

Opinion: Blatchford speaks

When the land claims was enacted, I knew our people had lost the one thing we had in common: our respect for one another in regards to sharing our natural resources of the land.

In a wink of an eye, our people were transformed from people of generosity, to people of selfishness.

I have seen families split, and weakened from the greed which has been placed upon our shoulders—namely my own family.

I have seen good, honest men fail when the temptation of power and corruption weighed heavily on their minds.

I have seen families split because of new urban pressures placed upon those who were used to village lifestyles.

I have seen good people drink themselves into oblivion to bolster confidence, curb homesickness and for many more reasons.

I have seen damage done by those who before the Claims Act did not claim their Native heritage, and now cause strife among our people by their greed.

I have seen how it has yet divided us even more from non-Natives. For aren't we very rich? and did we not receive compensation for our lands? I agree we are rich in the lack of understanding of what has been done us.

I have seen my people lose hope, realizing after so many years of hope, that the white man with all of his corrupt business knowledge has finally trapped us in his corporate maze.

I have seen the white men come with their uniforms and empty ceremonies to claim our rivers and oceans, for they have need of these waters if they are to succeed in taking our lands. For is this not a tradition of the whiteman? To take from the poor and give to the already rich?

Before the discovery of natural resources the whitemen termed our environment too harsh to live on. Now they are in praise of the beauty surrounding us and are coming to settle and build cities and take from our lands.

I have seen television come into our life, breaking us yet further away from our sense of Inupiat pride, transforming our children to a selfish society, breaking our culture yet away from a social structure which was successful for thousands of years.

I have seen the white men come into our country with empty promises of employment, education, loans, spiritual relief, and much more.

All of these—empty promises with the intent of taking away what little cultural pride we have left.

I have seen our leaders transformed from those who fought for our true rights before the Claims Act, to this new generation of leadership who worship money while stepping on those who they are to represent.

I have seen our corporations escalate prices of goods needed in this land for proper survival, all for the sake of personal gain.

I have seen the federal govern-



Charles Blatchford

photo by Jim Benedetto

ment take yet more lands from our people by denying us our allotments. Citing the Claims Act as a priority and as interference to state and federal parks.

I have seen the white men infiltrate our corporate structure, sucking our life blood while becoming rich, gaining yet another foothold in the taking of our lands.

I have seen the AFN come into representation of our people, while walking hand-in-hand with the white man.

I have seen city, IRA and corporate governments fighting for power, while the villager stands by without voice or a hope of bettering their lives.

I have seen our people transformed from wards of the federal government, to positions of corporate power, involving decisions of destiny for our people and the millions of dollars representing the survival of our people. All of this burden placed upon our spirits with no prior knowledge of how corporate structures should function.

I have seen this greed brought on not only by the federal government; this act of treason was also

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perpetrated by those few among us who desired this false wealth to suit their own lazy needs.

Now the AFN has resolutions which will be placed before congress. These resolutions will decide the fate of our peoples. What our people have to realize is that after these laws are passed, they shall be broken down even more and they shall be used for further annihilation of our people.

Our elders are brought out and represented as those being of our wisdom and future, then conveniently locked away until the next time the white man has need to hear our voices from the past.

When our young leave the village for reason of education, we are termed shy and shyness is

a weakness in Americanism. Since we have had our culture, we have had a quiet spirit, and this has met with disastrous results, as the school dropout rate has proven.

I would ask those of you who are of the white ways: disprove all that I have voiced. If you cannot, keep your newly-learned habits to yourselves, and give me that which was not for you to sell in the first place.

When first the white man came, with a bottle in one hand and bible in the other, they gave us a choice: booze or religion.

When my ancestors sobered or rose from prayer our land was stolen.

Charlie B. Blatchford
May 19, 1985