

Mel Tonasket Once A Rabble-rouser

"I started as a rabble-rouser . . . I was going in kicking, biting and scratching because my people always turned the other cheek."

That's the way Mel Tonasket described how he entered the battle for Indian causes in the State of Washington four years ago. Today he is president of the National Congress of American Indians.

Tonasket appealed for national Indian unity recently before the Tanana Chiefs Conference in Fairbanks. "We have to be one unit to fight for all sovereign rights — big and small — that we have," said the pigtailed Tonas-

ket.

A close eye must be kept on any injustices done to even the smallest of tribes, he said, "to avoid allowing harmful precedents to be set." He said instant communications between Indians is imperative if they are going to be able to help one another.

"In Washington State we have our people murdered, but there are no investigations. . . . We have our belongings stolen and have to buy them back. I hope to God it's not like that up here in Alaska."

The national Indian leader pledged to return this summer to find out what's happening with Indians in this state, to offer his help and to seek support for Indian causes in the southern 48 states. "I hope to stay longer and travel extensively," he said.

Tonasket presented TCC's outgoing president, Mitch Demientieff, with a decorative necklace as a gift from Tonasket's Washington tribe.