

ICAS charges BIA grabs tribal duties

By Linda Lord-Jenkins
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Leaders of the Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope have charged that the Bureau of Indian Affairs is taking control of tribal organization services in violation of the Indian Self Determination Act and has refused to allow ICAS to handle social services in the North Slope area for 1983.

ICAS, long troubled by financial woes and turbulent leadership, recently sent letters asking for help to regain con-

trol over the federal "PL93-638" social service contracting authority.

The authority for the "638 contracts" was handed over to the BIA for "60 to 90 days" by ICAS on Jan. 21, 1983 but, according to James Savok, former executive director of ICAS, the BIA has refused to return the contract to ICAS or to help ICAS solve internal financial troubles that would allow it to regain the contracts.

ICAS has been having finan-

cial troubles for more than a year ago and those problems were credited with being part of the reason for the early 1983 election which totally replaced the ICAS board of directors, dubbed "The Red Guard" in some circles, with an older and more respected group of directors.

That board, faced with debts now estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, on Jan. 21, 1983, passed Resolution 83-17 which allowed ICAS to enter into an

agreement providing for a "temporary retrocession of 638 Contract" for 60 to 90 days but that the contract would revert to ICAS after that time unless a further written agreement between ICAS and the BIA is executed.

The resolution also asked the BIA to provide "desperately needed technical assistance" to help ICAS remedy alleged Fiscal Year 1982 deficiencies. The technical assistance should include visits and advice from
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'BIA won't help us': ICAS

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the BIA contracting officer and the Juneau Area Finance Officer, it said.

The resolution also asked that the BIA provide for employment of current ICAS staff at their present salary. An addendum to the resolution also provided that the agreement only take effect when the BIA established an office based in Barrow to provide the needed services.

According to Savok, who left a 13-year stint with the BIA in Fairbanks to take over as the ICAS executive director, the BIA never helped ICAS in any manner despite repeated requests and has recently demanded that ICAS provide numerous stacks of information to explain the 1982 expenditures without providing the help needed to figure out the 1982 books.

The accounting of 1982 expenditures is necessary, according to the BIA, before it will allow the ICAS to handle any more federal money.

Savok says that the 1982 books will be nearly impossible to figure out to the BIA's satisfaction without the technical assistance requested.

Prior to his starting with ICAS and during his tenure there Savok and other ICAS employees met repeatedly with BIA financial officers but he says that the BIA keeps changing its requirements in the middle of the stream.

Despite all the information provided the BIA, it has retained the 638 contract, says Savok, and shows signs of keeping it much longer than a few months.

"The BIA will claim that they need to do an "audit" of ICAS revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 1982, and earlier years (before the new comptroller and I took over the management of ICAS) as the reason they refuse to return the 638 contract to ICAS. Again, the real fact is they want to hire more bureaucrats in the Fairbanks agency," says Savok's open letter.

"One effect of the BIA's decision to keep the 638 contract rather than continue to contract with ICAS could be to force ICAS to close its doors. If this happens, local Inupiat people will lose control and have no say in the quality and quantity of services they will receive."

In an open letter to the people of the Arctic Slope, Savok said that "ICAS was forced and did not willingly agree to retrocede its 638 contract to the BIA. We only agreed to a temporary retrocession because the IBA promised us technical assistance in overcoming our earlier financial difficulties and further promised to provide services to the Inupiat people."

Savok says that the ICAS has kept its financial nose "clean" in 1983 and has not spent more than it has or should spend. But, he says that he must contend with 1982 problems.

Doing that will be very difficult, he says. Many of the reasons for that are bad feel-

ings on the part of many former employees.

Savok says he had to fire some ICAS employees and many of them have answers to the BIA questions. He is certain that they would be unwilling to help out. He also says that the ICAS headquarters in Browerville has been broken into and had important financial papers stolen on several occasions this past year.

"They (BIA) have asked us to do the impossible. They set arbitrary deadlines to have the 1982 problems identified and resolved, all without technical assistance. There is no way in hell that we can establish a paper trail . . . without the people on staff who were responsible for the money there is no way to find out what happened to it."

This leaves the North Slope area without a tribal entity

providing social services to the Inupiat people, a bad state of affairs according to Arnold Brower Sr., one of the ICAS board members.

Although the ICAS memo required that the IBA establish a Barrow office, all North Slope services are being handled out of the Fairbanks BIA service office.

Savok says that will result in much harm to the people of the North Slope who will have to make long distance calls to obtain services or, more likely, will go without them.

And the ICAS is, for a time being, without an executive director or staff.

"What I am worried about is the precedent this sets," says Savok. "If they can just come in and take over the weak tribal governments it won't be too long before they start doing it to more and more."