

Athabascan Accuses ANICA Gen. Mgr. Winfield Ervin, Jr.

Leonard L. Monaghan, an Athabascan Indian from Fairbanks, has leveled charges against Winfield Ervin, Jr., general manager of the Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association with offices in Seattle, that he, Ervin, has been violating the minimum wage law as applied in Alaska.

After working for four months for ANICA as a store advisor, Leonard Monaghan was fired by Winfield Ervin when Monaghan in his capacity attempted to raise the salaries of village ANICA store managers.

Monaghan charges that ANICA is paying its village native store managers \$1.25 per hour while the minimum wage law in Alaska sets the figure at \$2.25 per hour.

Along with his charge of minimum wage law violation, Monaghan said that Winfield Ervin "is both arrogant and dictatorial" and that the central office of the ANICA system should be moved to either Fairbanks or Anchorage away

from Seattle.

He said if the office was moved, it would be more accessible for visits by village store managers in Alaska "in contrast with the present situation in which your general manager might as well be in Japan."

In a scathing letter addressed to village native store managers, Monaghan appealed that ANICA Board of Directors dismiss Winfield Ervin as general manager.

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ANICA Manager . . .

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"As a store advisor I traveled to a number of member stores and much to my surprise, learned that general manager Mr. Ervin was paying the store managers less than state minimum wage in direct violation of law," Leonard Monaghan charged.

"The store managers were getting generally \$1.25 an hour," he continued, "whereas the legal minimum rate is \$2.25 per hour."

Leonard Monaghan said that in his capacity as a store advisor, he raised the salary of the managers to what he thought approximated the legal minimum rate.

"When I got back to Seattle Mr. Ervin called me to account and said I was 'moving too fast and the natives had to walk before they could run,'" Monaghan said.

"In answer to this I told him 'the natives have been walking for 30 years. When do they run? I am merely trying to meet the standard of wages fixed by law.'"

"I was then told 'they have been getting along for 20 years without you and they will get along for another 20 years without you.'"

The ANICA stores were established, Leonard Monaghan said, as a result of a wonderful law called the Indian Reorganization Act enacted by Congress in 1934 and extended to Alaska in 1936.

He said the law was designed to be a training ground for natives to become accustomed to operation of businesses. So far, he said, the ANICA central office has never given this opportunity to natives except in a minor way.

"From the beginning, this central organization has been 'for whites only,' Monaghan cites.

"I say that the general manager, including the present one, is both arrogant and dictatorial, so he feels that he can fire me for raising your pay to meet the legal standards and for approving minor labor improvements in your stores."

Monaghan asks whether the natives were to assume that they do not wish the Seattle office to employ natives but to give these jobs from top to bottom to "whites only."

"In a business that grosses over one million dollars annually and doing business in more than 60 villages, don't you agree that you should do something to better this situation?" asks Monaghan.

He continued:

"Mr. Ervin likes to tell us that he controls the government loans (which now amount to about \$400,000) and he gives you the impression that he can freeze your bank account.

"The Board of Directors is in control of ANICA, and that means you! Anytime the general manager injures a store or injures the entire system by enforcing such threats, he is working directly against your interests.

"I say you have nothing to fear from any effort on his part

to injure your store or injure you.

"Once we get the idea that the dictatorship is one that we have created and therefore can take away, then we acquire a freedom and we can establish ANICA for the benefit of the natives from the top to the bottom."

Monaghan said that after 30 years the native store managers should be getting more than the "hand to mouth" returns. He said it was inconceivable that a firm like the Sears and Roebuck being satisfied with an income of \$76 per month.

He said this was the average for each store, "in spite of the fact that Congress has given us tax immunity from federal and state and has provided money at a very low interest rate."

He said this gave the native stores a leeway of charging competitive prices with other businesses that have corporate tax of 46 per cent and from which ANICA is exempt.

Monaghan pointed out that the village ANICA stores owe the government about \$400,000 with interest charge at the prevailing government rate but which had been increased from one per cent to 5½ per cent, "in spite of the fact that you have your own reserve fund, said to be in excess of the government debt."

"You have a choice:" writes Monaghan. "You can continue under the miserable substandard pattern that has prevailed for more than 20 years, with of course no hope of improvement, while managers follow each other in endless succession, living above their income standard merely because they have a white collar job;

"OR: You can gather in convention and reorganize your entire setup from top to bottom, unless you are afraid, a conclusion that I am not willing to accept."

Leonard Monaghan said he has had consultation with some of the best known Indian leaders and the leaders had agreed that the time has come when such a convention of village leaders should reorganize the corporation, even though the ANICA system had just had its annual meeting.

"I say this because the Seattle office has just sent out a letter telling the ANICA president that ANICA is reorganizing," said Monaghan.

"But, when I consider the many years ANICA has existed merely to enrich such men as Winfield Ervin and his predecessors, I can say for a certainty that he will sit on his present throne until death removes him, at which time the 'power behind the throne' will exalt the newly appointed heir.

"A suggestion that occurs to me which I hope you will discuss, follows:

"Don't you think that your business could be improved by removing your central office to Anchorage or Fairbanks?

"Each store manager and the councilmen could have ready and frequent access to visit your central office, in contrast with the present situation in which your general manager might as well be in Japan."