

Massive Training Program Needed

The other day we happened to encounter some of the men from the lower forty-eight who have come north to work on the pipeline. We must admit most of them impressed us negatively.

They were dissatisfied with this and dissatisfied with that. They were barking orders left and right. And it appeared they were irked with almost everything. They were so obnoxious, it was quite pathetic. And we couldn't help but wonder if they were so unhappy in Fairbanks, what would these specimen be like when they get to a remote pipeline construction camp? What would they be like when things really got rough, when, for instance, it is dark almost around the clock and the temperature is 50 below.

If these men coming north were highly skilled and persons with these skills were not available locally, that would be one thing. But most of those with whom we talked had very little training and skill; they were expecting to get such on the job.

We could be wrong but it appears to us that there is going to be an awfully lot of those workers that are being poured on northbound planes that are going to be coming southbound before too long. They just don't have the stick-to-it-ness and perseverance that is required.

All this causes us to ponder. In the past three or four years of delay, waiting for the pipeline permit, has Alaska done what it should in preparing for it?

The pipeline means jobs, thousands of them, and heaven knows that our unemployment rate is one of the highest, if not the highest, in the nation. The rates that are put out are deceptive in that they refer chiefly to those drawing unemployment. Most of the small communities and villages in Alaska where the unemployment rates are unconcionable, 70, 80, or 90 per cent, these are automatically excluded from the figures on which the unemployment rates are based.

While it is true that there has been much work on an Alaskan plan for minority hire and it appears that Alyeska and its contractors are making an ernstwhile attempt to comply with that plan, it is also true that they are not finding the job easy. The reason: they are finding it difficult to find Alaska minorities that have the specific skills that are needed. Those minorities that are being hired are mostly for jobs requiring little skill or for common labor.

As long ago as four years ago, we knew that during the first year of pipeline construction, the following would be the approximate need: 170 management, 104 foremen, 395 welders, 300 operators, 175 mechanics, 42 master mechanics, 42 powdermen, 95 truck drivers, 535 welder helpers, 32 stabbers, 32 spacers, 530 swampers, 340 mechanic helpers, 340 oilers, 340 miscellaneous skilled labor, 815 miscellaneous common labor, 365 cooks and bull cooks, 70 medical and security, and 105 mechanical and electrical.

And yet, it appears to us, while we knew these jobs would be available there have been pitifully little training of Alaskans for these opportunities. And it is not that such is impossible. We remember that about 1969, Burgess Construction Co. put on a quality school to train mechanic helpers. Burgess had some of its top personnel to be the instructors. A group of about 10 village men were thoroughly grounded in all phases of heavy equip-

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ment maintenance and repair. After they were graduated, they had no trouble finding jobs. And even today, five years later, they are employed and doing well.

These men and their families are stable members of their communities, they are a tremendous asset. It is hard to understand why — in light of the apparent success — we did not have many more village men undergoing similar training.

We think it is safe to say that the present boom will last more than three or four years. There is bound to be other pipelines and feeder lines, other road construction, and so on. And while we have procrastinated, it is not too late to do that that we should have been doing all along: provide a massive program for training Alaskans for Alaska type jobs. Expenditures for such a program would pay dividends beyond our wildest expectations.

— T.A.S.