

Glimpse Into Past And Future

By REGGIE JOSEPH

It was a good gathering. The community hall was filled with people eager to begin the Feast. Outside, under the warm, peaceful sun, more people gathered near the building entrance. There were about ten cars parked here and there, hinting the distance the people had come.

Inside, 50 to 70 people were busy arranging their plates, cups and spoons on the long white paper roll on the floor. All fell respectfully silent with with bowed heads as a clergyman said a prayer before beginning the potlatch.

Once finished, the servers started down the rows dishing out hot soup out of huge pots. Later, baked fish and moose meat accumulated. It was a happy, noisy gathering; some talked and some busily ate their food. It all seemed they were being lost in a time, a time when way back, our people used to celebrate in the same manner.

Outside under the warm and peaceful sun, about 50 feet off the right of the community hall, a group of drunk Natives were gathered around a smoldering fire. There was an endless stream of chatter coming from their direction and one could see their bottles of beer and jars of home brew clasped securely in their hands.

A few feet to their right, there was a Native man saddled on top of another Native man, energetically beating the Native man he was sitting on. His raised fist would swing downward and disappear into a face. Fairly soon, almost casually, red thick blood, like catchup gushed from the downed man's face. And then too, almost casually, a girl appeared, stopped the beating, and slowly walked off with the bloody man.

Inside, the traditional Indian

potlatch was moving along in it's lost time and we hear the speeches of the older people. In a voice full of deep convictions and fervor, an old man spoke of his past life, the present and what the future looked like.

In his gesturing hands and fine weathered face, you knew he was saying be Native, fight for your Native rights and beware of the threat of white man.

In his time-honored eyes, you saw a pleading, a warning.