

The Ousting of AFN President Don Wright

The ousting of Donald R. Wright as president of the Alaska Federation of Natives by the board members of the AFN, Inc., is not a real surprise to some but it is a real jolter to others. Such an eventuality has been expected for some time as rumors of mismanagement and misappropriations of funds within the organization persisted.

With the signing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act on December 18, 1971 by President Richard Nixon, the effectiveness of the AFN as a decision-making force ended. Some of us deplored this eventuality because we had known and respected the great effort the organization expended toward the settlement of Native land claims fairly and equitably. When this particular history is written, that part of the action of the AFN will be a bright one for Alaska's Native people. It was a superb effort and an historic one.

Even as this was happening, there was also some evidences that something was amiss within the inner workings of the AFN. This was disturbing, to say the least, because the Native people needed a good image of their statewide organization. This desire of the people should have been a moving force in itself to maintain a good organizational setup. Those people who are taking up the reins of the organization should keep this in mind — definitely.

Don Wright more than met the challenge of the difficult and complex fight for the settlement of the land claims. His influence was unmistakable, even to the level of the White House. On this end of his work, he was relentless in seeking a fair resolution to the land problem. His utterances regarding this matter were convincing and usually right. His superb lobbying abilities were reflected among other Native leaders.

Don Wright also had some faults. He tended to be extravagant in dispensing of funds. He tended to be arbitrary in decision-making, which meant that he did not adequately consult his board of directors. We feel that the board should always be consulted on any important decision.

It is not pleasant that Don Wright has been divested of his duties as president of the AFN but we also feel that it was a necessary action by the board. The action will clear the way for a newly aimed central group that must involve each and every regional organization, or corporation. It must be given enough teeth to command respect of each group. It should have the financial backing of each regional corporation just enough to make it operate efficiently but not extravagantly.

This one will take first rate powers of thinking and thinkers had better go into it right away.