

# DRINKING-RELATED PROBLEMS

By RALPH AMOUAK

I have worked in the field of alcoholism for the past several years, and have an understanding of the drinking-related problems that are prevalent among the Alaskan Natives. The drinking problem is not a new problem, it is one that has been among us since the time that the Russians first came to Alaska.

I feel that it is time that someone began to realize that alcoholism (drinking problems) among our people is getting to a point that is now really getting out of hand. It is time that our people begin to see that these problems are beginning to be embarrassing, not only to our leaders, but to the Native world. There has been a lot of information in the newspapers about the upcoming money that the Alaska Natives will receive individually.

Being recognized as a person working in the field of alcoholism, I have had many people come and talk about their concern about how this money is going to be spent. Some people are saying that this money will be going to the individual and that most of it will be spent on one good drunk. Some have stated that they would like to be in the alcohol business, so that they could get their share of the money that is coming to the Alaskan Natives.

As an Alaskan Native, I am concerned about the fact that many people are seeing that, once again, the Alaskan Native is another drunk. I think that it is time that those attitudes are changed. Attitudes can not be changed unless the Alaska Native people change their attitude about their own drinking.

It has been noted, officially, and unofficially, that alcoholism, or drinking related problems is the number one problem among the Alaskan Native. To date, I think that it is the programs related to the field of alcoholism that have been trying to do something about the drinking related problems among our people. It is now our turn to really take a look at what is happening with the drinking among the Alaska Native. Whenever there is a convention or a meeting of statewide people or even regional people a way to relax after a meeting is to go to the local bar. Alcohol is used as a tool for manipulating each other in the meeting setting. Alcohol use adds to the problem and many times, perpetuates drinking behavior.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act has brought into focus, frustrations that are being created by the mis-transitional period for the Alaska Natives. Alcohol is being used by our people as a means of relaxation and as a means of escape. I think that to talk about a problem, one should realize that there are some solutions to those problems.

One solution would be to have in articles or by-laws of the Native Organizations, a statement concerning board members' use of alcohol during scheduled meetings. It becomes a concern of all of the people when one who represents us in business concerning the Alaska Natives, when those individuals are in a state of intoxication. One who is drinking does not make rational decisions.

Another solution could be to ask our regional people to buy alcohol testing devices which would be used by all board members to measure the state of intoxication that they are in. If they reach a certain alcohol level which would determine the capacity of drunkenness, they could be asked not to attend the meeting for that day. Should they miss a number of days at the meeting, then they should be asked to be replaced on their board.

Another solution would be to have a Sergeant-at-Arms that does not drink to see that the meeting is kept in order.

The Alaska Natives are now coming into focus more and more than they have ever been in the past, I think that we can be proud of the way that the Alaska Natives have handled the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement from the beginning. Many of the non-Natives have responded in saying that they are happy with the way that the settlement has been handled. It is not like what has happened in the lower 48 among the Indians.

As an Alaskan Native, I am proud to say that I too am happy that there have not been demonstrations, militancy, or any embarrassing actions that have caused any problems in the settling of the claims.

With the implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, we are becoming a group of people with a lot of money. Also it is a concern of all, to see that the problems of drinking, which has plagued many races, does not happen in the case of the Alaska Native. We have thus far, handled the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in a way that has the respect, not only from Alaskans, but from the people from the "lower 48."

We have found a way to take care of our financial problems. Now I think that we should find a way to make sure that those financial problems are taken care of and that the money that is coming to the people is not spent in creating more problems than ever before.