

Editorial—

Secretary Hickel's Dismissal - A Setback

As far as human values and resources were concerned, among other things, the Department of the Interior was on the way of coming into its own when Walter J. Hickel was running it. The American Indians throughout the nation, although resisting his appointment with some hostility at first, were to realize a bit later on that Mr. Hickel was not as bad a Secretary as they thought he would be. In spite of himself, Hickel was achieving the original purpose of the department--overseeing the fair life status of America's original people as one important facet of his complex job.

The achievement of this was well underway into becoming a definite reality when he was suddenly removed from his office. Now, things that might have turned out for the good of the Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts are in a state of limbo. There is more than a little hope that the next Secretary will pick up the ball and continue the trend or movement toward doing things under more self-determination by the native people. This was, of course, the stated purpose of President Nixon himself in his special message to Congress on Indians of the country. Secretary Hickel, we believe, was doing an outstanding job in implementing the new approach.

It is also a common knowledge now that Secretary Hickel was planning to extend the land freeze in Alaska from six to nine months until the resolution of the native land claims in the 1971 session of Congress. This and other momentous decisions involving Alaska were directly within the grasp of Secretary Hickel.

Mr. Hickel is a surprising man. We have been fortunate in knowing something of the man and know that his seemingly inflexible position can be breached. This was true of his position on native land question when he first became Governor of Alaska in 1968.

Hickel, then, deeply worried the native leadership on what the leadership thought was the new governor's unreasonable stand on native claims. They began to make public criticism of it. Within a year's period, Gov. Hickel changed his views on the land situation and then actually assisted the Alaska Federation of Natives in establishing its stand on the native land claims bill that contained a request for 40 million acres of land and to which AFN is still adhering.

The nation as a whole knows Hickel's initial stand on conservation. That position worried a great many people. They also, within a year, witnessed a pronounced change in Secretary Hickel. When he was dismissed, much of the nation thought that the man was not such a bad Secretary of the Interior after all.

Walter J. Hickel may not have the finesse some people might like to see in a public figure, but he does have the stuff that makes men tick. If he has a somewhat rough exterior, we have also noted a generous streak of humanity in the man.