

The Whaling Ban: We All Will Suffer

Unless one was aware that the Native people themselves asked for twelve separate regional corporations, one might think that the Native claims settlement in 1971 was a clever scheme designed to provide each region with just enough land and just enough money to keep Native people divided and weak and incapable of working together for the common good.

In the old days of the Native Movement in Alaska, each new day seemed to present a new life and death crisis for Native people. The Aleuts and the Tlingits, the Athabascans and the Yupiks, and the Koniags and Inupiat were in constant communication and were prepared to act together to meet threats through mutual effort.

That was prior to December of 1971. Now, the president of one regional corporation may have to deeply search his brain to remember who is running the affairs of another region.

The settlement act was designed in recognition of varying priorities from region to region among the Native people. Yet, it would be a tragic mistake for the regions to forget the benefits of common action and unity of purpose which resulted in the settlement itself.

From time to time, an action or injustice surfaces which deserves a strong response on the part of the entire Alaska Native community. We can be proud of the work we do at home, in each of our regions, on behalf of our regional profit, non-profit, housing or health, and village or group corporation. But we must continue to help each other in times of crisis.

Such a circumstance now presents itself in the proposed ban of bowhead whale hunting by coastal Arctic Inupiat. The International Whaling Commission has voted to ban the whaling, and the mood in Washington indicates that environmental zealots have the ear of the Carter Administration on the matter.

There are few friends of the 4,000 Arctic Slope Inuit when it comes to the whaling issue. Environmental fever, particularly on the whaling issue, is running so high in the Congress and among the Federal bureaucrats that few observers take the time to examine the difference between large-scale pelagic commercial whaling and the harvest by Arctic coastal Eskimos of the bowhead for subsistence purposes.

Rep. Robert L. Leggett, Chairman of the subcommittee of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee which is reviewing the d-2 proposals, had these comments on the proposed bowhead ban last month: "We've given the Native about \$60,000 to \$80,000 per family under ANCSA; they've asserted their rights and we are paying for that already here in D.C. All this talk about subsistence is endless coddling of those folks who don't need coddling. They've got 40 million acres and \$1 billion. What else do we owe them? Myself, I don't favor bargaining with them as though we haven't negotiated. We have."

With attitudes like that to contend with, the Native regions have the option of letting the Arctic Slope Inupiat tough it out by themselves, and suffer the same fate when their way of life comes under attack. Or, they can join with the Inupiat whaling communities in defending their culture.

We understand that the Alaska Federation of Natives is entertaining this theme for its November convention: "Must One Way of Life Die so that Another May Live?" We would like to suggest that the various regions warm to that topic by joining with the Arctic Slope Inupiat in Barrow on August 31. The Eskimos have set that date for a meeting for discussion on how to respond to those who wish to extinguish the Eskimo whaling culture.

— T.R.j.