

# Hippler: An anti-subsistence opinion...

## Editor's Note:

The following article is by Art Hippler, an anthropologist working at the University of Alaska Institute of Social and Economic Research. Mr. Hippler is a part-time columnist for the Anchorage Times newspaper. The column which we reprint here appeared in the April 11 issue of the Times and is reprinted here courtesy of that newspaper. The response by Ms. Zilys was sent to the Tundra Times after reading the Hippler column.

We are dedicating this space in the hopes that people interested in the subsistence campaign know what sorts of arguments are being used to oppose subsistence.

We feel that Ms. Zilys' response was an eloquent response to the Hippler column. We welcome any further response from the community and we welcome any comments in the form of letters to the editor or My Turn columns at all times.

By Arthur E. Hippler

The "SUBSISTENCE" problem and its implications have created the single most divisive issue between Alaskans since statehood, and there are few signs that the solutions being sought at present will still the turmoil.

Briefly, Alaska Natives are insisting that they want first

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call on Alaska fish and game by virtue of their subsistence need.

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Opponents, nearly all non-native, counter that the number of Natives "living off the land" is vanishingly small, that in fact most of those really living on a "subsistence" hunting and fishing economy are non-natives. They argue further that indeed many non-natives also have a deep cultural need for hunting and fishing.

Natives are, of course, correct in stating that they were traditionally hunters and fishers. But everyone alive on earth is descended from once-upon-a-time hunters and fishers.

Those sophisticated Natives who are aware that the argument that Natives would starve

or go hungry without primary access to hunting and fishing is simply nonsense instead use the cultural validation argument and claim that moreover Natives are better game managers and finer conservationists than non-natives, and this substantiates their claim to preference.

Unfortunately this does not seem to be the case. A mass of testimony exists showing that the worst offenders in terms of waste are Native hunters and fishers. Examples from headhunting of walrus to indiscriminate slaughter of caribou and wanton waste of waterfowl are common.

I have personal knowledge of some of this, nearly any fish and wildlife protection officer will tell you the same thing, and the evidence provided the House Special Committee on Subsistence is especially damning in this regard. This may simply be a leftover cultural practice, but it certainly does not look good when those who waste most ask for preferential access to wildlife.

The truth seems to be that

many Native hunters are more wasteful of game than most all non-Natives even when given racially exclusive privilege to many species.

Very few Natives have discernible "need" to hunt or fish beyond that of urban residents. While their personal desire to hunt is fully legitimate, so is that of the urban dweller. To fuzz this over by trying to play on irrational white guilt and to demand preference instead of equality is not only unjust, but can lead to justified backlash.

For example, recently on a plane trip to a major "Bush" community, I overheard a discussion between two men and a woman who were long-term (one lifelong) Alaska residents, concerning their growing anger at Native preference.

One stated that since Natives receive free medical benefits, pay nothing for education, can get the federal government to provide them nearly free housing, can get grants of all kinds simply by virtue of being Native, have limitless programs directed toward helping them

and want all these services so that they can live in the Bush and not work, they have become totally irresponsible.

Another said that was not completely fair since there was little Bush work, but agreed that huge transfer payments made village life attractive since it was subsidized by the taxpayers.

The third said that though she was part Native, she was sick of all the Native preference. She had calculated that since the Native claims act the amount of federal and state money and in-kind services given to Natives had amounted to between \$180,000 and \$200,000 per capita. Now Natives had the effrontery, she complained to act like dogs in the manger (she used a less flattering term) and demand that the non-native who is already taking care of their every need from cradle to grave give up the right to equal hunting in favor of Natives.

I cannot in a newspaper article convey the sense of absolute vituperation and disgust which animated this conversation, now would I repeat the actual words used to describe Natives, but I can suggest that these attitudes are increasingly common among non-natives who are actually aware of what life in the

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# Hippler implies subsistence a 'racial' issue

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Bush is like.

Alternatively I hear more and more anti-white sentiment in the Bush from Natives (couched in equally vicious and unrepeatable terms) who have come to believe that somehow they are not being given enough and who feel whites owe them more and more.

These angers reinforce each other and do little to quell inter-racial conflicts.

Moreover, such inter-racial antagonisms are exceedingly dangerous because they very quickly degenerate into open racism, in which the issues are forgotten in favor of naked hatred. We must do all we can to head off racism and political or legal decisions made on the basis of race, since those simply exacerbate racist feelings.

The SUBSISTENCE preference as it now seems certain to be defined will wind up using a criterion that is directly meant to benefit one race at the expense of the other.

Ever since the 1950s, with the vast expansion of public programs that deliberately take money from one class of

people specifically to give to another, and since the advent of social programs consciously designed to assist given racial groups by humiliating and disadvantaging others in a punitive fashion, we have experienced a decline in the moral power of a sense of justice and compassion in favor of an increasing acceptance of force and power as the basis of social change, and growing antagonism toward that use of coercion.

The hatred, however, is often not so strongly directed at the government coercers as it is at the supposed beneficiaries of this forced largesse. Hence some who suffer at the hands of a coercive utopian government develop a level of racial hatred when they see their money taken forcibly and given to others whom they rightly or wrongly deem unworthy recipients.

Eventually, of course, all such recipients do become unworthy as they become hopelessly dependent. At that point, racial antagonisms begin to have such a basis in reality that it is impossible easily to root them out. If we have not arrived there, we are well on the way.

This is a circumstance for

which we will eventually pay dearly. We must not add the subsistence injustice to the list of debts to come due. We cannot afford any further institutionalization of governmental privilege.

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