

Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.  
432 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10016

THE DELEGATION

Mr. Lewis Goodhouse -  
Chairman  
Devils Lake Sioux Tribe  
Fort Totten, North Dakota

is in his 60's and has been tribal  
chairman for 11 years.

Mrs. Lewis Goodhouse -

is in her 40's and is the mother of  
10 children. She is a volunteer com-  
munity health worker and is leading  
the mothers' effort to alleviate child  
welfare problems on the Devils Lake  
Sioux Reservation.

Mrs. Alvina Alberts -

is in her 50's and the mother of 8  
children. She is a Bureau of Indian  
Affairs education counselor

Mrs. Left Bear -

is in her 40's and all her 6 children  
are in non-Indian foster homes off  
the Reservation.

Mrs. Elsie Greywind -

is in her 50's and the mother of 5  
children. She looks after her grand-  
children.

Mrs. Alex Fournier -

is in her 60's and has 19 children, her  
own and foster children. She is currently  
the center of a court case in which the  
Benson County Welfare Board is seeking  
to remove an infant from her custody.



Martin J. Dain



*Sioux delegation at press conference, left to right: Mrs. Lewis Goodhouse, Mrs. Alvina Alberts, Tribal Chairman Lewis Goodhouse, and Mrs. Alex Fournier. Far right: Mr. William Byler, Executive Director of the AAIA.*

# Don't Take Our Children Away, Indian Mothers Plead

By ANTHONY BURTON

For Mrs. Left Bear, a Sioux Indian, yesterday was the day that the renowned stoicism of her people finally deserted her.

The white man had slaughtered the buffalo on which her ancestors had depended. The white man had taken the plains and forests for his own and herded the tribes of Indians onto reservations.

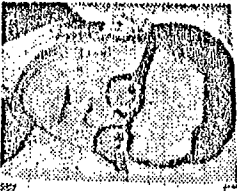
That was history and it could not be changed. But Mrs. Left Bear was suffering another cruelty, and yesterday she came to New York from Devils Lake reservation in North Dakota to plead that this should not become history too.

## Her Children Were Taken Away

She sat in a room in midtown Manhattan and told a press conference that the white man, in the guise of a welfare agency, had stolen all her five children.

The youngsters, aged 8 to 16, had been taken away despite her protests and put in white foster homes.

With her was Lewis Goodhouse, chairman of her tribe, and four other Indian mothers who had firsthand knowledge of what they called child-snatching. Their protest sponsored by the Association on American Indian Affairs, a private charity group,



## Devils Lake

And now, when the Indian comes before us, he is no longer a diversion; he is a reproach and a warning.

There were these six Sioux from the Devils Lake Tribe at Fort Totten, N. D., who stopped at the Overseas Press Club yesterday on their way to Washington and the presentation of their grievance.

One of them was Lewis Goodhouse, their tribal chairman; the others were women. They had come all this way in search of their children. There are only 1,721 Devils Lake Sioux left on the reservation. One quarter of their children have been taken away and put into institutions or foster homes or adopted into families they do not know.

In the winter many Devils Lake Sioux have no resource except public relief. Mrs. Goodhouse says. County welfare makes them wait until they have exhausted their last credit. "The children are always hungry and bare-footed; the starts thinking; the mother starts thinking then they are unfit parents and the welfare takes the children away from them."

they will go to Washington today to repeat their plea to government officials.

Mrs. Left Bear was shy and inarticulate in the strange surroundings of the press conference yesterday. But she did her best, and then the association's executive director, William Byler, took over.

## Fit Everyone in Middle-Class Mold

He said that white welfare workers, with middle-class suburban outlooks, were taking the children away in an attempt to turn them into white people.

He agreed that conditions were bad on the reservations, but added:

"As sad and terrible as the conditions are that Indian children must face as they grow up, nothing exceeds the cruelty of being unjustly and unnecessarily removed from their families."

"On the Devils Lake reservation, approximately 25% of the children born on the reservation are eventually taken from their parents to live in adoptive homes, foster homes or institutions."

