

Editorial—

The Rumor Mill - A Cruel Weapon

Justice Arthur J. Goldberg removed himself from the developing chief counsel status of the Alaska Federation of Natives last Tuesday without really having tried his legal skills on behalf of the native land claims and its course through congressional legislation. Many people, including many natives, have set their sights to watch what the venerable citizens would have done with the background of his great achievements behind him. Many thought that this rich backlog of experience would have stood him in good stead as he worked for the long-awaited settlement of the native land claims.

Justice Goldberg made it plain at the outset to the members of the AFN in Anchorage, that he would not have any part of the assignment if there was dissension

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among the regional members of the statewide organization.

But dissension there had been but this, at least not all of it, cannot be blamed solely on the native regional members of the AFN. Coupled with the inability of some of the regional native leadership to speak up for themselves instead of doing too much listening, and taking what they've heard as facts most likely, the attorneys, it strongly seems, have been the movers of the breakdown of the AFN-Goldberg relationship. Attorneys are fine in contributing their technical knowhow toward policy decisions by the officers of organizations, but if they might actively work for policy decisions in their favor, then they are actually doing a disservice to the groups they are supposed to be working for.

At any rate, there has been a furious rash of rumors in recent days and weeks concerning situations in the AFN-Goldberg, Goldberg retainer fee and the land claims situation. Many rumors were wild and groundless. They were blown out of proportion. There were halftruths. Some rumors were downright silly. Gullibility seemed to have reigned supreme without some effort to get to the bottom of the hearsays from those directly concerned.

Who started them? This might be a good question for which concrete answers might be sought. Why were they started? A good answer to this would also suffice. Was it so wrong for the authorized AFN steering committee to meet privately with Goldberg during which policies might have been formulated and to be presented for approval before a more representative gathering of those people concerned with the land claims? Was it too soon to holler, "FOUL," when this took place? Were dissensions among the organizations meant to be developed? Are some of our native leaders being used to gain this end?

We would like to know the answers to these so the muddied water can be cleared for renewed efforts toward solving the deeply serious work at hand—the justifiable and fair settlement of the native land claims. We hope that an impasse has not developed out of the AFN-Goldberg breakdown. It came at a very awkward moment for the native people of Alaska who can stand to be the real losers.

A brave, new repair job is now needed and cooler heads must prevail. It must be done soon. During this process, a second look should be made at some or all of the attorneys who represent regional native organizations.

If the native effort should be stymied by the AFN-Goldberg situation, there could be legislation on the claims that will be ramrodded through Congress with less ear to what the native people might want in the final solution. This could be disastrous in the future efforts of our people.

A brave, new repair job is now urgently needed and cooler heads must prevail. This should, and must, be done soon. During this process, a second look might be made at some of the attorneys who represent regional native organizations.