

Barrow Power Play Baffles BIA

BARROW—On July 1, Barrow Utilities Inc. is set to pull the switch on a large Bureau of Indian Affairs installation leaving it without power, water and maintenance of its sewerage disposal plant. The shut-down will also shortcircuit the city of Barrow.

Last year BUI contracted to maintain BIA utilities and received advance funding to pay 45 workers needed for the job.

Now, under a new federal regulation, advance funding is not available for renegotiation of the contract and if a waiver is not obtained, utility employees will walk out leaving the BIA to mind its own business.

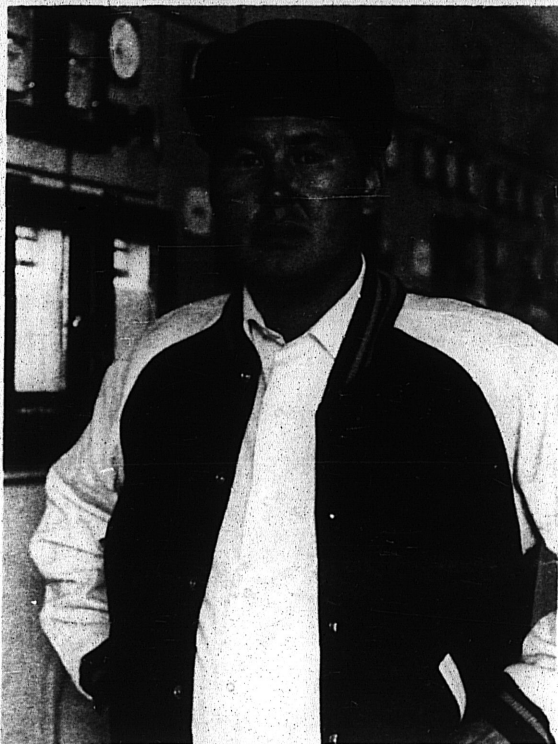
Since BUI buys its power from the BIA plant it has been maintaining, it will put itself out of business as well.

"Without a contract we cannot legally set foot on government property," explains Nelson Ahvakana secretary of the board and registered agent for BUI. "I won't leave the utility plant unattended. I can't jeopardize the property of the government. So I'll have to shut down power for the whole town."

"Certain restrictions can be waived by the Secretary of Interior," reported Fred Sloan, area plant manager for the state, from his Juneau office. "We're in a quandary ourselves."

"We want to go ahead with negotiations. Last year BUI did a good job and pretty much fulfilled its obligations. But its up in the air. If they shut down we'll just have to hang on somehow."

BUI was formed in 1965 with a \$750,000 BIA loan that went



READY TO PULL THE SWITCH—Nelson Ahvakana, secretary of the board and registered agent for Barrow Utilities, Inc. is ready to shut off all utilities his company furnishes the local Bureau of Indian Affairs installation and the city of Barrow if a new contract to run the facilities can't be negotiated with the government. Deadline is July 1.

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mostly for utility poles and installation. Proceeds from private enterprise are not much and without advance funding, Ahvakana said they cannot possibly hire the staff needed for maintenance.

"This provision (on no advance funding) was not in our last contract. Is it because of a law Congress passed from the time the Indian people used bow and arrows?" puzzled Arnold Brower, president of BUI. "If so, why apply it now to Indians who have educated themselves to the same level as the U.S.

Neither Brower or Ahvakana are too happy with the contract arrangement anyhow, because it limits profit to 5 per cent and turns it back as payment on the BIA loan.

"They have us right under their hand." Ahvakana said. "The board of directors can't do a thing without the approval of the area director himself because of the revolving loan we have.

"They wrote the requirements put on hiring a new manager and we can't find a man here with some of those qualifications. We have a man I think would probably be good if he had a chance of getting the job. But he can't meet their qualifications."

"They've drawn up a contract of cost, plus five per cent," Brower added. "It's not a contract where you can lose yet we've been losing because of the loan."

"If the BIA would only forgive BUI on the loan and recognize us as a utility company and then let us go and run that company we could do a lot better," Ahvakana maintains. "We could make a lot more profit if they'd give us their pay back more on the loan."

And if BIA should refuse to sell BUI power if the maintenance contract is not renewed?

"If they cut our franchise there will be a suit and it will not be a small one," Ahvakana warned.

On a visit to Barrow this month, the Secretary of Interior was apprised somewhat on the problem and stated in a public press conference, "I'd like to

know where that (new) policy came from myself. Obviously the policy can't work if, in fact, there isn't enough money to do the job."

But the Juneau BIA office has yet to hear anything official and BUI, which hasn't heard anything official or otherwise, hasn't even seen a contract.

"If we don't here anything, we'll shut down as planned," Ahvakana assured the Tundra Times Tuesday.

Since it's summer and Barrow is in the land of the Midnight Sun, daylight is on his side and—he added—the townsfolk are stocking up on batteries.