

Ahtna says— **Alyeska's broken treaty**

Part One of a Series

By LONE E. JANSON

Well, now. The pipeline is finished. Oil is flowing, so Alyeska is happy. The Natives had a few jobs during construction, so they're happy. Right?

Wrong!

Increasingly, it becomes apparent now that they have what they want, commitments made to Native people in exchange for cooperation no longer carry any weight with the oil companies.

Ahtna Natives are picketing the Trans Alaska Pipeline in an effort to dramatize the commitments made and broken by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. "No Trespassing" signs have been placed on access roads to the pipeline where it crosses 55 miles of Ahtna selected lands in the Copper Center area.

In return for easements and
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● Alyeska's "Broken Treaty"

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other rights to build on Ahtna lands, Alyeska in 1974 signed an "Omnibus Agreement" with Ahtna guaranteeing them exclusive rights to work performed on Ahtna land, and preferential bidding rights off Ahtna lands.

Ahtna and Chugach, the two regions most affected by this section of pipeline and the terminal at Valdez, joint ventured with a third firm, Fru-Con, to form Meridian Contracting Corporation for the purpose of bidding and performing the work. Despite the 1974 Omnibus Agreement, Alyeska awarded the contract to Northland Construction, a subsidiary of Green Construction Company.

As recently as three weeks ago, Ed Patton told Dr. Dean Olson, a consultant working with Ahtna, "The days of the 'Free Lunch' are over!" That illustrates the arrogance of the oil companies perfectly.

Free Lunch? If anyone had a free lunch, it was Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. "Bro-

ken Treaty" is a far better description. The agreements violated by Alyeska in the awarding of the maintenance contract to an Outside contractor were reached in exchange for good and valuable considerations on the part of Ahtna, Inc. They were literally bought and paid for by rights to build on Ahtna land.

Walter Charley of Glennallen recalls that in the days when Alyeska needed Ahtna cooperation, they said, "No problem. You'll get the contracts."

On February 23, 1971, Mr. Ed Patton (of the 'Free Lunch' remark) said: "We as a company have established a policy which will result in the use of Native contractors or subcontractors. . . We don't expect you to beat people who have been in a similar business for a long period of time, but you have to be in the same ball park."

On October 17, 1970, Lew Lively, speaking on behalf of Alyeska, said, "...there will be no bidding; we will negotiate these contracts," and Quinn O'Connell also for Alyeska, declared: "We feel we have this commitment to you people and we're going to carry out that commitment."

Christine Yazzie, president of Ahtna, Inc., was present during those meetings. She outlined the details of the events leading to the 1974 Omnibus Agreement.

In 1969, the pipeline corridor was withdrawn. It cut an eight-mile swath right through the heart of Ahtna's present region,

taking all the land of two villages and much of that of two more. The Natives of that region were ready to sue and perhaps hold up construction of the line for 18 months or more, at an additional cost of \$2 billion. The Secretary of Interior felt that the suit would have a very good chance of success, so he entered the picture, urging that Ahtna and Alyeska sit down together in the National interest and come to a mutually-satisfactory agreement.

Ahtna had no wish to delay construction; unemployment was high in the region and they felt that if Alyeska would meet guarantees for jobs and contracting, everyone would benefit.

"The Secretary of Interior was backing us, because the 1974 Omnibus Agreement was negotiated with his participation," recalled Yazzie, "They needed our cooperation to get the pipeline. We gave up alot for that agreement."

The petite, dark-haired young woman, the first woman president of a Native regional corporation, said she remembered the meetings well.

"There was only my father (Walter Charley) and myself and Bob Goldberg, our attorney, there for us. On the other side sat all these guys - I remember lots of business suits and ties, and all these big guys sitting there. They promised us all kinds of things; jobs and contracts, whatever we wanted."

So the agreement was signed. The pipeline corridor was lifted in a 55-mile stretch of the Ahtna region so the region and villages could select their land. In return, Ahtna gave assurances that they would not sue, and gave up easements, releases and such considerations so construction could begin. Alyeska in turn guaranteed exclusive rights to Ahtna for work on its land, and preferential rights for bidding on the rest of the line.

"In fact," Yazzie asserted, "The only free lunch we ever got was one time in March of 1975 the Alyeska people took us to lunch at the Glennallen pipeline camp."