

ABC HOLDS KOTZEBUE PROBE

Board Probe Unveils Huge Profits Made by Kotzebue Bootleggers

By CHRISTOPHER R. COOKE

KOTZEBUE, (Special)—On April 17, 1969, citizens of Kotzebue had a town meeting with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board.

Claude Millsap, Director of the ABC, three members of the Board, James Rhodes of the Attorney-General's

office and several investigators came to hear the comments and complaints of Kotzebue residents

regarding liquor control.

Nearly 200 people attended the meeting.

Under the "local option" law of Alaska, Kotzebue prohibits the sale of liquor. State agencies, namely the State Police, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, and the Attorney-General's office, have the responsibility for enforcing this law; but enforcement has not been visible in Kotzebue.

There is widespread traffic in liquor in Kotzebue. This is evident from the most casual observation of the town's night spots or discussion with residents.

The ABC officials concluded this too as they announced figures gathered at prior hearings in Nome estimating profits of suspected bootleggers supplied from Nome at more than \$30,000 per month.

The true figure of bootleggers' profits must be much higher, the

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Board concluded, when shipments from Fairbanks and Anchorage are considered.

Kotzebue citizens have been concerned about the situation for some time. There have been several stormy city council meetings on the subject, and recent newspaper articles about Kotzebue have stirred public feeling.

Many here feel unfairly treated by the legal system: nearly every arrest in Kotzebue is for a drunk or drunk-related offense, but the last conviction of a bootlegger was in 1962.

Others object to liquor on religious grounds or because they feel it is a factor in parents' lack of control over teenagers.

The Alcoholic Beverage Control Board heard these points of view expressed. Also it heard from people desiring to have liquor available and those believing law enforcement was better where the sale of liquor was legal.

The ABC Board tried to gauge community sentiment. Most of the audience felt the present situation was bad and that bootlegging should be controlled. Others felt a liquor store run by the city might be a better solution.

Still, in some ways, the present situation had certain good points:

"When the town is wet, booze is cheap and the poor man will spend all his money for it," one man said. "When we vote 'dry' we know there will be bootleggers and that a bottle will cost \$20.00. So, the poor man with only a few dollars will spend it for food for his family,

and he will drink only when he has a lot of money."

The Board stressed the basic responsibility for control of liquor rests with the individual citizen. Purchasing liquor is an individual choice and no one has to buy from bootleggers.

Police control, furthermore, would be more effective if citizens with first-hand knowledge of bootlegging transactions would sign complaints and testify against bootleggers.

Some members of the Board said that the solution to the bootlegging problem would be to have the sale of liquor legalized. In fact, they said it so often it seemed they were trying to sell the product rather than meet the problem of how to enforce the state's "local option" prohibition law.

But, as Mr. Rhodes stated near the close of the meeting, the situation at hand was that the present prohibition laws exist and are in force in Kotzebue, and it was the duty of these state officials to work for enforcement of them.

Some pointed questioning brought indications that the enforcement agencies were beginning to move against the bootleggers.

Federal Income Tax officials have been alerted regarding possible tax violations and, Mr. Mill-sap said, the Nome and Kotzebue hearings should serve as "due notice" to bootleggers that other action might be forthcoming.

Further, the Board suggested that some of its regulations might be changed as a result of these hearings.