

# Native employees discuss discrimination

By MARTHA UPICKSOUN

It was earlier reported in the Tundra Times that two Native men, Frank Pagano and Frank Peratrovich, have filed discrimination suits against the Federal Aviation Administration. The initial facts and figures were hard statistics, and they were discouraging.

And yet some FAA employees still insist that Natives could not expect a 'free hand-out' - that they deserve whatever happens

to them.

Since statistics obtained from the agency and interviews with management have left some unconvinced that the FAA might well have a discrimination problem, perhaps a story about people directly involved in the class action discrimination suit (filed in the fall of 1979) can personalize the numbers, columns, job title codes and Natives who work for the FAA.

The unravelling of the story be-

gins with a statement made by George Woodbury, and FAA personnel officer. "There is a kind of feeling that exists on the part of the Native, a feeling of inferiority, and (there is a feeling of) superiority on the part of the white man."

Bob Faith, FAA's Alaskan Region director replies: "That's a good point, when you say 'Inferiority.' Now, I've only been in Alaska a very short time, but I've been out in the bush coun-

try... I don't know how they happen to get inferior, but you know the eye contact and the hanging of the head, and, I didn't realize it when I came up here, but I am just now beginning to realize that it is a Native trait."

"And so it doesn't bother me anymore, but darn it, it DID bother me. But that wouldn't have anything to do with discriminating against them... I read (about 'Native traits') in a book, and that's when I changed my attitude."

Pagano, an Aleut, adds a new dimension to the story. His recollections of his boyhood are short, but vivid. Collectively, its simplicity is more powerful than 100 pages of a textbook. "I was raised in a mission and then in Eklutna School, which was a Bureau of Indians Affairs school. Whenever you were scolded for something that you were supposed to have done wrong, you were always told: 'Don't look at me, look at the floor.' It took me years to get over this."

Interviews with other Native FAA employees have further personalized the subject of discrimination. Individual Natives have either supported or criticized the FAA. But most would agree with Pagano when he explains that "there are a lot of good people with the agency. I'm not attacking them." Instead, he and others are concerned about discrimination in terms of recruitment, employment, training and mobility.

A rural Eskimo building maintenance man related: I am happy with the job I got. There's no problem with me. They respect

me ever if I'm Native...I used to drink a lot-being a Native I guess. I stopped drinking, and now people respect me. If I didn't like my job I wouldn't be working for 'em."

An Eskimo aircraft mechanic said: "As far as I am concerned, it (the discrimination charge) is true. Nobody has enough guts to stand out and say it. People I have known and who work for the FAA, even the black people, they have the same problem. Where I work they hear about Fourth Avenue, and they relate me with all that." We Natives always has to fight, and hang in there and take all that crap, and keep working at it. I've always had to fight to get anywhere."

Another Eskimo maintenance mechanic stated: "I've been treated good at the stations I've been working at. There are two other Natives where I work. I thought there wouldn't be any."

Frank Haldane is an Indian who is also a team supervisor. He filed a complaint of discrimination after he said he was passed up for promotions for at least five years. Of his case he declared: "So long as I didn't push the issue, I'm an 'all right guy.' After trying five - seven years for a promotion, and you keep getting bypassed, you get a bad self-image."

The investigation of Haldane's complaint uncovered procedural errors, which resulted in a priority promotion preference. No one admitted that discrimination might have been a factor, but he still wonders why he-a man ranked high in bidding scales, was not earlier promoted.

An Indian electronics technician states: "I think discrimination is going to always be there. You can't knock off something that has been going on for years and years...I have yet to meet a Native supervisor."

He spoke of personal changes

(Continued on page 12)

## ● 'Over fifty percent who have left FAA have been discriminated against'

(Continued from page 8)

he made since hired by the FAA, "I used to be able to sit back and take it all in. Not anymore. If you don't stick-up for yourself, nobody else is going to do it. I had to prove myself, and because I was an Alaska Native I had to fight a lot harder. I feel Pagano is doing the right thing. It (discrimination) has got to be exposed."

A Native employee in the Air Traffic division spoke on a different note. After reading the TT series, he said. "I guess I've been pretty ignorant about all of it. People have talked about it, but I didn't see it, or I don't want to, maybe."

David Hawk, a Native Equal Employment Opportunity recruiter, says, "there has been discrimination, but not everyone has been discriminated against. I'd say over 50 percent of those who have left (the agency) have been discriminated against."

Hawk suggests that "some managers need to be replaced. Attitudes towards Natives have to change. They (FAA personnel) have to take into consideration Alaska Native backgrounds."

A clerk typist asks: "How do you go about thinking that you're being discriminated against because you are a Native?" Her job performance is rated as 'satisfactory', but she has yet to receive a promotion--even though one had been promised. She adds "I've asked him (the supervisor) for training, and my name is only put down. He

has passed me up before...I see others being pushed up the ladder...A lot of times they ask me to run errands and to thing that are kind-of menial." This woman is active and respected in the Native community. But her work environment is a distinctively different world. She senses the hostility of others, and misses the encouragement others in similar positions receive.

The FAA Alaska Region does not seem to be following the spirit of the law when it demands specifics from Pagano, who verbally and in writing, testifies that he has provided them with the specifics. The spirit of the law -- in this case, equal employment opportunities--is ignored by those who wish to cover-up allegations of discrimination. It is suppressed when Native employees, who until recently, rarely and quietly complained, are ignored in favor of glossy affirmative action plans and smooth waters.

While the agency's Fiscal Year 1979 Equal Employment Opportunity Plan states that "it is the policy of the Department of Transportation/FAA that even the appearance of discrimination because of race...must be avoided," the FAA management team has inadvertently acknowledged

that discrimination existed in the past within the Alaska region.

Pagano and Peratrovich, who have been joined by other

Alaska Natives, go one step further and argue that discrimination exists today.

Pagano argues that "we at the FAA know what our problems

are, and we are not admitting to them because they lead back to discrimination and prejudices.

Because of our discriminatory practices, we are not effective."