"This is 50 times the rate for the nation as a whole. Eighty per cent of all Navajo children between the ages of 8 and 9 are taken from their parents in order to 'educate them' to the white man's way."

Byler said that on the Devils Lake reservation, the

county welfare agency was responsible for removing the children. He claimed that the tribal court which heard the custody cases was intimidated by white officials.

"Today, in this Indian community, a welfare worker is looked on as a symbol of fear rather than of hope," Byler said. "The children, when they hear the sound of a strange car coming down the road, fear that it is the welfare worker coming to take them away."

Another of the Indian mothers, Mrs. Alvina Alberts, said she knew one little boy who said he would throw his spear at the welfare workers if they came for him and then he would run away.

## Little Wealth, Plenty of Love

"They're trying to make white people out of us," she said. "They use their own standards to judge us. What is the difference if an Indian woman has plenty of love but her child is barefoot with a dirty face and jam on his nose?"

Byler claimed that experience had shown there was a high rate of suicide and alcoholism among Indians removed as children from their families.

"And what is so wonderful about white people that we want to change Indians and make them like us?" he asked.

## MURRAY KEMPION

Indians, of course, have the special protection of the ancient treaty pledges of the United States of America and for just as much as that's worth. The Devils Lake Sioux have their own Court of Indian Offenses, governed by tribal statute, and their own judge, Margaret Iron Heart, appointed for them by the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

So the Dept. of Welfare of Benson County, N. D., took its complaints to Judge Iron Heart, who assumed in her confusion that it was her duty to do what the county government told her and surrendered the children.

\* \* \*

One of the pilgrims here was a Mrs. Left Bear, who has had all six of her children scattered by this process to different homes. Another was Mrs. Alex Fournier, who is in her 60s and has been taking in the lost children of other Devils Lake families for more than 30 years now.

There ought to be a time when Mrs. Fournier is recognized as a woman of a peculiar and special nobility instead of the object of a sheriff's pursuit.

"A long time ago, one of the women in the tribe died and left her husband with nine children. They were like steps, they were so close together. I couldn't do with them, and I said to him, 'Why don't you bring them to me? I'll find a place for them.' That was before welfare and we lived by selling firewood."

Now her 18 natural and foster children are grown and gone away, and she has no company except a 3-year-old orphan she had taken in. Last winter the county Welfare Dept. ordered her to surrender him to a white foster mother.

"They said I had boys who had been in jail and sometimes came to see me and that it was a bad influence."

One night the county sheriff descended upon her and Mrs. Fournier held the child while her foster-mother-successor-designate tugged at him. The tribal chairman went off to get his camera and record this triumph of official benevolence, at which the sheriff took alarm and left. Mrs. Fournier is in court now trying to keep her last foster child. "I'd hate to part with him," she says.

The Indians are a warning to us because they were the first Americans guaranteed the special care of the U. S. Government. They gave up to civilization their right to hunt and fish and our treaties promised them the compensation of education, food when needed and our Public Health Services. They were the first wards of our first welfare system.

The St. Bureau of for every of kidnap pot to in Indian M gan is r with the spread the treat as

# Indian friends charge abuse of children

By Peter C. Stuart  
Staff correspondent of  
The Christian Science Monitor

New York

An American Indian assistance group charges that the white man has found a new way to prey upon the red man—plucking away his children and placing them in foster homes.

And a leader in the welfare-rights movement suggests that "child snatching" is a major problem among other deprived Americans.

The Association on American Indian Affairs leveled its charge at a press conference here. Spokesmen said:

- Eighty percent of all Navajo children between ages 6 and 9 are taken from their parents.

- In North and South Dakota, where Indians comprise only 3 percent of the population, Indian children account for nearly half of all children placed in foster homes.

## Removal set at 250%

- On the Devils Lake Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, about 25 percent of children have been eventually removed from their homes—50 times the rate for the United States as a whole.

