

Writer Criticizes AFN Constitution

Dear Editor:

Now that we see the Interior Department proposed bill, a pattern becomes clear and it is one that should make us pause to consider just what is taking place and who is influencing whom.

In the hastily assembled convention at Anchorage, the group voted a constitution and by-laws which emphasized the small village concept. Earlier, the State had made a proposal that villages be given outright deed to a portion of land surrounding them. Now the very same embodiment is found in the Interior Department draft of the Congressional bill. Has someone somewhere made a commitment that they will try to get the Alaska native to accept this? Why does this current of idea run through all the various plans? By no stretch of the imagination can the Arctic Slope villages exist on an area of 50,000 acres. From actual experience, it takes at least 1,000,000 acres to sustain in good shape 1700 reindeer. And Barrow alone consumes over 4000 caribou annually and they are somewhat larger than the reindeer. In 25 years, the need will almost double.

The associations who lent strength to the villages by combining ethnically similar groups were a step forward in the power inherent in the native vote. These associations were instrumental in creating the interest in a statewide native conference. Without the concerted drive of the people behind the associations this would never have come to pass a year ago in September. The intent at this time was to form a federation of associations; not to delve into the area of the individual association operations, but to give weight and strength to the overall voice of the native peoples by applying statewide political pressure.

Yet on studying the constitution and by-laws, we see emerging from the cocoon of incubation an entirely different type of organization than which was originally planned. It, in effect, becomes another competing association by the very wording of its constitution and by-laws, committed to compete in the statewide area against the associations already formed and who have carried the burden so far, for the support of individuals and villages. Nowhere in the format of the new association is recognition given to the existing associations who gave birth to the idea of this, what was supposed to be a federation of associations. That those villages who in the meeting last September were not then formed into associations, was taken into consideration. They could either, (a) band together or, (b) join an existing association.

How, may I ask, will an independent village of 300 receive equal representation under the present constitution, with an association that numbers some four and a half thousand members?

To recreate what was in the original motion calling for a statewide organization, the board of governors will have to do immediate, radical and definite surgery on the constitution and by-laws so that it at least bears some resemblance to the intended original creation. To return to village concept is to play the game in weakness and on the terms the State and the Federal government want. Under the State and Interior Department bill, we wind up with LESS than we actually have at present. We MUST NOT play into that trap.

We have our vehicle for statewide native action; we must not abandon it, but we must be prepared to alter it to conform to the original blueprint so it will be effective and a representation of the organized power of our people.

Yours truly,
Afbayok