

Editorial—

Ill-timed Dismissal

James W. Thomas, public relations chief for the Alaska Federation of Natives, has been asked to resign by the officialdom of the native statewide organization. Thomas has served in that capacity for the past five months.

There are always mixed reactions when such things happen in an important organization. Initial reactions to this one seem to lean toward the opinion that Jim Thomas' dismissal will be a serious setback for the federation. No one is faultless in any field, including the AFN PR chief, but with his resignation, AFN will have shed itself of a most dynamic assistance it has had since its inception. Before Thomas came on the scene the organization through the years of its existence has tended to be reticent, almost too uncommunicative with the native people it served.

When Jim Thomas was appointed, AFN actually became alive. The native people began to become more acquainted with the efforts of the organization. It was good for the folks to see their own statewide group doing things they could perceive—to learn of what it was doing from week to week and to be able to evaluate the efforts of their leaders. This was the way it should have been always because the AFN was their own organization—their own federation made up of those native men and women they voted for to serve them. It was only right that they knew about the efforts for the betterment of their situations.

AFN officials said the reason for asking Jim Thomas to resign was lack of funds. Surely the PR chief spent money, perhaps a little too much at times, but he also got results. He also used his talents to get more money to fund the efforts of his office.

Asked to resign a day after he returned from New York and Washington, D.C. last week, Jim Thomas had this to say:

"... I have just returned from New York and Washington, D.C. and indications are that substantial more funding will be forthcoming to the Public Awareness Program of the AFN and indications are that the next three weeks are the most crucial in the 1970 land claims settlement effort. However, the finances appear to be available..."

As of March 15, the Public Awareness Program of the AFN will be "abolished," as the federation office said. It seems to us that it is the most importune time to do such a thing. Anything that will replace the AFN PR office will have to be a good one. The native people should demand that it be. If there is a chance that it would not measure up, perhaps it might be a prime idea for Jim Thomas and the officials and the board of directors of the AFN to talk the thing over thoroughly and iron out the difficulties that have been experienced. We feel this is worth trying. To change horses in midstream, especially at this particular time, can be damaging.