- Some of the 30,000 Indian children who attend boarding schools operated by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs must do so because welfare workers feel the schools offer a better environment than the home.

William Byler, executive director of the group which claims a membership of 30,000, said Indian children are removed through "the missionary zeal of welfare workers to impose the standards of white middle-class suburbia."

He said welfare workers see only the overcrowding, low income, and other physical limitations of many Indian homes. He said they overlook the rich "emotional environment" to be found there.

## Intimidation charged

Mr. Byler said most Indian children are removed in a manner that is technically legal, but the tribal courts often are "intimidated" by welfare workers—or shunned altogether.

In some cases, however, welfare workers resort to threatening to cut off an Indian foster family's aid if it refuses to surrender a foster child, Mr. Byler said.

The Association on American Indian Affairs flew a delegation of seven Sioux from the North Dakota reservation to New York to dramatize its case.

Blinking into the strange glare of television floodlights at the press conference, they told the human side of the problem.

Mrs. Left Bear, a pretty, young mother, related in broken English how all six of her children had been taken from her and put in non-Indian foster homes off the reservation.

Mrs. Alvina Alberts, a mother of eight with a kindly, bronzed face, protested that

"Indian children lose their Indian identity" when reared outside the reservation.

## Problem emphasized

Dr. George A. Wiley, executive director of the National Welfare Rights Organization, with headquarters in Washington, told this reporter that the removal of children for foster homes is "a very substantial problem"—not only among Indians, but also among other disadvantaged Americans.

He charged that provisions in the recent amendments to the Social Security Act "encourage this." He said welfare agencies now are instructed to make full use of child-placement services as one means of compelling mothers on welfare to take job training.

## Investigations asked

He added that the federal government now offers to reimburse foster parents for child-placement costs at a rate up to three times as great as that for the natural parents (a maximum of \$100 per month, compared with a maximum of \$32 a month).

The Association on American Indian Affairs wants the federal government to investigate charges of "child-welfare abuses" against Indians and to cut "to a minimum" the unnecessary enrollments in Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools.

The group has written Wilbur J. Cohen, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, and Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior, to press its demands. Leaders of the organization and the Sioux delegation planned to follow up with a visit to Washington.

JUL 17 1968

*Byline*

# A proud Indian on the warpath for her tribe

By MARTIN GERSHEN  
Star-Ledger New York Bureau

NEW YORK — She was better educated than most of the Sioux from North Dakota. She had a high school education because, as she explained, her father was a tough old disciplinarian. He made his kids go to school.

That was one reason Mrs. Alvina Alberts came to New York yesterday. The Sioux of Ft. Totten in Benson County, North Dakota, had asked her to speak for them.

The county welfare people, charged Mrs. Alberts, a woman in her 50s, are breaking up Indian families illegally by taking children from poor homes and forcefully sending them off for adoption with white families.

## LOSE IDENTITY

"They want to make white people out of the Indians. They want to assimilate Indians into the white race. They're starting with the kids because they can't do it to us," Mrs. Alberts said proudly.

The story she told was corroborated by five other Sioux who had come to New York with her and by William Byler, executive secretary of the Association of American Indian Affairs.

The Indians of North Dakota, charged Mrs. Alberts, are caught in a cycle of poverty and sickness and

local welfare agencies are physically breaking up families.

The excuse used, she says, is that parents are unfit guardians of their young and that Indian homes are too unhealthy for the children.

"They are using white middle class standards to judge the Indian way of life," said Byler.

## LOVE THE KEY

"What is the difference if an Indian home is poor," asked Mrs. Alberts "as long as there is an abundance of love?"

Mrs. Alberts said in North Dakota there was no way to bring the questionable tactics of the local welfare agencies before the public. That was why she and the other Sioux had come to New York.

"We want our children and our grandchildren but we are not allowed to keep them," Mrs. Alberts said.

"We are told we have no rights. Sometimes we don't know which way to turn or what to do. We need help."

"We are too backward," she continued eloquently. "Sometimes our people just despair and give up their children without a fight."

