

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

Editorial—

'It Divided Them Up'

"It divided them up," said a Bethel Eskimo on the telephone the other day. "I was afraid it was going to work that way."

The Bethel Eskimo, of course, was talking about the fish controversy that had plagued the Lower Kuskokwim area this month and part of last month and its effect on the Eskimos there. Although the controversy has quieted down from a broil, it has left some simmering elements which may not be serious but which are thought provoking and somewhat disturbing.

"Gussaks" means "white men" in the Kuskokwim area. The word is perhaps a derivation from the Russian "Cossack" with whom past generations of Kuskokwim area Eskimos had contact. At any rate, since that time, Caucasians have been known as "Gussaks" in the Kuskokwim Delta area.

The Kuskokwim Fishermen's Cooperative with technical assistance of the Alaska State Community Action Program made a transaction with the giant Mitsubishi International to sell its fresh-caught salmon because the co-op had lost its freezing facility in a fire last winter. The transaction called for a Japanese freezer ship to handle the deal. The arrangement was an emergency measure because the Bethel area native fishermen saw difficulties in marketing their salmon catches this year.

Saying that there was something not quite right in the deal, the state and some of the domestic fish processors got into the act and confusion resulted. Controversy began to rage. During the hassle, some of the salmon, thousands of pounds of it, spoiled while words flew back and forth. This did not set well with the native fishermen.

Rebellious Eskimo elements against the native co-op also resulted. Rightly or wrongly, "Gussaks" were deemed held responsible for this. This has not set well either.

"Gussak" has now become quite a common word in the Bethel area.

Some of the Bethel Eskimos are saying, reportedly in a joking manner, "We should pull the Gussak fishing boats inland," and, "We'll float big logs down on the Gussak nets."

Although the fish controversy is still going on but on less intense manner, it will apparently leave something in its wake. There will be some mending to do and this must be done so it will leave no room for discontent for all concerned in the future.

We are also of the belief that exploitation of the native people that had been prevalent in the past will begin to disappear in the not too distant future. It is now time to deal with the native people on a fair and equitable manner and this is all they ask.