

Publisher's Notes

ARE ALASKA NATIVES "OPPRESSED" PEOPLE UNDER THE TERMS OF ANCSA?

The Immanuel Presbyterian Church's Seminary of the Church, in Anchorage, and the Alaska Native Review Commission, will be posing the question "Are Alaska Natives culturally, politically, or economically oppressed under the terms of ANCSA?" through a series of workshops and lectures beginning Sunday, March 10 through March 14.

This symposium will include a comparison of the plight of Nicaraguans with Alaska Natives, under ANCSA, and is entitled "Alaska, Latin America, and Liberation."

The idea that Alaska Natives have become oppressed under the terms of the very Act, which we struggled to achieve is intriguing, but somewhat strained. The word "oppression" suggests tyranny, and it is very difficult to apply such a word in any sense to Alaska Natives in this day and age.

There was a time, not too long ago, when Alaska Natives considered themselves oppressed, not only by the government, but by the school system, by the churches, and by other well meaning organizations. ANCSA, was not only an economic tool for Alaska Natives, but it was a vehicle for liberation in many ways.

The people involved with the Seminary of the Church and the Alaska Native Review Commission, no doubt have every intention of helping, as they go about raising such questions. But the questions placed in the context of "oppression" and "liberation" are very hard to understand.

If such questions were placed in an historical perspective; that is, "culturally, economically, spiritually, and politically, where were Alaska Natives before ANCSA?" perhaps this whole exercise could be understood by the people who are being helped.

Perhaps from a world or universal perspective, Alaska Natives do belong in a category of "oppressed" indigenous people, who are struggling for freedom. It is not a view that many of us would share, but a "world perspective" is not the most important view right now.

With all due respect to the Reverend James Cox, Program Director for the Seminary of the Church and the Honorable Thomas R. Berger, Alaska Native Review Commission, we find the idea of using the terms "oppression" and "liberation" in connection with ANCSA and Alaska Natives to be inappropriate and somewhat confusing.

We are not opposed to an academic or theological examination of the issues that confront Alaska Natives, but placing those issues in the context of "oppression" does have the tendency to confuse the issues, at a time when confusion could be harmful to the efforts of Alaska Natives, who are attempting to answer questions about ANCSA for themselves.