

LEKANOF BLASTS PRESS

NATIVE LEADER CLAIMS ONE-SIDED STORY TOLD OF PRIBILOF ISLANDS

"I was somewhat disappointed by the recent coverage by the Associated Press of the Pribilof Islands."

This was the comment here Friday of Flore Lekanof, the first Pribilofian to obtain a master's degree in education.

"In pictures and articles only the good side and not the bad side of the Pribilofs was brought out," Lekanof said.

"Either my people failed to communicate or the one and only reporter for the Associated Press failed to grasp the problems as seen by my people," said the 33-year-old teacher at Kotzebue, attending a "Project Headstart" workshop at the University of Alaska.

Lekanof, first president of the Cook Inlet Native Association, said "I know the problems well and the conditions there. As a native of St. George, I speak the language fluently and understand their difficulty in expressing themselves in English and their form of expressing themselves at all lest they lose their jobs."

"The past is still with my people and it has left its scars."

"I believe there still exists a degree of servitude on the islands."

"I do not agree with the commission report there is no servitude — of course, the commission didn't define what it meant by servitude."

"The people are fearful of losing their jobs if they are critical. They do not have full freedom of speech."

"Their freedom of movement is restricted, partly as a result of geographical location and partly as a result of a pass system which has been modified somewhat since Tundra Times started publicizing the



FLORE LEKANOF

Pribilof problems.

"Because of the restriction on their liberty to speak, freedom of movement, and inability to own land, I believe a degree of servitude still exists."

"They are in bondage because they have no other choice except to work for the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. If they choose otherwise, they have to leave the islands."

Lekanof said as a teacher at St. George in 1961 that the people there petitioned him to aid them in the removal of the island manager.

"There was no attorney. No one else to help them. I took it upon myself to help them because I could see no other way."

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"At least I knew some of the procedures that could be utilized in helping them get some of their desires realized."

He said he corresponded with Senator Bartlett and sent copies to Governor Egan and the late President John F. Kennedy, then a senator.

A man, Howard Euneau, was sent from the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries to investigate. Euneau later became the island manager of St. Paul.

The island manager of St. George was removed but Lekanof indicated that in the process he was smeared as having Communistic leanings.

When being interviewed for a position later in the Anchorage school system, he said twice he was given the third degree and when he found out about the smear, he blew his top.

"Nothing could have been further from the truth. I was merely trying to help my people and that was the result," he said.

Lekanof, who has a master's degree in school administration from the University of Washington, said he desired school administration work but felt that the smear was still affecting his obtaining this work as well as chances for promotion.

He explained how he was able to escape the servitude of the Pribilofs and obtain for himself an education. He said because he had a spot on one of his lungs he was sent to the Tacoma Indian Hospital. When he recovered, he attended and graduated from Tacoma's Lincoln High School. He then attended Whitworth College on a scholarship. Upon graduation, he returned to Alaska — to St. George — and with a college degree worked for six months as a laborer under the old system.

He explained it was the only way he could find of returning to his home so his wife (a Sioux Indian) could see his parents and so he could get acquainted with his relatives. He had been away from the islands for six years.

He then took a job as counselor at Sheldon Jackson School at Sitka, and after a year and a half became a Bureau of Indian Affairs teacher. He taught for one year at Chignik Lagoon, and one year at a nearby village, Chignik, on the Alaska peninsula near Kodiak. He then was employed as a teacher for the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries at St. George.

During 1960 and 61, Lekanof said upon request he assisted the people in their desires in requesting an airfield and removing the island manager. His attempts to aid his people resulted in the smear, he said.

He then taught in Anchorage and now teaches at Kotzebue.

After six summers of work at the University of Washington, he received his master's degree.

Lekanof said he joined the Bureau of Indian Affairs school system in the hope of being in a position where he could be of greatest service and use to Alaska natives. "The Bureau of Indian Affairs is improving its educational system at a fast pace," he said.

"I do not know what the Bureau of Indian Affairs will think about my making a statement like this but I feel it is my duty to speak out when I can be of benefit to the native people. I have consulted with Dr. Don Dafee, who is a former Alaska Commissioner of Education, and he indicated he could see no reason why I should not give my opinion."

Lekanof had previously not been in communication with Tundra Times. He contacted the office last week after articles began appearing in Alaska daily papers and over radio and TV.

Lekanof said he believed Howard Euneau, as island manager of St. Paul, had "helped in achieving betterment in conditions" and that Pribilof Director Baltzo had also done a lot of good.

"Mr. Baltzo was brought in to make changes and he has made some good ones, but I didn't like his methods in inducing the people from St. George to move to St. Paul.

"The move may have resulted in more efficiency and a saving to the government. It may have resulted in citation to a few and resulting cash awards, but it definitely would make the people of St. George unhappy.

"Their pursuit of happiness was definitely being infringed upon by the government."

Lekanof lauded the Tundra Times as an "excellent medium of communication."

"If it hadn't been for the Tundra Times, the progress of the Pribilof natives would have been delayed perhaps for years," he said.

"It was largely because of articles appearing in Tundra Times that Senator Bartlett was moved to introduce a bill even before the commission went out there.

"The passage of the bill is an important first step in allowing the Pribilovians, who have been held back, to progress," he said.

"I might add I think a provision in the bill allowing the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries to make certain reforms in their own discretion should be removed."

He indicated that if the discretionary clause remained in the bill that conceivably an undue length of time could be consumed in making the reforms. "A timetable needs to be set up," he said.