

Exerpts from the book: "A Recollection of Civil Rights Leader Elizabeth Peratrovich 1911-1958"

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Beginning Chapter VIII , Paragraph nine - The Battle, begining page 20:

The anti-discrimination bill was introduced by Edward Anderson, the Swedish-born former Mayor of Nome. The bill passed the house with little debate by a vote of 19 to 5. When it came up in the Senate, a two hour discussion followed where it was violently opposed by Allen Shattuck. "Far from being brought closer together, which will result from this bill," he said, "the races should be kept further apart. Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who what to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?" Senator Frank Whaley, a bush pilot and gold miner from Fairbanks, also opposed the bill. Declaring that he had an amendment to propose to the measure, Whaley read a lengthy prepared address to the assembly. He labeled the measure "a lawyer's dream and a natural in creating hard feelings between whites and natives." Whaley said he did not want to sit next to an Eskimo in a theater, they smelled. Declaring their opposition to the law, unless amended, Senators Tolber Scott and Grenold Collins also spoke their feelings. Senator Scoot declared, "Mixed breeds are the source of trouble, it is they only who wish to associate with the whites. It would have been better had the Eskimos put up signs 'No whites allowed.' This issue is simply an effort to create political capital for some legislators. Certainly white women have done their part in keeping the races distinct, if white men had done as well there would be no racial feelings in Alaska.

Senator Collens spoke in support of Senator Scott, "The Eskimos are not an inferior race, but they are an individual race. The pure Eskimos are proud of their origin and are aware that harm comes to them from mixing with whites. It is the mixed breed who is not accepted by either race who causes the trouble. I believe in racial pride and do not think this bill will do other than arouse bitterness. Why should we prohibit the of liquor to these Natives, that's the real root of our trouble. Mrs. Kunz recalls one Senator getting so upset he jumped up knocking his chair over and stomped out. The crowd booed his actions.

Senator O.D. Cochran declared himself "personally assailed" by Senator Whaley's remarks and raised his voice in favor of the bill citing instances of discrimination which came from his own knowledge. Senator Walker also held firm in favor of the bill, Senator Joe Green was chairman of the hearing.

Elizabeth Peratrovich listened quietly as witnesses called for separation of whites and

Natives races in Alaska. She heard a church leader sermonize that it would take thirty to one hundred years before Alaska Natives would reach the equality of the whiteman.

Senator N.R. Walker asked Roy Peratrovich, as ANB Grand President, to stand and, following questions that established his education, background and right to speak for Indians, he was then invited to express his views on the bill. Mr. Peratrovich pointed out that the Governor, in his report to the Secretary of the Interior, as well as in his message to the legislature, recognized the existence of discrimination. He quoted the plank adopted by the Democratic Party at its Fairbanks convention, which favored action on the Natives' behalf. A "plank" is stated principles that make up a platform or program of a political party. He read the names of the committee who helped frame that plank and pointed out that among them were members of the present Senate body. "Only Indians can know how it feels to be discriminated against," Peratrovich said. "Either you are for discrimination or you are against it accordingly as you vote on this bill," he added.

According to established legislative custom during the debate on the bill, an opportunity was offered to anyone present to voice their views. Elizabeth Peratrovich, Grand President for ANS, rose in the gallery and said she would like to be heard. She came to the floor, crossed it and sat next to the Senate President on his raised platform. Elizabeth was a beautiful woman with the ability to maintain her composure in even the most heated debate. As she stood before the all male, predominately white legislator's, the packed gallery was tense with expectation. Clearly, the passage of this bill would spell profound social change in Alaska.

"I would not have expected," Elizabeth said in a quiet steady voice, "that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with five thousand years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights. When my husband and I came to Juneau and sought a home in a nice neighborhood where our children could play happily with our neighbors' children, we found such a house and had arranged to lease it. When the owners learned that we were Indians, they said 'no.' Would we be compelled to live in the slums?" Her intelligence was obvious, her composure faultless. After giving a potent, neatly worded picture of discrimination against the Indians and other Native people, Mrs. Peratrovich said, "There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination. First, the politician who wants to maintain an inferior minority group so that he can always promise them something. Second, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones who aren't quite sure of their social position and who are nice to you on one occasion and can't see you on others, depending on who they are with. Third, the great superman who believes in the superiority of the white race." Discrimination suffered by herself and her friends, President Peratrovich told the assembled body, "has forced the finest of our race to associate with white trash." There was awesome silence in the packed hall, you could hear a pin drop.

Asked by Senator Shattuck if she thought the proposed bill would eliminate discrimination, Elizabeth Peratrovich queried in rebuttal, "Do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent these crimes? No law will eliminate crimes but at least you

legislators can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

When she finished, there was a wild burst of applause from the gallery and senate floor alike. There was tears, crying. Her plea could not have been more effective. Opposition that had appeared to speak with a strong voice was forced to a defensive whisper at the close of that senate hearing by a five foot five inch Tlingit woman. The senate passed the bill 11 to 5 on February 8, 1945. A new era in Alaska's racial relations had begun.

Of Elizabeth Peratrovich, the *DAILY ALASKA EMPIRE* wrote, "It was the neatest performance of any witness yet to appear before this session and there were a few red senatorial ears as she regally left the chambers."



**Above writings are Exerts from the book:
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