stay home and fight for the people of Camden."

Ali Sloan El, a father of three, was a corrections officer at the Camden County jail until 1988, when he suffered a back injury that left him disabled. He got by on a \$1,400-a-month pension and, after he was elected in 1996, his \$10,000-a-year Council salary, Cipparone said.

Sloan El is now broke, Cipparone added.

On Council, he railed against the powerful suburban politicians who profited from Camden, in his view, without giving back. One of his pastimes was dropping by job sites to see how many Camden residents had been hired.

He fought against a state economic bailout - championed by Bryant - that pumped \$175 million into the city but stripped Council and the mayor of their power. And he opposed the economic development plans that promised bonanzas to developers, but would force out Camden residents through eminent domain.

Sloan El also wasn't above theatrics, once going on a hunger strike in support of one of his pet causes, nonpartisan elections. He lost 17 pounds in 1996, and city voters approved the nonpartisan process.

Despite the victory, Sloan El promptly resumed his fast to protest layoffs of city workers.

"I'm still a champ," he said before the sentencing. "I won't be fighting for the title of councilman, but I'll be battling for the titles of husband, father, godfather and community person."

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Inquirer staff writer Dwight Ott contributed to this article.