

# Pribilof Islanders Should Become First Class Citizens

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As a result of deep concern and depth coverage by the tiny Eskimo-Indian-Aleut newspaper, Tundra Times, published here in Fairbanks, the Pribilof Islanders may be on their way to at last receiving justice from the government and becoming first-class citizens.

We visited the Pribilof Islands recently with a review commission comprised predominantly of government officials. From the evidence we gathered, it was apparent

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# First Class Citizens . . .

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that the natives of the Pribilof Islands aren't first-class citizens now.

They live in nice homes. They have record players, radios, sofas, practically all the modern conveniences such as flush toilets, running water, electricity, etc. A few had automobiles, a considerable number had motor scooters. Their standard of living—judged by material things—appear much higher than in the average Alaskan village. But we were not overly impressed with outward appearances. We knew about these economic niceties. After all, these were reported last year in that responsible newspaper, the New York Times.

We were also not overly impressed because the economic level of the Pribilovians as compared with other Native Alaskans was cited by a 1949 "whitewash" commission that went to investigate the Pribilofs.

Not judging a book by its cover, we looked underneath the surface on the Pribilofs and what we found was shocking. The people bore the scars of long years of servitude by our government. Many of the carryover bonds of servitude remain today. Many of the people indicated they were afraid to speak at a public meeting lest they lose their jobs. There was an appalling lack of independence. The people depend today almost entirely for jobs upon a government bureau as well as normal education, health and welfare services.

Bureau spokesmen indicated they were ill equipped to provide these services, that they were burdened and would like "to get out of the business of managing people." It was clear that that is exactly what they had been doing and that they had been doing a miserable job of it. In case after case cited at public meetings, it was apparent that the federal government was not providing the regular social services that are the right of all Americans. Neither was the state carrying out its responsibility.

Beneath the surface, we found that the nice homes in which the people lived did not belong to them but to the government, that the people themselves could not own land. An archaic pass system, defended as recently as this December by Pribilof director Howard Baltzo, restricted freedom of movement to and from the island already restricted by isolation.

In public meetings on St. George Island, the overwhelming evidence piled up that the government was putting tremendous pressure on St. George islanders to move against their will. The people indicated the pressure by the government was making them very unhappy. The government in 1965, not 15 years ago when timely charges were also made, has been infringing upon the pursuit of happiness of a people under the American flag.

Some persons—probably those more interested in the fur seals of Pribilofs than the people—would have you believe that the Pribilovians are an economic liability of the government. Don't you believe them. The Pribilovians in great part have been responsible for putting millions into both the federal and state coffers. The Pribilovians have given much and received in return abuse and mistreatment.

We commend Sen. Bob Bartlett who has introduced a bill in the Senate to provide major reforms on the islands. The bill, as pointed out by Senator Bartlett, will go a long way in helping the Pribilovians to become first-class citizens of Alaska and the United States.