

Peter McDonald:

“Pen proves mightier than the lance”

ANCSA: An unsacred trust...a series of articles by Paula Schiller exploring threats to Alaska Native lands based on speeches and discussions recored at the 1980 AFN convention. Paula Schiller produces “Chinook”, a program on Native Affairs for KUAC-FM in Fairbanks. The program can be heard on many stations throughout the state.

Part Two: Let's Make a Deal

In the philosophy of Peter McDonald, the pen wielded in Washington, D.C. has proved mightier than the Indian lance. McDonald is chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council and

chairman of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes. CERT is a coalition of 25 southwestern tribes which have energy resources and water rights on their reservations and on land they control. The object of CERT is to keep that control in the hands of the tribes. This is by no means an easy mission. McDonald told the 1980 convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives that there are many people, corporations and even state and federal governments who want what little the Native Americans have left.

Like Willie Hensley who spoke before him, McDonald wished the convention to understand the historical roots of what he termed, the new American Indian wars. The new

struggle is for Native owned resources and it's being fought in congress, in legislatures and in the courts. McDonald doesn't think these battles are being fought any more fairly than those of the 1800's.

The capsule history McDonald outlined starts with Native Americans owning all the land in the United States. They had wars, were relocated and pushed farther back onto land the whites didn't want yet. After a time the whites would discover something on Indian land they wanted and the Indians would be moved again, until they now control less than one percent of the land they once had.

(Continued on Page Four)

● "Pen Proves Mightier than the Lance"

(Continued from Page One)

McDonald's assessment of the situation is blunt. "When the people of the United States thought they had squeezed out everything we had from us, including our land and resources, they sort of left us alone. We had no more sex appeal."

That state of benign neglect lasted until just recently when, McDonald said, "They learned we had some oil and gas, uranium and coal on our reservations." Once again, he said, they began to re-activate the Indian wars. "They feel comfortable that they will win again," McDonald said, "this war is in their forum, in their language and before their judges - not ours."

For the most part, that's what has happened in the lower 48, McDonald thinks the same is going on in Alaska when, "Once upon a time you had over 300 million acres of land - all yours. They didn't pay much attention to you because there really was no sex appeal in all that snow."

They didn't become interested in Alaska until they discovered gold, timber, oil, gas, coal and uranium. "Then all of a sudden they want to make a deal," McDonald said.

The bad news is that when the government makes a deal with Indians, the Native Americans are set-up to lose. In Alaska, McDonald said he understands the "good deal is that they have left you with 25 percent of the land you had and they devised a beautiful scheme by which maybe they'll get that too."

They won't get it by sending the calvary, instead they'll send the briefcase brigade. McDonald said, "They're going to do everything they can by legislative methods or judicial processes to make sure that you don't keep what is rightly yours - what little they have left you with."

"They" is the federal government, although McDonald advises Natives to watch out for big corporations and greedy individuals as well. According to

McDonald, the state governments are also to be regarded as potentially hostile. In New Mexico, he says, "We are always fighting about jurisdiction over who has the right to say who can hunt and fish, who is going to collect taxes and who is going to run the schools."

As to the federal government, McDonald mistrusts its motives. He says it doesn't always act like a faithful trustee because the federal government has a constituency it listens to. Peter McDonald says this constituency is always complaining about money being given to the Indians, about why the federal government lets the Indians control their lands and about using tax dollars to support Native Americans. This is the voice the feds pay attention to.

One of the weapons the government uses is paperwork attached to federal programs. McDonald said, "They send tons of forms, 'in hopes that maybe you will not adhere to the many regulations and guidelines

they send out from Washington." Of course, if the contracting corporations don't follow the rules to the letter, they must pay the penalty.

(For more of the wit and wisdom of Peter McDonald on the subject of paperwork, please see boxed story on this page.)

Another way the federal government drains the corporations is by setting up what McDonald called a "double standard." He says it is ridiculous to give the corporations money, tell them to become self-sufficient and profitable and then expect them to provide the social service the people need out of corporation profits in providing social services when the Chrysler Corporation doesn't have to worry about the welfare of anyone except the stockholders who are constantly asking for dividends every quarter?"

The next question is, "Do you think the federal government will bail you out if one of your corporations goes bankrupt like Chry-

sler?" an unqualified no, McDonald says, "they want to buy it from you at half price."

So, bankruptcy is a danger, everybody is out to relieve the Native population of its natural resources, and you can't even trust your own trustee. Coming from an old political hand like McDonald, that's a bleak warning. He's serious when he says there has never been a time when the threat to survival was greater. He's afraid that if President Carter's energy program is the moral equivalent of war, then it also means a new Native American war for Native control of a large amount of energy resources.

McDonald's advice is to make sure, through education, training and vigilance that Native resources stay under Native control. In the southwest, they have found it necessary to band together in the Council of Energy Resource Tribes and McDonald called on Alaskan Natives to work together in the village and regional corporations and with the Indians of the lower 48 to put up a united front.

McDonald's final caution concerns Native exploitation of Native resources. He asks, "Shall we eat, drink and be merry now? Shall we sell off our assets, strip-mine our coal and partake of the American dream at least once in our history, or, shall we use our bargaining power, now, to purchase for our children and our children's children, a future with dignity, with security and with fulfillment?"

Concluding his speech, McDonald said, "We must ever be mindful of the wisdom of our forefathers who teach that the frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives."