Unemployment Conference Draws Participants . . .

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answer to our problem but 80 men are out of work and out of this, one man is working as a store manager and three men work as boat captains just in summer...

"...Sometimes we don't get too much work because of poor communications. This is a handicap. This is true of other villages, too."

TOM BROWN of White Mountain:

"...I hope these people will accomplish what they're here for... One big trouble we have is poor communications. When a worker is called, he doesn't know it until it's too late sometimes.

"We need better communications between the village and Nome office—from Nome to villages. Sometimes mail comes the same day the man is supposed to work. Better communication with Nome it would help..."

CHARLIE SHELDON of Shungnak:

"First time I speak in a mike like this but I like it...

"...There only five men working at Bornite—only those who have diplomas..."

MERLIN KOONOOKA of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island:

"...Our village is 37 miles to Soviet Union, closer to Soviet mainland—closer than Alaska mainland...

"...Hunting is not as good as it used to be... And the root of our problem is lack of employment.

"...They train people for some jobs. After trainees graduate, they are forgotten. This is just a waste of money..."

ERNEST NYLIN of Elim:

"...We were all ready for commercial fishing last summer but the commercial fisheries people did not show up..."

CHARLES FRANZ of Port Moller:

"...In our area, shellfish industry has been developed into a year round industry. It is fortunate that village people can come from other areas and work there.

"...The importance of better communications cannot be over emphasized..."

MARTIN OLSON of Golovin:

"...We have a 2,700—foot long airstrip and it is on a spit. It cannot be lengthened. If we had a longer airstrip, maybe someone would buy fish... There should be a system of getting the fish to market.

"Perhaps if a cooperative was formed, fishermen would benefit. We need to have regulation changes in our area on fishing—and we need a bigger airport.

"There should be a system of communication. Perhaps an agency that would process job listings—an agency that would contact workers by radio or wire.

"As it is now, some men go into town and find no work. They used their money to pay their fare and they wind up with no money...

"In Golovin, we have the oldest and biggest reindeer herd owned by Sigfried Ankongak—around 18,000. When the reindeer is range killed, it has real good flavor.

"Sigfried has thousands of pounds of reindeer meat on order. It cannot be hauled with little planes. We need a bigger airport..."

THOMAS JOHNSON of Nome:

"...I have worked for two or three years for a slaughtering facility. There is a standing order for 20,000 head a year. Eleven herders can't butcher 20,000 head a year..."

Many other delegates presented their employment problems. They brought out the situation that has been common in villages that there were usually three people out of the average of about 200 who have year round jobs, and these were usually employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In her presentation to the conference, Patricia T. Mayo, Equal Opportunity Officer of the Federal Aviation Administration, said:

"As the largest employer in the State of Alaska, the federal government has the responsibility of leading the way in eliminating discrimination and assuring that equal opportunity is available to all Alaskans.

"There are many problems to be faced and solved before equal opportunity is a reality instead of a promise. We in the federal agencies know that much needs to be done before all the barriers to equal opportunity in employment are removed."

Miss Mayo pointed out that the first barrier was the lack of, or low quality of, education and training of people applying for federal jobs.

"Our second barrier has been poor communication between people with jobs to fill and people looking for jobs," she said.

"We know that we have not kept native Alaskans well informed about job vacancies in the federal government and what it takes to qualify for them. Lack of good communication has also created fears, both on the part of the employer and the person looking for employment..."

"Another barrier," she added, "is the fact that too many federal jobs require written tests and skills which the native Alaskans do not have the educational background to qualify for."

She said there were other barriers however that prevent the native people, even though they might qualify, from becoming federal employees; that many lived in remote villages where they did not hear at all about the registers opening on civil service jobs, or they did not hear in time to file applications.

That if they did get the opportunity, travel to the test area was so expensive they could not afford it. That if they did overcome the barriers, they may be passed over by the agencies because they were too far away to be interviewed.

"There is a final barrier to be passed," Pat Mayo continued, "assuming that all the others have been conquered—if the applicant is successful, he often must pass a physical examination and meet security requirements before he is accepted and put on the federal payroll."

State Commissioner of Labor, Thomas J. Moore, pointed out the discrepancies in the system of unemployment statistics in the following manner:

"Speaking of statistics, we are beginning to take a better look at our unemployment statistics. How do we know the true scope of unemployment? Right now, I don't think we really do.

"A. I think it is important that we attain better measurement, first because we must know the extent of our problem. Second, public funds are often allocated on the basis of the degree of unemployment in a district.

"B. Our labor market figures are estimated on an original basis of census figures, sample surveys of employers, unemployment insurance claims, etc.

"C. How effective the methodology is cannot be accurately measured now. However, common sense would seem to indicate discrepancies. For example, let us look at the statistics from the Kobuk Election District (Kotzebue).

"There is a total population of 3500 to 3600. Of these, 1835 are over 14 years of age, about 750 are considered in the labor force; that is, persons who are both able and willing to work according to the statistical estimate.

"Further down the statistical chart we find that 540 of these 709 people are employed.

"This leaves a statistical 169 unemployed out of a total population of over 3500. Clearly, this is not a true picture in the general understanding of the term 'unemployed.'

"It is a matter of definitions. Most of us think any able bodied mentally competent person, not financially independent and having no job, is 'unemployed.' For statistical purposes, however, unemployment estimates cover all jobless persons LOOKING FOR WORK. This excludes a great many of our village people, many of whom not only are NOT looking for work, and many of whom the statisticians consider as 'self—employed' by virtue of their subsistence way of life.

"Our definitions are prescribed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and are common to the nationwide definitions of other federal agencies.

"Because we think the methodologies are impractical in their application to the outlying areas, we have corresponded with the U.S. Department of Labor in an attempt to get some new definitions. I assure you we will continue to pursue them."

The conference, held in the National Guard Armory gymnasium through the courtesy of the 1st Scout Battalion headquarters at Nome, presented a number of other speakers.

In his welcoming address, Jerome Trigg expressed the purpose of the meeting:

"...Yet, here we stand in this city at over 80 per cent unemployed.

"We don't have all the story yet, but from what we hear on the radio and read in the newspapers about the finds of the teams of scientists that worked in the Brooks Range and along the Arctic continental shelf this summer —we have riches that should lead to more jobs than we've dreamed of.

"If new or changed methods of mining and mineral extraction are to come to us because of natural deposits in our traditional lands, we, the native people of Alaska, want to be a part of both the labor and the local operations that will surely come.

"It is toward this kind of future we must also lay our plans for continued and permanent employment of Alaskan natives in the North.

"Now, today, it's vital and important to our bellies and our dignity that we earn a decent and honorable living. It is impossible to overemphasize the desperate need we face to develop a secure and integrated role for the Alaskan natives in the development and expansion of the economy of the State in EVERY region—not just in a few oil—rich or fish—rich pockets."

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