

# The Alaska Plan: The Product of All Volunteers

## PART II THE PROGRAMS

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW

Almost none of the people who sat down two years ago to formulate what is known as the Alaska Plan can agree today on how the goals of the plan are to be achieved.

How do you, in fact, bring minority workers into the mainstream of Alaskan building and construction? How do you open up unions which for many years were not open to minorities? How do you recruit and train minorities to take their place as apprentices, journeymen, and ultimately supervisors?

How do you re-educate not only the minorities themselves, but the unions and the contractors? How do you meet percentage requirements of minorities at the job site and at the same time not discriminate against white workers?

There has been little or no central direction since the enactment of the Alaska Plan. It operates in a piecemeal fashion with volunteer help and little communication between one party and another. Many of the original signatories were not even aware that there was no executive director.

Most assumed that Bob Willard of the Human Rights Commission held that position. Willard served as a volunteer, unpaid

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chairman with an all-volunteer unpaid committee. They sandwiched in work on the Alaska Plan between regular full-time jobs. When the committee gathered together, each member paid his own expenses.

Last week, Willard resigned from the Human Rights Commission and was unable to be reached, but it is questionable whether he will continue to serve as Chairman of the Alaska Plan Commission. The non-existent offices and yet-to-be-hired staff remain somewhere in limbo.

Which is not to say that nothing is being done. In spite of its obvious difficulties, some of the goals are being met. What is lacking is a central organizing force. Each party is operating separate programs. When asked how it ties into the Alaska Plan, most look confused and say, "Well, we're just going ahead on our own."

The objective of the Alaska Plan is to bring minorities into the building trade unions, and while many of the participants in the plan can talk about guidelines and goals, the unions must produce a specific number of trained minority apprentices and journeymen within a strict time frame. They are wrestling with the problem with little assistance.

"We were supposed to achieve 26-27 per cent minority membership by 1976," said Julius Kornfeind, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. "We really didn't have too far to go."

"Our coordinator in Anchorage keeps records, but I think we were up to 25 per cent last year. If we didn't keep records, I'd never know who was a minority. We had one kid mark down American Indian and I thought he was putting me on, because you sure couldn't tell it."

The forms which a contractor is required to fill out for the

federal Dept. of Labor, Office of Equal Opportunity, has columns to list minority workers as Black, Filipino, Spanish-American, Oriental, American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut.

The forms are considered a nightmare of paperwork and one contractor commented that between the requirements for the Alaska Plan, the Occupational Safety Act, and the Environmental Protection Act, he spends more time shuffling paper than building a project.

And the forms are not fool-proof. They must be followed up with on-site enforcement checks. Morris Thompson of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said contractors have been known to use the term "Alaska Native" to mean anyone born in Alaska.

A contractors' joke tells the story of the supervisor who told the enforcement officer that half his men were Negroes. "They don't look like Negroes," said the officer. "Just ask them," was the answer.

Personnel shuffling to fill minority quotas can only be done at the apprentice level. Every unions operates on strict rules as to work lists and a business manager of the union can NOT alter those lists in any way. Journeymen must be sent out as they sign in.

Traditionally, union members must come in person to the union hall to sign in. In Alaska, however, there are many remote communities with no union halls. So a man who is a union member but lives in the bush faces a disadvantage in signing up for jobs.

Because of the distance problems, some unions have adopted a more flexible attitude, and allow the man to be signed in by phone notification.

This does not alter the fact that the unions, the contractors and the industry are based in urban areas. Bud Wadsworth, Department of Labor, commented, "A union man has to be urban oriented because that's where the work is."

"In the Plumbers Union, for example," he said, "they have to come in and sign up every 90 days. But if a man's unemployed, the union pays him \$160 a month supplemental unemployment. That makes it worthwhile to pay his dues and come in to Fairbanks."

The joint labor-management apprenticeship programs is also urban based. Recruitment trips are made to the bush to search for talented youngsters, "But once he's accepted into the program, that youngster's going

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to have to pack up and move here. They have to come out of the villages," said IBEW's Kornfeind. "The only thing it does is take more talented ones away from the village."

Many of them are motivated and make it in the city. But a large number drop out and return to the bush.

Are minority workers dependable or are they irresponsible, lazy, and shiftless as many employers will claim? The answers are varied.

Tex Taggart, head of the Fairbanks Association of General Contractors, said "A contractor today has to bid close to the belt, and you've got to have people that are going to be on the job every day."

He and two other contractors felt that the Native people have a different concept of time — Indian time."

One employer said he had a

job going in Galena where the men were drawing good wages and working six ten hour days.

"Somebody comes along and says the fish are running and we didn't have one native. They were all off chasing fish. Those fish were more important to them, and with the money they were making, they could have bought all the fish they wanted."

Frank Peratrovich, U.S. Office of Equal Opportunity, disagrees, "We hear a lot of these comments — Alaska Natives are drunk, lazy, they quit on you. We make statistical analysis of this kind of data, and we haven't run across a substantial disparity in years."

Taggart has strong feelings about the Alaska Plan.

"I think it stinks!" he said.

"When we call the unions, we don't say, send me a white man or send me a black man. We have an agreement with the different craft unions — a closed

shop, more or less, to furnish us with competent workers in whatever craft we need."

"If they do not have the minority races on the rolls, we can't go out in the street and hire non-union. I don't think the onus is on the contractor," he added. "I think it's on the unions."

It appears at this stage that much of the burden has indeed fallen on the unions. They are faced with an enormous task of recruitment and training.

But training is not the end goal.

"The worst thing you can do," said Peratrovich, "is training for training's sake. Your trainee winds up back in the village."

George Wise of the Outreach Apprenticeship Program said, "I think we just got stuck with this Alaska Plan because it parallels what we do, to reach minorities for the building

trades."

Outreach is an effective apprenticeship training program, sponsored by the Building and Construction Trades Council AFL-CIO.

"We had 350 applicants for 51 positions," he pointed out. "The problem is unemployment."

Bud Wadsworth, Dept. of Labor, added "No apprentice program will accept more applicants then they keep employed. It is a disservice to the community to train more people than you have jobs for."

"You can get all the training in the world," agreed Tim Wallis, President of DNH Corporation, a Native-owned construction firm, "and if there isn't a job to go to, it doesn't do you any good."

"The work picture is the thing that establishes how many we can take," said IBEW. "And the out of work picture is the

worst we've seen in 10 years. When our journeymen aren't working, our apprentices aren't either."

"The Alaska Plan looks good on paper. It sounds good when you start talking about it, but when you try to put it into application," said a contractor, "it doesn't work."

NEXT WEEK: The unemployment picture, local hire and the pipeline, first audit for the Alaska Plan. Where is it going?