

Alcohol Committee Explores Urban Native Drink Problem

The problem of alcohol and its relationship to the urban Alaskan native was recently explored by an Anchorage committee which is ready to report its findings to the Anchorage City Council.

Although natives comprise only 4 per cent of the population of Anchorage, the committee found that they account for 52.6 per cent of the arrests on drunk in public charges.

Selective geographic enforcement of "drunk in public" statutes, tendency toward racial en-

forcement of such statutes, and inadequate enforcement by the City of Anchorage of alcoholic beverage sales to intoxicated persons were cited as reasons for the disproportionate figures.

Drinking behavior among urban natives, it was concluded, results from a "matrix of cultural, psychological, socio-economic and educational factors, which often culminate in the commission of the criminal act of being 'drunk in public.'"

The committee proposes a four-

point program to be instituted as a new approach to the problem. The first calls for individuals arrested for being "drunk in public" to have charges dismissed twice during a 12-month period.

The offender may then sign a waiver and discuss his reason for drinking with a referral aide, who would refer him to the appropriate agency depending on his problem.

The second point of the proposal is the retention of a counselor to supervise referral aides and overlook the entire referral system, at the same time available for professional recommendations.

An evaluation and referral center for those having alcohol-related problems, inclusive of a community health program, would be established as the third point in the proposal.

The final point requests the abolishment of the drunk in public charge as a criminal offense. "The present deterrent system does not work as over 50 per cent of those arrested for DIP have more than one arrest," the committee stated.

It is reported that members of the committee included a number of Anchorage doctors, lawyers, as well as several native leaders.

The "drunk in public" statute is expected to be discussed at the July 8 meeting of the Anchorage City Council, in the council chambers at the Loussac Memorial Library.