

Editorial—

'The Web of Circumstance'

President of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Emil Notti, read the telegram Senator E. L. Bartlett sent to the organization's convention in Anchorage two weeks ago that the Conference Committee of the House and Senate had turned thumbs down on the \$1 million

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'I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend your right to say it.' - Voltaire

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that would have initiated the Alaska native housing program. The moment the gist of the message sunk in, there were audible groans followed a moment later by complete silence. Hopes for the modest, but better homes for ill-housed native people had been struck down in one fell swoop. Our poor, and there are many of them, will have to endure damnable discomfort, we wonder, for what additional length of time.

Proper housing has always been a problem for a hundred years, in the Arctic at least, when the native people there were made to change their type of abodes. The warm and easy-to-heat spruce framed sod igloos were abandoned gradually because the Eskimos were told that the igloos were not civilized type homes and that they should adopt Western frame type houses. They did, and they were cold from that time on because the native people didn't have skills then to build them properly, nor did they have adequate material nor money to build them properly. The results were improperly constructed shacks or packing case hovels with little insulation.

These became the shelters our native people used for years and years and they paid dearly for having used them. They became fertile and ideal propagation grounds for tuberculosis, a disease that was foreign to them in the first place anyway. Multiple deaths resulted from this disease, and other diseases compatible with sub-standard housing. All this from improper dwellings that were not followed up with provisions to improve them by those who introduced Western type structures.

But, in spite of the failure of the follow-up, there is now a highly commendable effort on the part of the native people themselves to improve their own housing. This slow but steady improvement is progressing among the gainfully employed in all areas. They are taking pride in using good portions of their earnings to buy good homes and materials although at great expense. They have learned the value of good insulation in building their houses and the construction is proper in most cases.

This progress in housing improvement is being done by our more resourceful people but there are great many others who are less fortunate. These are people who are being left behind by their more fortunate brothers—people who lack skills, jobs, and lack of education. These are the people who have been caught in the web of circumstance with little equipment and means to solve their housing problems. They are the ones who are suffering great discomforts and they are people who need the benefits of a follow-up in the improvement of their homes and away from their shacks and packing case hovels.