

Editorial—

The Value of Native Organizations

The native organizations of Alaska are performing vital roles in efforts to improve the everyday lives of our people. They have become important sounding boards through which the problems are being posed before the public and before the officials of our state and federal governments. That the efforts are heeded is unquestioned because improvements to better the lot of our people are becoming evident and other improvements are being sought and planned for the future. These things clearly point out the importance of our native organizations.

The emergence of the native organized groups, outside of the venerable Alaska Native Brotherhood that has been in existence for over 50 years, mushroomed into prominence only within the last few years in northern part of Alaska. This huge expanse of land had been the area where nothing much was done for great many years. Great problems existed and, seemingly, just existed because few people had the courage to bring them out. The attitude of "Let the sleeping dog lie" seemed to have been one policy of handling them.

There was a huge, uneasy void—an atmosphere of a

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

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morass of vast problems in a state of restless inertia but which no one seemed to want to touch. In the meantime, our people lived in abject misery knowing that something was grievously wrong but still not knowing how to approach them for solutions.

Then in November, 1961, a conference of native village heads took place at Barrow, now generally referred to as the first big gathering of the native leaders of northern Alaska. It was funded by the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc. of New York and coordinated by its executive director, the late LaVeme Madigan.

That conference was the initial one, a brave step for the northern area native people of Alaska. What the delegates uttered there proved to be prophetic. Lands, sanitation, health and other subjects that are important today were talked about. The conference told Barrow people in effect, "You are sitting on a resource you are not allowed to use but which you can use."

The resource in question was the deposit of natural gas which was in use then but only by the government installations and the Arctic Research Laboratory. Subsequently, Senator E. L. (Bob) Bartlett picked up the ball and had a bill passed in Congress and now the Barrow people are benefitting greatly from the full use of this resource.

The Barrow convention also pressed the need for a communications media and in less than a year after the meeting, this evolved into the publication of the Tundra Times when its first issue came off the press on October 1, 1962. We believe that the publication of this newspaper has been of vital importance to the native people of Alaska serving as an effective voice to help pose their problems. Our people owe a great debt of gratitude to one man, Dr. Henry S. Forbes of Milton, Mass., without whose financial support the publication of Tundra Times would not have been possible.

After the Barrow conference, the Tanana Chiefs organized at Tanana, a scant six months later. Other native organizations formed and the impetus continued where until today, some 23 organizations are in existence.

The organized groups have been proving their worth through the last few short years. They have become vital sounding boards through which the needs and problems of our people are brought forward. They carry weight because our people are speaking out through them.

Many disturbing problems remain but we can be thankful that we have the means to bring them out effectively and that is through our organizations. These groups, as well as the Tundra Times, need the full support of our people everywhere in Alaska. Outside of the important services they provide, they are also proving to us that they are the means of paving ways for us to do things for ourselves.