

# **Non-profit Corps**

When the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was passed in 1971, many people thought Alaska Natives became millionaires overnight. They seemed to feel that with a generous settlement of aboriginal claims, Native people could shed poverty and cultural oppression as easily as we in the North shed our parkas in a warm room.

Let us state simply that these people were a little too optimistic.

Native people, living in more than 200 rural Alaskan communities, are not wealthy. The incredible responsibility of organizing to carry out the administrative mandates of the land claims act, added to the need for vigilance against those individuals and interests still at work to sabotage the intent of the act, have added to the physical and emotional pressure on Alaska Natives as they attempt to preserve some semblance of a rural Native culture.

This struggle has created new difficulties for Alaska Natives which cannot be solved by profit corporations. These new difficulties compound the old problems of poor health, alcoholism, identity confusion and trying to subsist in a harsh land.

If profit corporations cannot address these problems, help is still available. Many profit Native corporations are the children of the older non-profit associations across the state which formed to press Congress, or anyone who would listen, for a just settlement of aboriginal Native land claims in Alaska. These non-profit associations were the training ground for many of today's Native business leaders.

In the rush to develop new financial and natural resources, these non-profit associations have been a bit neglected. They are still there, attempting to meet the needs of Alaska Natives that all the money in the world could not solve. Needs that can only be solved with a little compassion and a very special identity with the problems of preserving a Native lifestyle under constant attack by many forces.

—J.R.R.