

# 'Communications-Vital' Says Times Editor In Address

*(Editor's Note: The following address was given at a workshop for editors of Indian newspapers at Billings, Montana, this week by guest speaker Howard Rock, editor of the TUNDRA TIMES. The workshop included representatives from newspapers on 14 reservations in that part of the United States.)*

## COMMUNICATIONS AND THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF ALASKA By Howard Rock

When I learned that Will Clegg was a communications specialist, I was interested from the start. Communications is a vital link in anyone's endeavor to do something. Getting across to someone for better understanding is a rewarding experience and this is the level from which deeds for betterment can spring.

I am from Alaska, a huge state. From the tip of the Aleutian Islands, from Attu Island to be exact, to the Canadian border at Demarkation Point in the Arctic, the distance is over 2,000 miles. From Point Hope, my home village, in the Far North-western part of our state, to Ketchikan near the southern tip, the distance is about 1,450 miles. Alaska has about 34,000 miles of coastline. Highway mileage is small in comparison with other states and countries and this necessitates travel by air. As a result, our citizens are the flyingest people per capita in the world, I believe.

In a big state like ours, there are bound to be difficulties in communications. Areawise, this has been largely solved by radio, air travel and by mail. There are other communications difficulties however. Alaska has varied customs and cultures depending on geographical locations. This fact alone poses difficulties in getting across ideas from people to people. This was especially true in the not-too-distant past.

Our native people have begun to find out that in communications, education is an excellent shortcut. However, they have not yet had the benefit of adequate book-learning now generally enjoyed in our United States. This situation is very noticeable in the northern half of the state. We are now hopeful that in a few generations, adequate education will become general. Aims to give the Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts good education are beginning to form and in a few years, the practical application of this much-needed proper schooling should begin to bring results. The lack of it at the present time is a hindrance to our progress in the competitive world into which we have been plunged within a period of a hundred years more or less.

A hundred years is but a fraction in the educational traditions of the world, some of which have been in existence for thousands of years. In Alaska our native people, especially in the Far North, have been exposed to schooling for scarcely 75 years and much of this exposure to Western type education has been spotty and erratic. If you care to ask questions about this, I will try to answer them after this little talk.

As far as schooling among our people in Alaska is concerned we are, I would say, barely beginning to get our feet wet. There are some promising signs that we are slowly making mincing steps toward establishing an educational tradition. We are beginning to graduate our Aleuts, Indians and Eskimos with degrees from colleges and universities. Our native parents are now also realizing that our educated young people are well equipped for acquiring good jobs--jobs that are lucrative and desirable. Knowing this, they are starting to encourage their children to go to school. Parents' blessing counts a great deal especially when we are just venturing into learning new ways of doing things.

As far as Tundra Times is concerned, I believe that before we started publishing five years ago, communications among our people and our Caucasian friends was very poor. I think our newspaper has been of some help in bridging the gap, especially in posing our peoples' problems that were generally unknown before we came on the newspaper scene. We have tackled assignments other newspapers dared not touch. We did not always make friends in doing things like that but we felt that if we didn't, nothing would be done about them. This we have done and some of our major problems are now being considered on the national level as well as on the state level. Some of them are on the way to being solved.

I believe Tundra Times has, in some measure, helped to bridge the gap in prevalent misunderstandings among our peoples and our Caucasian friends. It has made us realize that communications are vital if we must make progress in the complex activities of the present day world.