

# Member Opposes ANB Exec. Committeeman

Dear Editor:

I read with deep interest the letter from Mr. John Hope which was printed in the Tundra Times. As a member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and a Native of Southeastern I feel some of his contentions need to be argued. Using the address of the Grand Camp, A.N.B. and signing the letter as an Executive Committeeman gives one the impression that Mr. Hope is speaking for the membership of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. I trust that this is not so.

As one of the few persons from Southeastern at the Statewide Native Conference I feel that my views might have some merit. I heard no reference to a third political party. I believe everyone realizes such a move would be disastrous. I refer to the Statewide Native Conference because it seems that before that time there was no real effort shown by many of the Native leaders in southeastern as to finding EFFECTIVE solutions to the problems which beset our Native people. Since the Conference there has been almost a deluge of statements and actions emanating from Southeastern, most of them in the form of criticism which offers no real aid to the problems at hand. It is very true that there has been a genuine concern on the part of our leaders here. But concern does not of itself bring results. It is also very true that the Alaska Native Brotherhood has accomplished many necessary and vital things for our people throughout Alaska. It is a fact that as late as the 1940's there existed blatant and legal segregation in Alaska. Many of our leaders, who in their efforts to end segregation entered segregated business, were thrown bodily out onto the sidewalks of our cities. The A.N.B. was responsible for getting the Alaska civil rights statutes passes. When the A.N.B. was formed fifty four years ago the Native people were not allowed to vote. Many of our leaders suffered humiliation and sometimes bodily injury in securing for us that Constitutional privilege. It was through the efforts of the A.N.B. leaders that the Indian Reorganization Act was extended to include Alaska in 1936. These are very substantial and basic contributions which have aided immeasurably the advancement of our Native people throughout Alaska. I sincerely believe that the record of achievements which the Alaska Native Brotherhood has compiled will never be equalled.

But those achievements of the past do not give us license to sit on our duffs and ignore the future! Because the Native people of Southeastern have progressed more rapidly than the rest of our Native people, due to Southeastern's earlier overall development, does not give us the privilege to ignore the problems which face particularly the Natives of the Northern areas, but which stare us in the face in Southeastern Alaska also.

I too am unalterably opposed to separating our people from the rest of society. I too am unalterably opposed to the formation of a third political party. However I do believe that our problems must be answered with reference to our ethnic origin as Mr. Hope says they must not. I do believe that realistically the only way our problems can be effectively and expeditiously solved is by the formation of a statewide Native organization representing all of Alaska's Natives which would function as a non-partisan political pressure group. (Incidentally, in many newspaper reports I have been disturbed by the reference to an already formed Alaska Federation of Native Associations or some such organization. It is my recollection that the officers who were elected at the Statewide organization with a title in capital letters, no less, has caused some concern here in Southeastern where there has been no news of a statewide organization already formed).

Our problems are many and if they are studied closely they stem from the fact that we are Natives with a cultural heritage totally different from that of the non-native segment of our society. When one says that we must face our problems without regard to ethnic origin and cultural heritage we are being asked to throw off centuries of custom and belief; customs and beliefs which shape our every thought, our every action, our every reaction. Any person who has studied human and race behavior will assure you that this will have disastrous consequences. If we are to be assimilated into the society of the non-natives, it must be done with full cognizance of our ethnic origin and cultural heritage. In the process of assimilation approaches to our problems must be made only after careful study of the effect they will have on the customs and beliefs which shape our thinking. If that is not done, if centuries of culture are ignored and we are forced to accept the culture of the rest of society as our own without careful conditioning, I assure you Mr. Hope that the problems which are now economic and educational will come back to haunt us all as a real and terrible "race conflict."

I believe that political action on the part of our Native people in a direct fashion is absolutely necessary to the solution of our problems. We must be able to help shape the policies which affect us rather than be the passive recipients of arbitrary actions by persons without a real understanding of our problems. With the formation of a statewide Native organization we will be in a position to carefully evaluate candidates and issues. We will be able to responsibly back the candidates of any political gender who best understand our prob-

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lems and office positive solutions. The formation of a statewide Native organization will provide a means by which persons in office can be evaluated and the ensuing information used to determine our preferences in the next election. Thus it will be necessary for elected officials to produce if they are to retain office. I know this sounds Utopian and the road we must walk can be compared to a tightrope for there are many possible pitfalls; misuse of the organization, backlash, etc. But if we sincerely care and want to solve our problems and see progress we will see to it that we act responsibly at all times with the good of our people uppermost in our minds.

Since the years of the real activity of the A.N.B. there has been a lapse in our efforts to seek the solutions to the many problems which face us throughout the state. With the growing awareness of their needs in the Northern and Western areas, the Native people of Alaska have again begun to actively seek the answers to our problems. So with the differences I have pointed out here and in concurrence with the rest of his statements, I close quoting Mr. Hope: "Let us make every effort to become good citizens, ever contributing to the welfare of our state. Let us not encourage racial separation. Let us advance together with other people of this great state."

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