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The Alaska Tragedy

Bureaucracy and exploitation of the country by interests that care naught for Alaska's future threaten the ruin of the territory. So desperate is the plight of the unhappy people that they have sent their strongest man to the capital of the United States to beg for succor. Unless there is an immediate relaxation of the strangling methods now being pursued it is claimed that none will be left to mourn the tragedy save the Federal officials who have done their part in bringing it about. The appended dispatch is from Thomas B. Drayton, of Seward, Alaska, who through long residence there is thoroughly familiar with conditions.

Seward, Alaska, August 21.

ALASKA is sending a high commissioner, an envoy extraordinary, to Washington, D. C. He leaves Alaska August twenty-eighth. John Noon, of Seward, is the man delegated as the spokesman, the voice of Alaska united, of commercial and industrial organizations, of the great fraternal order of Alaska pioneers and of the individual men and women who compose the loyal citizenship of this northern land.

His technical instructions charge him with the duty of asking the Federal authorities to relax the bureaucratic rules and restrictions which have gradually throttled Alaskan business activities and finally culminated in the utter prostration of Alaskan industry.

Underlying this ostensible purpose is the hope in every Alaskan heart that his mission will awaken kindly interest throughout the Republic and be taken to embody and typify an appeal from a sorely distressed people to the generous consideration of their countrymen.

The citizenry of the United States at large has no conception of the condition to which Alaska and her permanent residents have been reduced. With great resources on every hand, with every natural advantage, with many good years expended by her people in unremitting toil, Alaska's available tangible wealth is less today than at any time in the past decade. Many of her citizens are at the point of actual want. Sixty per cent of her population has taken fright and sought new homes in other lands. Those remaining in the territory may be roughly segregated into three general classes: the first class includes those who are desperately clinging to the hope of saving a remnant of property accumulated during the years before opportunity was banished and the sources of livelihood were taken from the people; the second is composed of the blindly optimistic who ever hope for amelioration of conditions and whom no misfortune can dismay; the third and preponderant class numerically is made up of such as are at last bereft of hope and through undeserved poverty cannot escape and seek new homes in other lands. To each and all of these classes the cause of Alaska's distress and of its own is as an open book.

The sole cause of Alaska's misfortune is so-called Alaskan conservation and the incidents of its administration through that policy. Alaska has been placed in the identical case of the starving man securely chained just beyond arm's reach of the generously laden dinner table. Surrounded on every hand by available and inviting sources of wealth which he himself discovered and by which he once supplied himself with every wanted comfort and necessity, the Alaskan's prosperity at that time excited the rapacious greed of the financier and exploiter or the fatal solicitude of the visionary and doctrinaire and almost overnight their resources were placed under lock and key and Alaskans were deprived of virtually every source of livelihood.

It is the hope and purpose of Alaska that the mission of this special envoy will result in awakening the American people to these facts, that it will force a full, complete and public investigation of a policy which has wrecked and if continued will soon depopulate this territory of all save Federal employes.

Conservation in the States is far different from the so-called conservation forced upon Alaska. Aside from creating and sustaining innumerable Federal jobs, its only effects in Alaska have been to pauperize men, degrade women and bring cries of hunger to the lips of little children. Alaskans hate it as they hate no other plague, no other pestilence, no other enemy of human happiness and progress.

So-called conservation in Alaska has halted the sprightly step of the youthful pioneer, outlawed progress, throttled industry, driven the home builder from his wilderness acres, and turned him back to the sole possession of the moose, the bear and the other creatures of the wild. Finally, it has brought Alaska's people to the humiliating alternative of abandoning their homes and property accumulated by long years of arduous labor or of publicly confessing to the world that as a people they are at the very threshold of destitution.

Our sources of livelihood were taken from us by Presidents of the United States through the expedient of executive legislation cloaked under the guise of administrative regulation. Hoping that a brief period would bring a renunciation of the fatal blunder and a return to American ideals of governmental policy, we waited in forced idleness with the inevitable result which attends the consumption of one's substance without a source of replenishment.

Further dissimulation and concealment have been recognized by the people of Alaska as both stupid and useless. We have little hope of the agents and agencies which profit by our misfortunes relaxing their grip but the mission of John Noon as the spokesman for this great territory will be effective if the American people are thus enlightened and come to our rescue. Unless this be accomplished, unless the United States Government quickly unlocks the sources of livelihood in this territory nothing can save Alaska from its impending collapse. But slight concession is required. A bare chance is all Alaska needs. Even a slight lifting by the United States Government of the crushing burden of repression will enable Alaska to stagger to her feet. Given a reasonable chance to live and grow Alaska will at once develop a boundless prosperity, radiating comfort and happiness among her people and conferring advantages of incalculable value upon the United States.

Alaska is finally broken and the future is viewed with hopelessness by youth, with dismay and terror by men too old or too poor to go.

This explains the dispatching of our envoy, John Noon, the strongest man among us, to plead with the American people that Alaska be given a chance to live, that white civilians be not blotted out from this last frontier of the American Republic and to these ends that the truth be no longer suppressed.

THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT from time to time has carried articles telling of Alaska's predicament. Other articles are in the course of preparation and readers will be kept abreast of all developments in this, one of the strangest situations that has crept out in American Government in many years.