

# MDTA Decline

In early October, 1964, the Tundra Times hailed the opening of the William E. Beltz State Vocational School at Nome.

The school, built by a state bond issue and with vocational classes financed with federal funds under late President John F. Kennedy's Manpower Development Training Act (MDTA), was to carry on a unique and significant experiment.

Hundreds of Native Alaskans living without a skill and without the hope of a cash-paying job were to be given "the second chance" to learn.

Today the Beltz school at Nome is a high school, with only a few vocational classes taught at night.

In Anchorage a multi-occupation MDTA vocational center at the Anchorage Community college taught "basic education" classes as well as actual job skills in vocational courses.

Alaskans who never went beyond the first or second grade, and some who never went at all, learned the wonderful world of the written word for the first time.

From the reading-writing classes they went into vocational subjects and learned a trade with which to make a living.

Today the Anchorage center is being closed down. The MDTA funds which financed the program are "not available."

In Fairbanks thousands of dollars were spent last year to equip an empty hanger at Fairbanks International Airport with special airplane mechanic's tools and machinery. The hanger was supplied to handle classes in aircraft maintenance for unskilled men wanting to become highly-paid plane mechanics. Air travel in Alaska is a necessity to life and the number of airplanes in the state, almost the highest per capita in the world, can only increase. Job opportunities in this highly-skilled profession can only expand.

But the Fairbanks project may be closed down in January, when funds are scheduled to run out. New money for the center may not be forthcoming. It seems to us that Alaska got ready to take a significant step forward when the mass of MDTA programs were approved by the federal government in 1964.

In just starting the step forward, however, we are already stumbling. According to officials of the state Department of Education in Juneau, the 1964 MDTA money was only an "extra" measure supplied after the earthquake. This "earthquake extra" was not replaced this year, so far, and now Alaska is back down to receiving the amount of MDTA funds we "normally" received before the Good Friday earthquake of 1964.

Many parts of the federal government's budget are being pared closely this year because of the high cost of fighting a war in Southeast Asia. The budget cuts hurt Alaskans in many areas. The BIA's construction budget, slashed because of war costs, is holding up building of new and bigger schools in the bush. Over-

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crowded classes in rural villages are not going to become uncrowded, at least not for a while.

Although Alaskans are willing to sacrifice, as should all Americans for the defense of an idea and a free people in another part of the world, we think cutting the MDTA programs after they were just beginning to roll smoothly merits some re-consideration on the part of federal budget planners.

Besides feeding the world with foreign aid, how about helping Americans—and Alaskans—feed themselves by learning a trade to earn a living?

This, in fact, would be an investment. Those learning trades and becoming employed would repay the cost of their education with higher taxes from higher wages.

Many words have been written and spoken about building an economy for Alaska. The key, according to the writers and speakers, seems to be natural resources developed in rural areas.

Right now not only is the industry not there, but the people of the rural areas wouldn't be able to take the advantage if it were.

They don't know how. They don't have the skills.

The MDTA courses, although training for local jobs available now, at least started Alaska on the right track in developing a trained manpower pool when industry does come.

And it will come.

The fund cut seems an indication of faulty government planning—the programs are started with great fanfare and then suddenly cease two years later.

Some serious thinking on the part of federal budget planners seems in order, perhaps prodded by our two Senators and one Representative in Congress.