

'New generation' seeks to eliminate Tanana Chiefs

By BILL HESS

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Inside an aging house in Fairbanks, a group of Native Alaskans, mostly Athabascans from the Interior, have gathered. The atmosphere is casual. There are no suits, no ties. There is plenty of food; moose stew, smoked salmon, frozen char, and muktuk.

Although the guests help themselves freely to the food, their main purpose in coming here was not to eat, but rather to plan the strategy which they believe will result in a shift of Native leadership within interior Alaska, and a new way of doing things. Bill Walsh, the chairman of the Native village council of Tanana, is in charge. Bob Gregory, the young director of mental health education for the Tanana Chiefs Conference, sits on the floor writing a public announcement which the group plans to release to the media. He wonders out loud if his actions with what has been known to this point as "Ad Hoc Committee for Tribal Recognition" will cost him his job with TCC.

"There is a new genera-



Bill Walsh

tion of leadership emerging today among the ranks of Native people who were growing up in the 60's," Gregory writes. "The present leadership who had settled the ANCSA issue were part of an elite group who acted for the people and not necessarily by the people. The ANCSA settlement was mainly for the benefit of the state of Alaska and its future in further colonizing and encroachment upon Native peoples' land, government, and way of life."

One of the expressed goals of the group gathered is to do away with TCC, "eliminate the middleman," as they put it, and Gregory is right. The next week he is fired from his job with the organization.

Bill Walsh, too, runs into difficulties. The group had brought a number of resolutions with them to the convention held by TCC a few days earlier, but had withdrawn them after a stormy confrontation with TCC leadership, in which they were declared out of order. One of the things Walsh had been driving for was to pull Tanana out of TCC.

The village council of Tana-

na gathers together the next week and in a unanimous vote, they remove Walsh from the chairmanship. He acted without Council authorization, they claim. He still retains his seat on the council but is replaced by Arlene Smith as head of the body.

"The council has not pulled out of TCC," councilman Will Mayo, who is also the executive vice-president of Tozitna Native Corporation, says afterward.

"There are no plans by this village to pull out of TCC," Mayo emphasizes, claiming that the relationship between the groups is a good one.

Mayo says that the council will still be taking a closer look at allegations brought up by Walsh. "We aren't endorsing them," he adds, "but they are interesting never-the-less."

After the action takes place, Walsh once again meets with sympathizers in Fairbanks.

It doesn't matter that he was removed from the chairmanship, he says, by law he and the other council members have the obligation to take certain steps and he will, regard-

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TCC leadership, dissidents, approach problems differently

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less.

William "Spud" Williams, president of TCC, claims that the goals sought by the group, who have since disbanded the Ad Hoc Committee and are in the process of re-organizing, are basically the same as TCC, but they have chosen different methods to pursue them.

Williams does criticize the group for having used disruptive tactics during the convention, "you don't disrupt an orderly meeting," he explains. "That way, you only succeed in antagonizing everybody against you," he says. "You cut off any chance of reaching a successful compromise solution!"

Still, Williams does not see any real trouble between TCC and the new group. "They are addressing the same issues we are," Williams says. "The rights of the Native people. . . I don't see any conflict."

The groups may be addressing the same issues, but their views on them are radically different. On the issue of game and fish management for subsistence hunting and fishing, TCC is supporting the Alaska Federation of Natives position backing state control of game and fish management, providing that the current law which gives subsistence users first priority to resources in times of shortage is maintained. The policy does not distinguish Native users from non-Native users.

To do otherwise, Williams says, would put the issue on a racial basis and would generate tremendous opposition toward subsistence. "It would not be acceptable to the federal or state governments," Williams claims further.

Walsh sees it differently. He points to the special relationship between the federal government and Indian nations. Let the state manage game and fish on state lands, Walsh says, but elsewhere, keep out of it.

Walsh exclaims that when TCC joined with AFN last fall in passing a resolution supporting the transfer of fish and game powers from the U.S. Department of the Interior to the state of Alaska, the action was a threat to Native sovereignty.

"By giving them (the state) any legality," Walsh claims, "they're going to act on subsistence. They're going to vote on it. They outnumber us!"

"We have original jurisdiction," Walsh states, claiming that D-2 legislation supports his position. "We are going to exercise that jurisdiction!" The thing is protected so much by Congressional powers, the people of the state of Alaska have no say. The United States does protect our sovereign right. It does not matter then, Walsh claims, if people in Alaska do get angry. "Racial conflict has no place and isn't even a question," he explains. "It's our original

jurisdiction."

The group has allied itself with the Igupiat Community of the Arctic Slope in a jurisdictional dispute with the state. ICAS contends that the state of Alaska has no jurisdiction north of the PYK line, an area which includes much of Northern Alaska, including a great deal of Athabaskan country. ICAS has also withdrawn from AFN over the subsistence issue.

Walsh recalls a discussion concerning the relationship between state and tribal governments during the TCC convention. "There is no relationship between state and tribal governments," he claims.

Both TCC and the ad hoc group agree that the federal government has a responsibility to provide services, such as education, medical care, and social services to people on the tribal level. Again, there is a disagreement on how the services should be delivered. Through the current system, money from the federal government is channeled from the federal government down through the Alaska area office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and to TCC, a non-profit organization which is responsible for dispensing the services to the 43 villages within the Interior.

The ad hoc group claims that each time the money goes through a different level of operation, much of it is syphoned off in administrative costs. Cut out the area office

and TCC, whom they call the middle man and a great deal more of that money will reach tribal members on the village level than now does, Walsh claims. Walsh expects an announced re-organization of the BIA to eliminate the area office. Budget cuts, he claims, will also take care of TCC.

"People can't figure out how to make Reaganomics work," says supporter Harry Lord. "Reagan can't figure out how to make it work. We're going to show them!"

Williams counters that TCC is strong, and will continue to provide the services in a coordinated way through all the villages of the region. "It's something that will continue forever," he says.

The group is charging Williams and other members of TCC with wrongdoing in their involvement with Dinaa Oho Huuheedliyo, a profit-making corporation. Walsh claims the operation of the corporation

conflicts with a clause in the articles and by-laws of TCC saying that no earnings of the corporation shall be distributed to members, except for compensation for services rendered and "to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the corporation)."

Walsh has sent a letter to Steven Cooper, Assistant to the United States Attorney, calling for an investigation into the matter.

"Walsh has a misunderstanding of the whole thing," Williams claims. "Dinaa Oho has nothing to do with TCC. This is what he doesn't understand. It is a separate, private corporation owned by all the villages."

Cooper says he has received Walsh's letter, which Walsh signed while still chairman of the Tanana council. "I don't yet know how I'm going to answer the letter," Cooper says, indicating that he has not yet determined whether or not he sees grounds for an investigation.