## THE THREATS

Mrs. Alberts said that welfare workers threaten Indian parents with jail and loss of welfare payments if they do

not give up their children.

Some 50 per cent of the Indian population is unemployed, Byler pointed out. The average Indian family earns \$1,500 a year. Indians hardly have more than five years of schooling, 90 per cent of their housing is substandard and their average age at death is 44 years.

There was a second reason, Mrs. Alberts said she had come to New York. Her son, one of nine children, was killed in Vietnam last February and she felt she had

earned the right to speak for her fellow Indians.

Mrs. Alberts pointed out that although her husband, George is a farm laborer and makes little money none of their nine children had gone bad.

"Don't misunderstand. I'm not bitter about my boy dying in Vietnam. I have two other sons in the service. None of them were drafted. They all volunteered. He died for a good cause."

"You see, we have no Indian draft dodgers or Indians who burn draft cards. When it's time to go, you go. Just like in the old days when the chief said it was time to go on the warpath the young men went."

"That is why I feel I have a right to speak," Mrs. Alberts said. "Besides we have no complaint against the federal government. It's the Benson County welfare people we don't like."

*Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.*



432 Park Avenue South  
New York, N. Y. 10016

MU 9-8720

For further information:  
Press Office: Felice Maier - EL 5-3818

Oliver La Farge, *President*  
(1932-1963)

Roger C. Ernst, *President*  
Benjamin C. O'Sullivan, *1st Vice President*  
Edward P. Dozier, Ph.D., *2nd Vice President*  
Mrs. Henry S. Forbes, *Secretary*  
Thomas Shaw Hale, *Treasurer*  
William Byler, *Executive Director*  
Arthur Lazarus, Jr., Richard Schifter, *General Counsel*

FOR RELEASE TO PUBLICATIONS  
DATED WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 1968

Charges of child-snatching from American Indian parents and coercion by welfare workers through starvation threats were made at a news conference at the Overseas Press Club yesterday (Tues., July 16).

Making the charges was a mothers' delegation of Devil's Lake Sioux Indian women and their Tribal Chairman, Lewis Goodhouse, who came from their North Dakota reservation to New York before their appearance today in Washington, to beseech help from government officials.

The Association on American Indian Affairs, a national citizens' voluntary organization of 30,000 members, called the news conference in order "to expose the scandalous situation regarding forcible removal of Indian youngsters without due process of law, which has reached epidemic proportions," according to William Byler, Executive Director of the Association.

He stated that the rate of American Indian children on the Devil's Lake Sioux Reservation who have been removed from their home environments is 50 times higher than the national rate of all American children separated from home. "This shameful situation should not be allowed to exist in this country," Mr. Byler said.

Children are forcibly removed from their Indian homes and

placed in white foster care because, he continued, "a concerted effort is being made to assimilate Indian children into white society, without regard to the wishes of the Indian people themselves. What the Indians are fighting against is the missionary zeal of welfare workers to impose the standards of white middle class suburbia."

In letters released at the news conference to Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Wilbur Cohen, and to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, the Association on American Indian Affairs requested a probe of child custody abuses that victimize American Indians and the nation's poor people in general.

PLEASE SEE TEXT OF ATTACHED LETTERS FOR DETAILS.

# # # #



*Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.*



432 Park Avenue South  
New York, N. Y. 10016

MU 9-8720

Oliver La Farge, *President*  
(1932-1963)

Roger C. Ernst, *President*

Benjamin C. O'Sullivan, *1st Vice President*

Edward P. Dozier, Ph.D., *2nd Vice President*

Mrs. Henry S. Forbes, *Secretary*

Thomas Shaw Hale, *Treasurer*

William Byler, *Executive Director*

Arthur Lazarus, Jr., Richard Schifter, *General Counsel*

The Association on American Indian Affairs has called upon Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Wilbur Cohen to probe charges by American Indian parents that many of them are unjustly deprived of their children.

