

The Alaska Plan and Natives-

Excluded from Figures are People from Bush

PART III

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Total unemployment in Alaska's work force for the month of March was 15,700 people — 4,400 more than were out of jobs in the month of December.

The Alaska Department of Labor makes the distinction, however, that "work force" includes only those people who are actively participating in or seeking to participate in the state's money economy.

Excluded from the figures or simply not counted are a certain

number of people living in bush Alaska, subsisting by hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Commenting on the outlook for summer, Jim O'Rourke, northern regional manager for the Manpower Center, said, "It is not going to be one of our better years."

It is easy to put the blame on the much delayed trans-Alaska pipeline which attracted many out-of-state workers with the promise of prosperity and jobs and then failed to materialize, leaving them stranded here in the state.

The state's Department of Labor noted that "With the continuing delays in the trans-Alaska pipeline and the higher cost of living in Alaska, many unemployed persons are beginning to leave the area.

No one is less happy with the situation than Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, Inc. whose early projections and data had counted on a much earlier start-up time.

In keeping with Department of the Interior requirements, Alyeska about a year ago sub-

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mitted an overall plan as to how it would implement the concept of "native involvement" in the construction of the pipeline.

Since no permit has been issued, the Department has not ruled on the plan and very few people have seen the final draft, even within the ranks of Alyeska management.

The plan calls for Alyeska to actively participate in training Natives both for construction jobs and for management and supervisory positions. No such training is now ongoing on an organized basis although one Native employee is being trained for an accounting position.

As one spokesman for the company put it, "You can hardly expect the company to invest in an all-out training program for an event which may never come to pass."

He added that the company cannot initiate negotiations with sub-contractors for minority hire plans because "We don't at this time know who the contractors and sub-contractors will be. At one time, we had letters of intent to bid on the project from four firms, but they have long since expired."

"We have shelved the plan (for Native involvement) until the permit is issued."

Pat Mayo, head of the federal Office for Equal Opportunity for the Alaska Region, sympathized with Alyeska's plight.

"Who should undertake this

training?" she asked. "Can we force a private system to train the general public when they have no guarantee of a return on their investment?"

"And if it is not Alyeska's responsibility to undertake this training, whose job is it?" Ms. Mayo pointed out that President Nixon's recent budget cuts hit very hard at precisely these kind of training funds.

"That leaves the state of Alaska," she concluded.

And with the state of Alaska waiting for its share of oil revenues from the pipeline, it is as little likely to plunge into expensive training programs as all other parties.

What, in fact, is being done to prepare for the tremendous numbers of workers that will be required for construction if and when the pipeline goes? What training programs exist and are now functioning? How will minorities enter the picture?

At the present time, there are normal apprentice programs conducted by union and management in the construction trades.

The Seward Skill Center, operated jointly by the Department of Labor, the state's Vocational Rehabilitation program, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, operates what is probably the largest single training program in the state.

The Seward facility serves four to five hundred trainees a year in a dormitory-style en-

vironment. It is designed to upgrade skills among the unemployed, underemployed and disadvantaged peoples of Alaska.

Training is offered in four "occupational clusters," clerical, food service, mechanical, and building maintenance.

The next largest training cen-

ter with a large potential for growth is the new Wildwood Complex at Kenai, under the direction of former AFN president Don Wright.

Local school districts, community colleges, and universities all conduct adult education courses.

Alyeska's own study on the impact of the pipeline now projects a training figure of between 1600 and 3000 Natives, in order to utilize the required quota of Native hire required by the Alaska Plan and the Department of the Interior directive.

Since this training is not now taking place, Alyeska management admitted that if the pipeline were granted tomorrow, training of Alaska Natives would have to take the form of on-the-job training.

It almost precludes the assumption that Alaska Natives are going to be used as semi-skilled workers, for more skilled trades would require that strong, ongoing programs be operational now.

Alyeska was asked directly, "When discussing Native involvement on the pipeline, are you thinking primarily of semi-skilled jobs?"

After a long pause, the answer was, "Yes I would say that."

Tim Wallis, executive with DNH Corporation, a native-owned construction company, commented, "There are two big work forces in the State: one is organized labor, the other is unorganized labor. The majority of Alaska Natives are in the second group."

Nevertheless, Wallis was optimistic that the pipeline would increase job possibilities for Natives.

"By getting a large enough labor force," he said, "you open the door for Natives into the unions. Anybody working on that pipeline is going to be making good wages, whether he's a cook or an accountant."

Wallis said the Tanana Chiefs and Doyon, Ltd. would like to see a big training area in surveying. "This could be utilized very well after the pipeline because we have a lot of surveying to be done on our own lands."

Most of the Native leaders interviewed felt that Alyeska would make every effort to fulfill its obligation to involve the Native population in a significant and meaningful way in the construction period.

"I don't think Alyeska will overlook the local people and bring in outside workers beyond what they need in certain specific fields," said Wallis.

"I think we're looking more at them bringing in their ad-

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ministrative and technical staffs and technical crews. On general labor needs, I think they're going to deal strictly with the unions."

Wallis was also optimistic about the Alaska Plan but emphasized that there were only three enforcement officers in the entire state.

"We are going to have to appropriate more money for enforcement," he warned.

Morris Thompson, Area Director of the BIA, is concerned about the negative impact on Native culture by the pipeline.

"Take someone from the bush," he said, "bring him in to the urban centers, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Valdez, and for four years he makes a high salary. The ones who make it, who acclimatize, who get used to the house, the car, TV, after the boom — where do they find employment at the same level?"

Alyeska's own study reads: "Native Alaskan hires will presumably return to their villages trained in construction trades and converted to a cash economy philosophy and may have problems adjusting."

It speaks hopefully to the new native corporations and the Native Land Claims Settlement to take up the slack in the manpower force.

The trans-Alaska pipeline will undoubtedly change the picture of Native employment. It will have long-reaching effects on the social and economic life of Alaska. With concentrated planning and concern by all parties, it will hopefully "open a door" and not Pandora's box.

DID YOU KNOW ?