

Union Leaders Declare Native Corporations, Unions Conflict

Tribal and native association corporations bidding on state and pipeline contracts are coming into conflict with unions in Alaska in many of their attempts to bring work to native people.

Ed Orbeck, head of the Laborer's Union in Fairbanks, ex-

plained the conflicts between Native Associations and labor unions in a talk before the Farthest North Press Club last week.

He appeared there along with representatives of three other labor unions to explain unemployment problems in the state.

The unions object to Native Association hiring and contract provisions, which are often, they feel, unfairly competitive to companies which hire union labor at standard wages.

"Most of the problem is that the Native groups have lawyers who know a lot about tribal and land claim law, but nothing about labor law, which is a complicated and different field," Orbeck said.

Among the conflicts discussed by the union leaders was one at Valdez which led to a meeting of AFN board members and labor leaders in Juneau on December 20. On December 23, committees from the AFN and the labor groups met in Anchorage to try to resolve the difficulties.

"There were several problems in Valdez," explained Orbeck. "First, the Chugach Native Association represents its group as an employer and as a union. This is a violation of the Landon Griffin Act," Orbeck said.

"They only hire people from Native tribes, which is against fair employment regulations.

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Native Corporations Conflict . . .

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Each worker employed means a kickback for the Native association. Jimmy Hoffa tried this and he's now in the Federal pen. The groups claim they have these rights under tribal law, that labor law doesn't apply. Charters can't be based on race."

"The Native Associations mean well," Orbeck continued, "and are determined to increase opportunities for their people. But, they will have to do things according to the law when they are competing with contractors who pay regular wages."

"They can do things like have their men work for straight time on Saturdays and Sundays, not pay regular wages, etc."

Orbeck told the group of Fairbanks newsmen that his International has adopted the position of holding off and trying to negotiate with Native groups, rather than sue or picket.

In a recent case in Fairbanks, he said, where the Laborer's Union protested, 35 Athabascan Indians were hired for a road job. Eskimo members of his union, he complained, were denied jobs because they weren't Athabascan Indians.

The Laborer's Union is about 40 per cent white, 40 per cent Native and 20 per cent other.

Under recent OEO rulings, Orbeck said, contractors on federal jobs are instructed to hire minorities in the areas in which the contract is being completed.

The Supreme Court has ruled that a white is Kotzebue is a minority, he told the group.

"This isn't the intent of the law," Orbeck complained.

Orbeck and the representatives of the three other unions who spoke told the group the alarming extent of unemployment in the Fairbanks and Northern Alaska area.

Ernie Miller, who represents local 302 of the Operating Engineers, said 90 per cent of the union's members are presently employed. Thirty per cent

of the members of this union are Alaskan Natives.

Joe Marshall, who represents the Cement Finishers and the Pipefitters Unions also presented alarming statistics of 90 per cent unemployment.

"Unemployment is the worst this year that it's been since I came to Alaska many years ago," said Marshall.

With many men having come to Alaska from the lower 48 looking for work on the pipeline and the road, unemployment lines downtown were reported by Marshall to extend out the door of the Fairbanks Manpower Center.

Usually, reports Marshall, at least 50 per cent of his men are working through the winter.

Starting dates on pipeline work depend on how fast the Native Land Claims bill is passed in Congress, the land freeze is lifted, rights of way are established and the preliminary work on preparing and coating

the pipe is completed.

"Due to the Native Land Claims and other factors, I can't see how pipeline work can start before September or October of next year (1971)," reports Ernie Miller of the Operating Engineers in Fairbanks.

Unemployment problems in Alaska are being increased, union leaders said, by people from the lower 48 who believe work is available in Alaska.

"I've seen advertising in the Great Falls, Montana newspaper for men to come to Alaska to work on the pipeline," reported Miller.

Joe Marshall reported calls he'd received in his union office from as far away as Honolulu from people who want to come to Alaska to work on the pipeline."

"The misinformation is uncontrollable," he said.

Marshall has been mentioned as a possible future Labor Commissioner in Fairbanks.



LABORERS UNION head Ed Orbeck argues the case of Fairbank's unions to a meeting of the Farthest North Press Club. To his right is Joe Marshall of the Cement Finisher's Union. Ernie Miller, head of Local 302 of the Operating Engineers appears on the left. Behind the speakers is a mural depicting Second Avenue before World War II. —MADELYN SHULMAN Photograph