

Letter to Gov. About Hyدابurg Cannery

(Editor's Note: Robert Mandell, a VISTA Volunteer, wrote to Governor William A. Egan about the closure of the village of Hyدابurg's fish cannery by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In his letter to the editor, Mandell wrote in part: "I am enclosing a letter which I wrote to the Governor. This letter concerns more than the Southeast Alaska region. It deals with the democratic process which has been denied the people of Hyدابurg two years in a row.

"This year again, we are asking for a fair and impartial hearing. We need the support of Alaskans so that the democratic process will not be denied the few, simply because they are the few.

"... Alaskans brag that they help each other out. The small, powerless village of Hyدابurg needs legal counsel, a fair and impartial hearing, and your letters. At the present time we have none of these things. I hope you will help us out.")

Box 173
Hyدابurg, Alaska
January 22, 1966

Dear Governor Egan:

My name is Robert Mandell, and I am a VISTA Volunteer. I am presently stationed in Hyدابurg. In the speech you gave at our December 10 graduation, you said, "If you did no more than articulate the special, pressing needs of these villages, you would be performing a great service. But with your you will be able to do much more. In no other situation would you have such an opportunity to use your own judgment and implement ideas. It should be kept in mind the villages in which you will serve have asked for you. And always remember that the fine Alaskans with whom you will be working are able, intelligent citizens."

Dear Governor Egan, I find that I must do more than articulate the needs of the people of Hyدابurg; I find that I must defend their rights as human beings, and as citizens of the United States of America.

Since my arrival in Hyدابurg, the people have been wondering whether or not their fish cannery would operate this season. They told me that their cannery did not operate last year because the Bureau of Indian Affairs closed it down. The BIA said that it was not practical to operate the canneries at both Hyدابurg and Klawock. Since the BIA owns and operates both canneries, they chose Klawock over Hyدابurg because their cannery could be operated at a lower cost.

This year the BIA officials came to Hyدابurg. I was fortunate enough to be at the town meeting and hear their arguments. The officials said that they do not have enough funds to operate both the canneries at Klawock and Hyدابurg. They then proceeded to tell the people of Hyدابurg that their cannery would not operate. The following is a brief description of what occurred at this year's meeting.

First I would like to tell you about Robert Sanderson. Mr. Sanderson was an honor student in high school and college. He could have, and still can get an excellent job away from his village. But Robert Sanderson has dedicated his life to his people, and has remained in Hyدابurg as acting City Clerk. In short, Robert Sanderson is one of those "able, intelligent citizens" you mentioned in your speech to us.

Mr. Sanderson acted as the chief defense for Hyدابurg. Following is a brief description of the arguments that were presented for and against the operation of the Hyدابurg cannery.

The BIA officials stated that:

1. There are not enough funds available to operate both canneries.
2. It is more economical to operate Klawock's cannery because
 - a. It is better equipped.
 - b. It needs less repair.

Robert Sanderson brought out these facts:

1. The cannery at Hyدابurg is more modern.
 - a. It was built at least 30 years after the Klawock cannery and so it needs less repair and is more modern.
2. The cannery at Hyدابurg has deep enough waters to allow large ships to load right at the cannery—in Klawock smaller boats must take fish from the cannery out to the large freighters which cannot come right next to Klawock's cannery because the waters are not deep enough.
3. Mr. Sanderson asked why \$50,000 in capital improvements was needed last season for Klawock's cannery if it is in such fine shape. No direct answer to the question.
4. Mr. Sanderson asked how much cheaper it was and is to operate Klawock's cannery over Hyدابurg's.
—Answer: We don't know exactly but they in Washington know.
5. Mr. Sanderson asked, if Klawock's cannery last season was in such fine condition and was so well equipped, why was machinery, bedding, etc., moved from Hyدابurg's cannery to Klawock's.
Answer: No reply.
6. Mr. Sanderson asked, if the \$50,000 that was invested in Klawock's cannery was invested in the Hyدابurg cannery, would it have run as economically? Answer: No direct reply.

Governor Egan, I could go on and on, but I shall summarize at this point. The fact is that Hyدابurg has a more modern, newer cannery. The fact is that large ships can enter our port and not Klawock's. This cuts down on the cost of shipping. The fact is that five key officials from the BIA COULD NOT answer the following question put to them by Robert Sanderson:

"In what part of the operation does Klawock save money over us? Is it in shipping costs, labor, repairs? What is the exact savings?"

The BIA now argues that our boiler needs replacement. This will cost about \$25,000. If the \$50,000 had been put into Hyدابurg's cannery instead of Klawock's last season, the Hyدابurg cannery would now have a new boiler, a still newer cannery by at LEAST 30 years, and a port where large ships can dock.

Governor Egan, there were other arguments stated at the meeting which were intelligently refuted by Robert Sanderson with FACTS and FIGURES. The officials, all of whom are supposed experts in their fields, did not recite any concise figures that would indicate EXACTLY why an operation at Klawock is cheaper to run than one at Hyدابurg; yet five important men flew down from Juneau merely to state that Hyدابurg will not operate.

If the cannery does not operate this year, there will be many people out of work. Women and high school children need the money from the cannery to support their families, and to return to school. In the past, an agreement was set up that stated, "Klawock and Hyدابurg will operate alternate years." Last year it was Hyدابurg's turn to operate—they did not. Again this year the BIA has informed Hyدابurg that it will not operate.

Governor Egan, as a VISTA Volunteer the Federal Government in so choosing me, said in effect, "You have a certain degree of intelligence and the ability to serve your country." In my judgment as a VISTA Volunteer the meeting held in Hyدابurg with the BIA officials was far less than the American way of democracy and freedom. The people of Hyدابurg have a right as American citizens and as citizens of Alaska to fair and impartial hearing.

Alaska has the honor of having the only Haida village in the United States. This village will soon be destroyed if the words fair play and democracy are not put into effect in Hyدابurg.

I ask that you use your powers as Governor to investigate this urgent matter. I ask that you investigate this matter so that 250 townspeople and one VISTA Volunteer will have their shaken faith of the democratic process restored into the rock bed of all that America should and does stand for.

Respectfully,

/s/ Robert B. Mandell
Robert B. Mandell
VISTA Volunteer