In a letter to Secretary Cohen released today, William Byler, Executive Director of the national Indian-interest organization, stated that there is evidence to show that Indian children are unnecessarily and unjustly taken from their parents or Indian foster parents for placement in white homes.

He pointed out that on one reservation in North Dakota approximately 1 out of 4 children born on the reservation are separated from their parents and placed in foster homes, adoptive homes, or in institutional care. He indicated that this rate was 50 times greater than the rate for our society as a whole.

Byler indicated that discrimination by welfare officials and discriminatory standards and laws are a major reason for this high rate.

In a letter to Secretary of Interior Udall released today, Byler also urged the Bureau of Indian Affairs to launch a crash program to reduce sharply the number of Indian children institutionalized in Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools.

The text of the letters to Secretary Cohen and Secretary Udall are attached.

*Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.*



432 Park Avenue South  
New York, N. Y. 10016

MU 9-8720

Oliver La Farge, *President*  
(1932-1963)

Roger C. Ernst, *President*  
Benjamin C. O'Sullivan, *1st Vice President*  
Edward P. Dozier, Ph.D., *2nd Vice President*  
Mrs. Henry S. Forbes, *Secretary*  
Thomas Shaw Hale, *Treasurer*  
William Byler, *Executive Director*  
Arthur Lazarus, Jr., Richard Schifter, *General Counsel*

The Honorable Wilbur Cohen  
Secretary  
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare  
Washington, D. C.

July 12, 1968

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the Association on American Indian Affairs I would like to call to your attention certain acute child custody problems among American Indians and the children of the poor in general.

There is evidence to suggest that in several states a large number of Indian parents or foster parents are unjustly deprived of their children, and consequently the children are subjected to emotional hazards resulting from separation from their parents or Indian foster families.

As an indication of the seriousness of this problem, approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of the children born on one reservation in North Dakota are eventually separated from their parents and placed in foster homes, adoptive homes, or in institutional care (chiefly Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools). This figure indicates that in this tribe the incidence of separation of a child from his parents is 50 times greater than the rate for our society as a whole. In the States of North and South Dakota nearly half of all children placed with foster families are American Indians, yet American Indians represent only three percent (3%) of the total population of these two states.

We believe that these extraordinary figures are an indication of abusive child welfare practices by welfare officials, discriminatory standards and laws in child custody matters, and the absence of appropriate preventive and rehabilitative services to Indian communities. They are emphatically not an accurate measure of the suitability of American Indians as parents.

Indian leaders and parents charge that county welfare workers frequently evaluate the suitability of an Indian child's home on the basis of economic or social standards unrelated to the child's physical or emotional wellbeing and that Indian children are removed from the custody of their parents or Indian foster family for placement in non-Indian homes without sufficient cause and without due process of law.

The Honorable Wilbur Cohen

July 12, 1968

Indian parents and leaders on the above-mentioned North Dakota reservation further allege that Indian foster families have been cut off the welfare rolls in order to coerce those families to surrender custody of their foster children for placement in non-Indian homes.

Additionally, thousands of Indian children are sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools on presumptive evidence as to the unsuitability of the child's home environment and without adequate concern for the suitability of the environment in which the child is placed -- an institutional setting where the child is subjected to severe emotional hazards.

The Association on American Indian Affairs looks to you for the same constructive, practical, and considerate approach to these problems that has characterized your administration in other areas of human welfare. We believe there is an urgent need for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to:

1. Survey child custody problems and official child welfare abuses among the American Indians and among the nation's poor people in general.
2. Develop recommended guidelines for state legislation to guard against discriminatory child welfare practices by establishing culture-free, non-discriminatory criteria in custody matters that do not penalize the poor or the racially different -- guidelines that make the physical and emotional wellbeing of the child the sole test as to the suitability of the child's home.
3. Conduct national and regional conferences and training institutes for State and local court and welfare officials.
4. Evaluate the adequacy of present preventive and rehabilitative services available to the families of the nation's poor in order to minimize those conditions that may make it necessary to remove a child from his home environment.
5. Explore with the Department of Justice and the Office of Economic Opportunity ways to provide legal assistance to parents or guardians who have lost or are threatened with the loss of their children unjustly.
6. Evaluate the adequacy of existing Federal law to protect the rights of parents and children.

