

When no one's listening?

Dear Editor:

Your March 18, 1981 edition included an article by a Jerry Gilliland, a former employee of the Interior Department, entitled: "To Natives, Some Parting Words of Advice" (My Turn Section, Page Three). He expressed an interest in the federal government's latest policy manifestation—that of including us in the "free enterprise system" via our Native corporations. He was well-meaning, if not slightly paternalistic, reminding us of what we already know: Life is tough, especially if you have to cajole the government into returning what belonged to the Natives of Alaska in the first place, the land. So, he told us, "demand, push, and scream and raise hell" or our land will be "taken back." Talk about omens of 'Indian Giving.'

Aside from his Six Commandments, there is something else the Natives of Alaska should know about, and that is the attitude expressed by one of Mr. Gilliland's former comrades. Like him, Cynthia Wilson (of

who knows where—you know these government people, they are always traveling) was also one of the special assistants to Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus. Cynthia was kind enough to serve as a guest speaker at a Yale University-sponsored symposium on the "Alaska Land Bill" held in late February in New Haven, Connecticut. Luckily or unluckily for me, it is hard to tell. I attended (along with dozens of environmentally minded students who called themselves Alaskans because they visited Alaska for one summer or perhaps two).

Perhaps because Cynthia thought no one was in the audience to contradict her, or perhaps because she just wasn't thinking, she mentioned that Native corporate lands could hold the outhouses and tourist information centers that the federal government would be loathe or incapable of providing on their recently designated park, preserve and refuge lands.

Gee, Cynthia Wilson, we thank you for the advice. And

remember, Natives are in the funniest places and it is too bad we have to listen to people like you talk about things that apparently don't mean much to you but a lot to us. And perhaps you should read the recent lands bill, since you mentioned that you had yet to read it. Maybe you could learn something.

It is too bad Natives have to suffer the effects of a 'White Problem'—exemplified by Mr. Gilliland's well-intentioned, somewhat harmless advice that smelled suspiciously of "Do This, My Children"; and further exemplified for Cynthia Wilson's outhouse comments. Then again, coming from former employers of the Interior Department, the arm of the federal government charged with looking after Native Americans' best interests, these attitudes don't surprise me. After all, life is tough.

Martha Upicksoun
Milford, Connecticut