

Guest Editorial—

Who Speaks for Indians?

Who speaks for Indians?

There are many throughout the country including some organized Indians groups.

Yet, can anyone, who is familiar with Indian Affairs, deny that it is often a scatter-gun approach and thus is ineffective? True, Indians have many friends including many in mass communications media such as newspapers and radio and television.

They, too often, are not in possession of the facts in complicated situations. So, the absurd generalities of those with their own motives and powerful lobbys prevail at the seats of power.

But, don't underestimate the power of the press. Given the run-around frequently on these affairs the press has a disconcerting habit of digging up the truth. Even a small newspaper which lifts the lid of secrecy and complacency from intolerable situations can get national attention and...action.

A case in point.

The Tundra Times, a free press concentrating on Alaskan Indian and Eskimo news, was recently recognized by a national publication, "The Reporter," as being the moving force behind far reaching changes on Alaska's Pribilof Islands. In an article in the national publication entitled "Emancipation Comes to the Pribilofs" the paper was credited with having spurred two investigations of conditions on these islands in Alaska. The Tundra Times is a weekly tabloid newspaper running approximately eight pages a week.

The paper's editor, Howard Rock, and an associate, Thomas A. Snapp, gathered information for the expose of near slavery conditions of the Pribilofs under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The investigation took two years.

Following its first expose article the paper was subjected to pressure by federal officials. Yet the editors went on with the articles.

As good newsmen should.

The national publication stated: "It was this story that inspired two investigations, with a great flurry of charges, alibis, explanations, apologies, and pledges of good faith for the future and led finally to the passage of a remedial bill sponsored by Senator E.L. Bartlett, Alaska, last October."

The Aleuts of the Pribilof Islands were given a chance for full title to their homesteads, full rights of self-government, and full benefits in retirement.

This was despite the federal agencies balking at giving these people equality and self government. The writer of the national article on the Tundra Times accomplishments said it may seem an exercise in irrelevance to concern ourselves with a handful of islanders who are far off. But, that nothing is too small to be of concern when it involves human rights and freedom.

And . . . we may add, along with our congratulations to a small newspaper staff, no area in which there are abuses of these freedoms is too small to escape attention not so long as there is freedom of the press to bring out these matters.

---NAVAJO TIMES