

ANB Sceptical About Native Hiring by Oil

(Editor's Note: The Alaska Native Brotherhood Executive Committee released the following item concerning employment in the oil fields on the North Slope.)

By EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
ANB

The agreement signed by thirteen (13) unions, representatives of the Joint Crafts Committee on Oil, appears to be only a token offer whose purpose is to appease the Native People of Alaska.

There is no guarantee that this agreement will work.

At most, this agreement as it relates only to the present work on the oil fields, i.e., exploration, pioneer construction, and development of the petroleum industry, can only be considered a temporary measure to the present unemployment of the Alaskan Native Peoples.

The agreement must relate to year around jobs for the Natives when the oil fields reach the final stage of production.

The proposed employment phases itself out when the exploratory work ends as most of these job skills will no longer be needed by the exploiting companies who can then say the Natives are not trained for further employment.

As we look at it, the oil industry in Alaska is moving towards the same end experienced by the advent of the pulp mills which was vividly portrayed by Dr. George W. Rogers in his keynote address to the 56th Annual Convention of the Alaska Native Brotherhood in Juneau on November 11, 1968:

"The popular and official view on the expected impact upon the Native People of the expansion of forest products industries was stated by the

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Governor of Alaska before a Congressional Committee in 1947: 'I know of no one thing that will be more beneficial to the Indian population than the development of this pulp and paper industry. . . It means a new day in the Indian economy. It means that instead of being obligated to subsist for twelve months on the rather uncertain earnings of three or four months fishing, they will have something that will keep them employed all year around, and I can think of nothing that will equal that in benefit.'"

Now, let us measure what actually happened.

The following figures are taken from the 1950 and 1960 U.S. Census. These reports provide a means of measuring and analyzing the human aspects of this experience, as they took place a few years before and after the development of the pulp mills.

Despite the creation of a

whole range of new employment opportunities, we find that the participation rate (or the percentage of persons gainfully employed) of the normal working-age Native population actually declined between 1950 and 1960 (from 38 per cent to 37 per cent) while that of the non-Native population enjoyed a significant increase (from 59 per cent to 64 per cent).

This decade also experienced a 25 per cent increase in total population. Breaking this data into areas and race classifications, there appeared to have been a movement of Native people away from the two centers of development at Ketchikan and Sitka.

(There was a very modest total increase in Native population in these areas, but that was due to natural increase being slightly higher than the out-migration of people from the areas.)

Just these two sets of statistical comparisons are sufficient for us to draw the conclusion that the new jobs and the new income created by this development were taken up by more intensive utilization of the non-Native labor force and a significant immigration of additional workers from outside Southeast Alaska.

The new developments had virtually no impact upon the employment situation of the Native people. Let us compare some of the facts that existed during the development of the pulp mills with those of the up-and-coming oil industries.

We have before us a whole range of new employment opportunities in the oil industries just as the pulp mills had. We find the participation rate of the Native population in the oil industry far below that of the non-Native participation.

We can expect an increase in population in the Fairbanks area, as did the Anchorage area during work on the platforms, due to job opportunities in the oil fields.

The new jobs and new income created by the development work in the oil fields is being taken up by more intensive utilization of the non-Native

labor force only and a significant immigration of additional workers from outside Alaska, many from Canada and the Lower 48.

To date, the development of the oil fields have had virtually no impact upon the employment situation of the Native people.

No provisions have been made to date by the State of Alaska, the Federal Government, or the oil companies to train Alaska Natives so that they may have qualified personnel available for the year around jobs when the oil companies go into production.

The Alaska Native, through the organization(s) of his area, is going to have to take a stronger hand in shaping the future in terms of objectives consciously chosen as being desirable.

There is considerable scope for us to influence development decisions throughout political institutions in directions which would promote our chosen objectives.

Through our political agencies we can insist that development be carried out so that our objectives be not destroyed nor debased.

In furtherance hereof, we,

the Executive Committee of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, moves that a copy of this letter be sent to the Governor of Alaska, to the Senate and House of Representatives, to the Alaska Delegation in Congress, and to the public press, the purpose being to create such public pressure so that the thirteen unions and the representatives of the Joint Crafts Committee on Oil and other bodies be forced to implement the objectives of this letter.