

Wah-Shee suspended by his board

By LOIS KEATING

INUVIK, N.W.T.—January 6, 1976, one of the biggest things that has affected the north

recently was the six-weeks-long mail strike, from October 21st to December 3rd. This strike, followed by the Christmas rush, has meant that mail service throughout the country, and especially in the north, has been extraordinarily slow, and it will still be a while until it gets back to normal.

Many people, especially those in the isolated settlements, were unable to order or receive items in time for Christmas. I guess the stores in Inuvik must have had an exceptionally good season, since it was so hard to obtain anything from outside.

Also, many people from the settlements made special trips in to Inuvik for shopping. Mail is still slow, and newspapers and magazines published during the strike period, are still dribbling in each day.

C.O.P.E. (Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement) is now publishing a magazine called "Inuvialuit". The first issue came out in October, and the second issue, delayed by the postal strike, is due to arrive any day now, while the third issue is almost ready to go to press.

An item of major importance is that at the beginning of

November, James Wah-Shee was suspended by the board of directors as president of the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories.

All of his powers (and the office keys) were taken away from him, and the directors said that the specific reasons for his suspension would be made available at the Brotherhood Assembly to be held the first week of December.

Tension mounted throughout the area during the month following the suspension, with various people taking stands pro and con. At the Assembly, which was held at Fort Rae, Wah-Shee's home area, the directors gave reasons, personal and political, as to why they felt Wah-Shee should be removed permanently from office.

In contrast, many people also spoke in his behalf, especially most of the older chiefs. However, toward the end of the week, Wah-Shee submitted his resignation. The delegates voted, and the resignation was accepted 26-17.

This means that for the time being the Brotherhood is without a leader as, according to the constitution, a new president cannot be elected until the next assembly, which is scheduled for May. Until that time the Brotherhood will be controlled by the Board, with the Yellowknife office under the direction of vice-president Richard Nerysoo.

Feelings are still running very strong, and many of the people hope to be able to get Wah-Shee back in again in May. In the meantime, the Brotherhood membership is very much split,

at a crucial time in the land claims proceedings.

Such a split could not have come at a more unopportune time for the people, who have long spoken of unity and the importance of speaking with one voice.

In late October ITC (Inuit Tapirisat) held a land claims meeting at Pond Inlet in the eastern arctic. Three delegates from each Inuit community were asked to attend. The ITC land claims proposal is now being revised and will be presented to the government and made public on February 5th.

In late October, Edith Kaye, wife of former long-time chief Johnny Kaye of Fort McPherson, passed away. And in mid-November, another old-time, Amos Tumma of Inuvik passed away. Amos was born in Alaska and was well known to many people in the Point Barrow and Kaktovik area.

That same week, a tragedy occurred in Tuktoyaktuk, when Richard Rufus, 20-year-old son of Peter and Agnes Rufus, became lost on a hunting expedition. A period of high winds and storms hampered the search, and it was almost a week before his frozen body was found a short distance from his skidoo, 30 miles from Tuk.

The ice roads on the river channels were opened up before Christmas this year, and people have been constantly going back and forth between Aklavik, Tuk and Inuvik. Also, there is now a regular bus service on the Dempster Highway from Inuvik to Arctic Red River and Fort McPherson.

The Tuk people and Sachs Harbour people have gotten a lot of caribou this year—and also those across the mountains in Old Crow—but so far Aklavik and Fort McPherson are short of meat, although they have plenty of fish.

On December 30th Rev. Doug Ditttrich and his wife Jean and their three daughters left Inuvik after 7 1/2 years to go to Kamloops, B.C., where Doug will again be actively involved in parish ministry.

Over the past two year, he has been on a leave of absence to work as Northern Games Coordinator and to do other community work in Inuvik. He was especially involved in the planning of the new Friendship Center, which hopefully will be completed late this year. Doug has worked with Northern Games since its beginning in 1970, and is known to many Alaskans.

The days are beginning to lengthen, and today marks the return of the sun to the Inuvik area.