We are also writing to the Secretary of the Interior asking his assistance with particular respect to the problem of Indian children placed unnecessarily in Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools.

Your thoughtful consideration of our request is deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,

*William B. ...*

*Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.*



432 Park Avenue South  
New York, N. Y. 10016

MU 9-8720

*Oliver La Farge, President*  
(1932-1963)

*Roger C. Ernst, President*

*Benjamin C. O'Sullivan, 1st Vice President*

*Edward P. Dozier, Ph.D., 2nd Vice President*

*Mrs. Henry S. Forbes, Secretary*

*Thomas Shaw Hale, Treasurer*

*William Byler, Executive Director*

*Arthur Lazarus, Jr., Richard Schifter, General Counsel*

The Honorable Stewart L. Udall  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C.

July 12, 1968

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the Association on American Indian Affairs I am writing to express our deep concern over child welfare problems associated with the placement of Indian children in Federal boarding schools.

According to the figures provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, approximately 30,000 Indian children attend BIA boarding schools. Some of these children are required to attend boarding schools because of the absence of day-school facilities and an adequate road system. Other children attend boarding schools because welfare officials believe that this is a more suitable environment for them than the environment from which they come, for reasons of alleged neglect, abandonment, or abuse by their parents. Additionally, there are those older children who attend boarding schools for educational reasons. It is with the first two groups that we are chiefly concerned.

We consider it urgent for the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to determine the cost of providing a day-school education to all Indian children presently denied this opportunity because of a lack of Federal financing for road-building, school construction, and operation of the schools. We believe Congress should have an opportunity to consider appropriating the necessary funds.

Second, we recommend that the Department of Interior adopt new guidelines and standards for use by the Bureau of Indian Affairs welfare personnel to help insure that children are not unnecessarily and unjustly taken from their parents or Indian foster families for placement in non-Indian homes or BIA boarding schools.

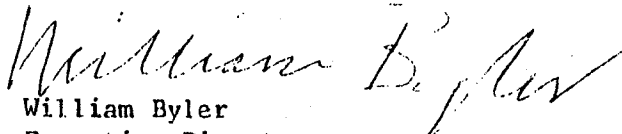
Third, we respectfully urge the Department of Interior to direct the Bureau of Indian Affairs to launch a crash program to identify suitable Indian foster homes so that Indian children who do not have an adequate home environment may receive Indian foster care rather than the institutional care presently provided by the BIA.

The Honorable Stewart L. Udall

July 12, 1968

We are also writing at this time to the Honorable Wilbur Cohen, Secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare on related matters. We are confident that your two departments working together cooperatively can find humane solutions.

Sincerely,

  
William Byler  
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Wilbur Cohen  
Secretary  
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare  
Washington, D. C.

STATEMENT BY WILLIAM BYLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
of the  
Association on American Indian Affairs  
at a  
News Conference held at the Overseas Press Club,  
New York City - July 16, 1968

---

President Johnson has stated that:

"It is a fact -- a shameful fact -- that America's first citizens, our Indian people, suffer more from poverty today than any other group in America ...."

Here is the harsh profile of poverty among American Indians:

Unemployment -- between 40 and 50% -- more than 10 times the national average  
Average schooling - 5 years  
Family income - \$1500  
Housing - 90% of it below minimum standards  
Average age at death - 44 years

It is difficult for most Americans to comprehend the appalling conditions in which the nation's half million American Indian citizens live.

There are Indian people today who live in abandoned automobiles and freight cars; and I know of one Indian family in North Dakota who lives in an outdoor toilet.

An Indian child may die because the mother does not know what a doorbell is, and the doctor does not know that the Indian mother does not know.

