

Editorial—

Kuskokwim Fish Flap

The surprising policy adopted by the Alaska Board of Fish and Game opposing any arrangement by the Alaska fishermen to do business with any foreign fish buyers was a direct slap in the face of the fledgling Kuskokwim Fisheries Cooperative, a group of Eskimo fishermen. The way the Board is acting makes it a prime candidate for a Seattle Board of Fish and Game. The Board seems to be doing the bidding of the out-of-state fishing interests who have had the stranglehold on the Alaska fishing industry. Those fishing interests combined spell monopolistic hold on the Alaska resource. Their power is immense and woe to those who try independent operations such as the Kuskokwim Fisheries Cooperative.

The state government has also been showing weakness in being an easy tool of the out-of-state operators which had plagued Alaska business community for decades. Last year's ruckus over the Kuskokwim fishermen-Japanese freezer ship versus the state was a prime example. The state's part on that one smelled worse than the Kuskokwim River fish that rotted as a result of the controversy. As it turned out, it was a no little effort on the part of the state to accomodate lower stateside interests.

When the sparks settled in last year's controversy, people found that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the Japanese ship buying Alaska fishermen caught fish. In fact, the U.S. State Department had given clearance to the ship. The only trouble was that the out-of-state fishing companies were afraid that the fledgling, tiny Kuskokwim fishing co-op might make inroads into their fishing industry empire.

The Kuskokwim fishermen are now making ready to fish their waters. They are some of the poorest men around who are in need of things they have learned to like and cannot have because of the lack of cash. The cash economy has caught up and is infusing into their lives. The difficulty of meeting this new way of life is now a real problem because for one—the lack of their own industries.

The Eskimo co-op men in the Bethel area, along with sympathetic assistance of Alaska Legal Services Corp., and others, managed to salvage pretty well their salmon catch last year. But now a new spectre in the form of the Alaska Board of Fish and Game is staring them in the face. In spite of this, we hope the co-op will be able to weather the storm this year thereby encouraging other independent fishing operators and gain something of a foothold in the process of marketing their product to buyers for a good price. The purchaser should not necessarily be the Japanese exclusively, but other independent buyers could well be encouraged.