



# LEKANOF BLASTS PRESS



**PRIEST SPEAKS OUT FOR HIS PEOPLE**—Father Michael Lesienkoff, a Pribilofian of St. George, now priest of the Russian Orthodox Church at St. Paul, spoke out at a public meeting before a five-member Pribilof Commission last week. Father Lesienkoff and the Rev. Deacon Smile V. Gromoff, each received applause for their presentations by the audience. In a tape recorded interview after the meeting, the priest said the dispute between the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and the Church over land was by no means settled as claimed by Pribilof Director Howard Baltzo last December in Juneau. —Tundra Times Photo by Snapp

## Senator Bartlett Introduces Bill Providing Major Reforms in State's Pribilof Islands

Alaska's Sen. E. L. (Bob) Bartlett has introduced a bill into the U.S. Senate to ensure residents of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea full rights of citizenship.

Sen. Bartlett, in a speech on the Senate floor on introducing the bill, also commended Tundra Times Editor and Publisher Howard Rock for his work in exposing conditions on the Pribilofs in a series of articles in the Tundra Times last winter.

The islands were part of the Alaska purchase, and are under control of the Secretary of the Interior. The 642 Pribilofians are the descendants of Aleuts brought to the islands by the Russians in the early 19th Century to harvest fur seals.

Sen. Bartlett pointed out that under Russian rule the islanders were not paid for their labor. "They worked in a state close to bondage, receiving food, clothing, and housing from the government."

The U.S. inherited the same system of maintaining the natives, which continued without substantial change until 1950, when the first wage system went into effect.

However, with the exception of the two Russian Orthodox Churches there, deeded in the treaty of cession, there is no private ownership on the islands.

Bartlett's bill would permit the transfer of land, houses, and property to private ownership. It would permit the State of Alaska to assume responsibility for conducting public schools.

A regulation making a pass necessary to visit the islands would be eliminated, and another provision would give the natives civil service retirement for their entire length of service rather than just from 1950.

"The bill which I introduce today is designed to allow the Pribilofians

to stand on their own two feet and obtain for them the protection and rights enjoyed by all American citizens," Bartlett said in his speech on the Senate floor.

"Interest in the status of the Pribilofians is not new. All my life I have heard accounts of their problems. All my life, I have heard, too, the official reassurances that Pribilofians are being fairly treated. And yet the problems continue."

"The bill which I introduce today, should it become law, will insure once and for all equality of treatment for the Pribilofians."

"I cannot introduce this bill without paying tribute to three persons with whom I have worked closely on its preparation," Bartlett said in his speech.

"First, to Howard Rock, publisher and editor of the Tundra Times, who, in a series of articles this winter, made clear to all who read them that the time had come to see that full justice was done on the islands."

"Second to Willard Bowman, executive director of the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights, who, at my suggestion and at the instruction of Gov. William A. Egan, undertook a study of conditions on the islands."

Thirdly, to Donald McKernan, Director, Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, who has given me his full and continuing cooperation in the preparation of this legislation."

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## NATIVE LEADER CLAIMS ONE-SIDED STORY TOLD OF PRIBILOF ISLANDS

"I was shocked and disappointed by the recent coverage by the Associated Press of the Pribilof Islands."

This was the comment here Pribilofian Flore Lekano, the first Pribilofian to obtain a master's degree in education.

"In pictures and articles only the good side and not the bad side of the Pribilofs was brought out," Lekano said.

"Either my people failed to communicate or the one and only reporter for the Associated Press failed to grasp the problems as seen by my people," said the 31-year-old Lekano, attending a "Project Headstart" workshop at the University of Alaska.

Lekano, first president of the Cook Inlet Native Association, said "I know the problems well and the conditions there. As a native of St. George, I speak the language fluently and understand their difficulty in expressing themselves in English and their fear of expressing themselves at all lest they lose their jobs."

"The past is still with my people and it has left its scars."

"I believe there still exists a degree of servitude on the islands."

"I do not agree with the commission report there is no servitude — of course, the commission didn't define what it meant by servitude."

"The people are fearful of losing their jobs if they are critical. They do not have full freedom of speech."

"Their freedom of movement is restricted, partly as a result of geographical location and partly as a result of a pass system which has been modified somewhat since Tundra Times started publicizing the



FLORE LEKANO

Pribilof problems.

"Because of the restriction on their liberty to speak, freedom of movement, and inability to own land, I believe a degree of servitude still exists."

"They are in bondage because they have no other choice except to work for the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. If they choose otherwise, they have to leave the islands."

Lekano said as a teacher at St. George in 1961 that the people there petitioned him to aid them in the removal of the island manager.

"There was no attorney. No one else to help them. I took it upon myself to help them because I could see no other way."

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## Many Carry-Overs Remain Of Servitude in Pribilofs

By TOM SNAPP

Are the people of the Pribilof Islands living in servitude?

Not in the strict sense of the word but many carry-over bonds of servitude remain on the islands.

In a nutshell, the Pribilofians live in luxurious surroundings with an appalling lack of independence and security.

They cannot own land. The government owns the homes in which they live. They depend almost entirely upon the government for employment. More than a dozen Pribilofians told this reporter they were afraid to speak at a public meeting for fear of losing their jobs.

Until recently an archaic pass system required everyone coming or going from the islands to have a

permit from the Seattle office of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries.

"I do not consider myself free as you and other people in Alaska," said Gabe Stetin, who has been president of the St. Paul village off and on for 20 years.

Stetin made the statement in a tape recorded interview for publication. He indicated he was taking a chance of losing his job for making the statement.

"We are in servitude," said the Rev. Deacon Smile V. Gromoff, who was forced to resign as president of St. Paul in 1962 when he wrote articles for this paper.

"The only way I became free is by becoming a priest," said Father Michael D. Lestenok, of the Russian Orthodox Church.

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## State Drops Plans To Sell Estates On Lake George

The State has dropped plans for promotion at the New York World's Fair of the sale of Alaska "wilderness estates" along beautiful Lake George in the Tanacross area, according to Roscoe E. Bell, director of Alaska Division of Lands.

The action came after controversy arose over an Indian lands claim by the Tanacross Indians and a protest was filed by the native group with the Bureau of Land Management involving 44,380 acres of land in the George and Healy Lake areas. In Fairbanks last week Bell said the federal government has received a protest from a group of Tanacross area Indians regarding the Bureau of Land Management approval of the State land selection in the Lake George area.

The State made land selections in the George Lake area in 1961, and

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