

**Alaska Hire—**

# Heated Labor Hearing

By JEFF RICHARDSON

Charges of payoffs and discrimination gave State legislators an earful at a hearing to determine if enough Alaska residents are being employed on the pipeline project. The hearing, held March 15 at the Traveler's Inn in Fairbanks, was conducted by the Joint Senate-House Labor and Management Committee, chaired by Sen. John Sackett.

Melvin Charlie, president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference led off the testimony. He said while the unions and contractors are making an honest effort to hire residents, "the mechanism they have is not working." He called on

the state to beef up the Human Rights Commission, the "only vehicle right now that can fully, enforce local hire laws."

Commissioner of Labor, Ed Orbeck blamed previous commissioners for writing local hire regulations but not enforcing them. He said his department will soon implement a plan to have potential workers fill out a form which will establish whether they are residents. He said the system would have to be voluntary, but a person would not be certified as an Alaska resident if he did not fill out the form. Orbeck promised the Dept. of Labor would follow up on the forms to discourage perjury.

By far the most complaints were directed at the methods used by unions to send people out on jobs. Testimony was sometimes emotional.

Tension sometimes ran high at

the seven hour meeting. It was interrupted several times by people anxious to respond to something said by the speakers.

J.P. Jones, president of the Fairbanks branch of the NAACP said, "Where the problem lies is in one place — with the unions, with dispatching." He said the union structure has to be changed. In subsequent testimony, he added the NAACP might go to court to achieve more local and minority hire on the pipeline.

Georgianna Lincoln, of the Fairbanks Native Association, said hiring practices discriminate against Natives in the bush because they cannot respond to job calls which were held in Fairbanks. They rarely have money to get here and if they do, have no place to stay.

Twenty-one persons testified before the committee. More than

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50 were in attendance. Jacqueline Butler, characterizing the hiring practices as a "dehumanizing process," said she was testifying on behalf of two people who did not attend because they were afraid of being harassed by union officials. Other people expressed similar fears.

Butler suggested that the entire hiring process be taken away from the unions. She alleged the practice of bribing a union official to get a job was common knowledge among people seeking pipeline work.

There were also charges that unions have failed to provide enough information about hiring procedures, that clerk are unfriendly and unsympathetic and that hiring hall space is inadequate.

M.A. Wier, business agent for the Culinary Union, and John Orbeck of the Laborer's Union both acknowledged they have received offers of money to give a person a job, but both denied they have accepted bribes.

Weir said his union has changed its dispatching procedures three times in an effort to make it more equitable and denied he had ever practiced discrimination.

Orbeck said his union expects to move into a bigger building soon to make it easier to process the 150-200 names being added to job waiting lists. He added that his union has gone through its "C" list several times in an effort to fill pipeline positions. This list is composed of skilled residents and non-residents who do not have enough hours of experience to have top priority.

Sen. Sackett told the audience there was no way to predict what would come of the hearing, but promised that all testimony would be fully considered. He said there were definitely not enough Alaskans employed on the pipeline project and that his committee would make a thorough study of the problem.

Other members of the committee hearing testimony were Rep. Charles Parr, Rep. Steve Cowper, and Rep. Fred Brown, all of Fairbanks.

A similar hearing was held simultaneously in Anchorage and an earlier hearing was held in Juneau.

Written comment will be accepted by the committee for another week. Interested persons should write: Joint Senate-House Labor Management Committee, Pouch V, State Capitol, Juneau, Alaska 99811.