

Position Paper on Native Land Claims

By YULE KILCHER

This position paper on the native land claims and related matters was started before the Goldberg withdrawal which this writer thinks does not necessarily harm the Natives' just cause and possibly will help it. Even a possible delay may be helpful by projecting a solution to the election year of 1970 and by giving the State of Alaska and its Natives more time to formulate policy and to achieve badly needed unity of purpose and methods.

With rapid economic and political development based on the nation-wide interest in our resources which is pressuring us from all sides, it is my hope to contribute what little I can to a better future for all Alaskans: the early inhabitants as well as immigrants who came to love this great land. Let us hope our children will not live as servants to colonial resource exploitation.

My wife and I and our eight Alaska-born children and their children to come have tribal rights and land claims dating back fifteen hundred years. If I'd married an Alaska native woman, my children would have two sets of tribal rights, the Alaskan set being the less secure of the two.

The Swiss rights they can never lose as long as their offspring are registered—not in Switzerland as such, but in my particular tribal community; for in Switzerland, even a foreigner does not become a citizen of the country, but of a sometimes very small community and so automatically becomes a "Swiss". . . just as if a Tibetan went to Tyonek, Noatak or Minto, got accepted into the tribe and became thus a U.S. citizen. You can see that I came by

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my notions of Democracy and Local Government and the honest way.

A few historic facts on land rights will highlight and sharpen some of the problems and solutions confronting us. In the fourth century, a shaky Roman empire invited the war-like Burgundians from Northern Europe to settle in that part of Roman Gaul which is now Southeastern France next to Switzerland: In Burgundy. They were to help fight off their more barbarous cousins from the North, and for this service were given by contract one-third of the arable land and large tracts of empty mountains with all rights—to which arrangement the Romanized Celtic inhabitants had little to say.

A hundred years later, my German-speaking forefathers fought their way up from the Baltic into the Roman province of Helvetia north of the Alps. They were a rough, barbaric and heathen lot who kept their common law and language to this day. By right of conquest they took two-thirds of the land: They did not kill off the old inhabitants, nor did these "barbarians" take ALL the land.

The point I am trying to make is that in my particular opinion, Alaska's early inhabitants are far too modest, not to say timid, in their claims. It is only two hundred years since the Russian invasion, one hundred years since the American intrusion, and at this moment over 90 per cent of the population are Natives living on over 90 per cent of this state's land. They should have ALL of that. I mean it. Mineral rights and all! And cash compensation lost or ceded. A settlement along these lines would put America on the map as a symbol of justice and hope for all of this earth's down-trodden.

This position should be the beginning of any bargaining. I realize that although Alaska's natives comprise a quarter of the state's inhabitants, they constitute a very small percentage of America's total population. And it is the power elite of America who wants and needs Alaska's riches. What compromise could be deemed reasonable? The Natives in their collective wisdom and effort will have to decide this, with some of us later inhabitants cheering from the sidelines.

Half of the State's land with all mineral and oil rights for the Natives and at least one quarter of the mineral and oil rights on the balance, or one quarter of all the land with all the rights (proportional to the population) and half the rights on the balance, would seem worth talking about. All this balance with a few hundred million dollars for compensation over a period of five to ten years.

You might ask me: "Why all this interest and 'generosity' of yours?" Disregarding moral aspects or my sense of justice based on historic studies, let me mention a motive to easier understand: Self-interest. I am convinced—and in this I am not the only non-native Alaskan—that our problems of welfare and continuing rural, alien and Native, poverty will only be eliminated as festering tax-eating sores if the Natives themselves are enabled to massively remedy these ills.

My association with Natives over the years, and especially this last year in connection with OEO programs, has shown me that the Natives are perfectly able and willing to do this.