

Editorial—

Plight of Tanacross

In these supposedly civilized times, many of our native people are sorely disillusioned. "Thou shalt not covet" and "Thou shalt not steal" don't have much meaning after they have been taught with such intensity that they had become almost second nature to many of Alaska's native population. To see them violated and grandly ignored by the members of those who taught them is sickening—a mockery of the first hand of the theologic teaching.

Chief Andrew Isaac of the United Crow Band and his people around Tanacross area are prime examples of disillusioned natives. Their lands which they have used historically and on which their ancestors lie buried are methodically being taken by the State of Alaska.

The Congress of the United States has said that the aboriginal inhabitants of Alaska were not to be disturbed in their use and occupancy of their lands and the lands they claimed would be respected. The Statehood Act has also said that it would not take those lands occupied and used by native people. Are these solemn declarations being followed by the state? The answer is a resounding, "NO!"

In the process of withdrawing lands by the State of Alaska under the authorization of the Statehood Act, the Bureau of Land Management and the agency of the Department of the Interior, seemed to have joined in a marriage of convenience. It looks as if that in order to gain that end, they conveniently lost, or forgot, claims made by native people so that they could say there were no records and used that questionable basis for continuing to withdraw lands.

Since 1917, and more urgently in the last few years, the Tanacross people have claimed their lands, reclaimed them when prior claims were supposedly lost, to protect their accustomed regions where they have always lived and roamed for sustenance. Chief Isaac had made plea upon plea—pleas of deep concern for help from the responsible people in Washington, D.C. All he has received to date are lukewarm responses. Quite often his pleas met with deaf ears.

One of the important provisions the U.S. Government gave the Secretary of the Interior was to help with the problems of natives of the Lower 48 and Alaska. As far as the Tanacross Indians are concerned, this has been strangely nonexistent. The covetous greed for Tanacross Indian lands by the state has not moved that great office. It stays strangely detached—silent—as far as Chief Isaac and his people are concerned.

Andrew Isaac has appealed to the congressional delegation of Alaska. There, too, little has been generated. In the meantime, Chief Isaac and his people are going through the agonizing feeling that they are losing their lands. Supposedly, at this time, they no longer have anyone to turn to. Their despair is worsening. And this in a country that frowns upon oppression as Alaska's native people have been made to believe.