

Editorial Comment—

North Star's Dim Future

The North Star III is a legend in all the coastal villages in Alaska. Its termination, possibly in the not too distant future, would be a real blow to the small communities especially those in northern part of Alaska. Its termina-

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tion could very badly cripple the economies of the villages.

The North Star III's servicing potentials are being sapped by various developments. For instance, each time the State of Alaska education department takes over a BIA school, that much less cargo for the ship, in truth, is being cancelled. Some native regional areas are said to be planning independent barge operations, which may very well kill the ability of the North Star to serve other areas of the coast. The physical self of the North Star itself will not last forever. Its life expectancy from the present time is said to be between seven to ten years.

In view of the above eventualities, we would like to present a proposal that should be examined closely by the regional areas especially those that encompass Calista (Bethel-Kuskokwim area), NANA (Northwest Area Native Association), ASNA, (Arctic Slope Native Association), to look into a real possibility of taking over the operations of the North Star III. The joint venture would assume the responsibilities, and they are huge responsibilities, of learning to run the North Star operation, and eventually, totally assume control of the operation.

There is a way to take the North Star III over. It could be done easily under the Bureau of Indian Affairs regulation 20 B.I.A.M., more frequently referred to as "Buy Indian Contracting." The BIC would allow real involvement of the regional corporations, working together, to learn and earn. This arrangement could very well be supported by the unions.

And there is an "out," or back door. IF the regional corporations are unsuccessful in achieving the takeover, the BIA must take the operation back when so asked by the contracting groups.

The ship can perhaps be taken over while retaining key officers of the vessel that would run the operation properly while a native crew learns and trains under the skilled officers. In time, when the native crew thoroughly learns the ropes, it can take over the full operation.

There are some good native mariners. Aleuts are skilled seafarers. Eskimos can learn. And Tlingits and Haidas are known to be superb sailors. There is a natural talent to draw from. Why not train and learn thoroughly and then do business with all the native people who will need nails, guns, groceries, washing machines, business supplies, desks, all the way from Ketchikan to Barrow.