

"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire

Editorial—

Land — 'You Felt Was Yours All the Time'

Since time immemorial, the people of the world have regarded their lands as vitally needed economic bases. This was, and is, an inescapable truth that through time emanated from the sceptres of kings, the iron fists of dictators, presidents of democracies, prime ministers, chiefs of Somaliland, chiefs of the interior Alaska Athabaskan Indians, chiefs of the Arctic Eskimo country, chiefs of the Aleuts, officials of the Eskimo, Indian and Aleut organizations, and all the village council presidents.

Land in many areas of the world is considered sacred—the giver of life and good things therefrom. This reverence toward lands has no less sanctity among the native people of Alaska. It is deep-seated and inviolable. When encroachments are made into the proven use of it, deep concerns develop and along with this—the uneasy, gnawing feeling that the lands that had nurtured them for great many centuries might be in the process of being lost. When feelings reach this point, tempers begin to spring up because the lands mean everything to the people concerned. We are deeply reluctant to say it but that has begun to manifest itself among some of our native people.

The community of Barrow, the northernmost Eskimo settlement on the continent of North America, perhaps is a case in point where serious land problems can be focused as far as Alaska's native people are concerned. The people there are up to their necks with the snarl of land questions and situations. It seemed very likely and perhaps without consultations with the local people, the governmental agencies in the past have hemmed in the community of Barrow by land withdrawals so that at the present time the growing village has no place to expand. The Barrow people are feeling the pinch. The enclosing ring of land withdrawals has become irritating and they are beginning to get angry.

The latest jurisdictional snarl as to what agency has the say on the Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4 is not helping matters any at Barrow. About a year ago, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Land Management gave the go-ahead for the Barrow people to file native allotments. The agencies must have known that the land on which the allotments were allowed was within the boundaries of the petroleum reserve. The Navy that has the jurisdiction on the area did not say a word for about a year even though some 99 native allotments were processed or were being processed with the cooperation and assistance of the BIA and the BLM.

Then a few months ago this year, great quantities of oil were discovered just outside of the eastern boundary of the Pet 4 by some of the major oil companies of the United States. About two weeks ago, Barrow people received word that the allotments may not be binding because the Navy suddenly seemed to have reinstated its jurisdiction it had, somehow, allowed to lapse when it allowed native allotments.

This latest development has had a stinging impact on the Barrow Eskimos and they are feeling more hemmed in than ever before. They are, understandably, disturbed and angry. Eben Hopson, executive director of the Arctic Slope Native Association, in his letter to the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of the Interior reflected the feeling of his people when he wrote the following, although in milder form than some of his other utterances in the same letter:

"... How would you like to be in my shoes one time? Live on the Arctic Slope, try to work for a living, hunting for your meat on the table, your house mortgaged, own no real property, not by choice but by government regulation, and watch the State and the federal government take all the land away from you and have to put up with a Secretary of the Interior unwilling or unable to make an honest effort to help you hang on to something that you felt was yours all the time. . . It ain't easy."