As sad and as terrible as the conditions are that Indian children must face as they grow up, nothing exceeds the cruelty of being unjustly and unnecessarily removed from their families. Among more visible kinds of poverty, this problem has gone unnoticed. On the Devils Lake Sioux Reservation approximately 25% of the children born on the reservation are eventually taken from their parents to live in adoptive homes, foster homes, or institutions. This is 50 times the rate for our nation as a whole. Fifty percent of the children placed in foster care in the States of North and South Dakota are Indians, yet Indians represent only 3% of the population of these two states.

The Devils Lake Sioux people and America's Indian tribes have been unjustly dispossessed of their lands and their livelihoods, and now they are being dispossessed of their children.

The delegation of Devils Lake Sioux tribal leaders that have come here today are on their way to Washington to seek redress of their grievances over child welfare abuses on their reservation. Today in this Indian community a welfare worker is looked on as a symbol of fear rather than of hope. The children, when they hear the sound of a strange car coming down the road, fear that it is the welfare worker coming to take them away. Many adult members of the tribe are afraid to speak out on the manner in which they are treated for fear that their children will be taken away from them in revenge.

Thousands of Indian children are placed in Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools, either because of a lack of day-school facilities or because of the alleged unsuitability of their home environment.

I am today releasing a letter I have written to Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Wilbur Cohen requesting a federal probe into official child welfare abuses against American Indians and poor people in general. I am also releasing today the text of a letter I have written to Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall urging that he direct the Bureau of Indian Affairs to launch a crash program to reduce to a minimum the number of Indian children institutionalized in federal boarding schools unnecessarily and to their hazard.

(This was followed by press interviews with Mr. Lewis Goodhouse, Chairman of the Devils Lake Sioux Tribe of Fort Totten, North Dakota, and a delegation of five Devils Lake Sioux mothers).



# AMERICAN INDIANS

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF  
1346 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C. 20036 • ROOM 1019 • 223-5532

## MESSAGE TO ALL INDIAN TRIBES AND ORGANIZATIONS, CLUBS,

---

---

Today is surely a time for collecting one's thoughts. In the past several years a number of outstanding Americans have been brutally slain because they tried to better the lot of their fellow man. Robert F. Kennedy had compassion for the American Indian people the way his brother did for the Appalachian Whites. Over the past two years Senator Kennedy did a great deal to improve the programs available to Indian people and to put the spotlight on Indian problems so that people would understand the Indian and want to help him.

There is no way of knowing what will happen to America now that the assassin's gun has become the method of electing people to office. It would be too much like guesswork to determine what the future of Indians, in fact of all minority groups, now holds. Even today Indian people are in Resurrection City demonstrating against the Poverty situation. Many Indian people have communicated their embarrassment at having Indians agitate against Poverty conditions. They should not be embarrassed, they should be ashamed because most of them are directly the cause of those Indian people having to take to the streets and demonstrate.

Time after time, the National Congress of American Indians has appealed to the various tribes to work together. To support good legislation, to join together to solve problems, to join together to develop programs and policies which will assist all Indian people in achieving peaceful solutions to their problems. But



too many times tribes have tuned us out on their listening sets and have refused to look at what was really happening.

Last year we appealed for support of a Legal Research Program to assist the tribes with their Hunting and Fishing Problems. No tribes wanted to do anything so last week a group of dissident Indians stormed the Supreme Court building after an adverse ruling on Indian Hunting and Fishing Rights. If we had been able to act last year, we would have been able to win those suits and we would not have had the mess and bad publicity last week that we had.

For years we have been asking for assistance in pushing appropriations but very few tribes responded. So now a group of Indian individuals is in Washington agitating for money to do the job in their home communities. ANY responsibility for violence now must fall on those tribes who have stuck their heads in the sand and refused to face everyday problems to the point where their people and other Indian people are willing to go to any extreme, face any danger, to bring change and progress in Indian communities.

After the death of John Kennedy, after Martin Luther King's death and now that Robert Kennedy has been killed, people have mourned and asked why these things happened. These things have happened and will happen so long as the ordinary man does not take any responsibility for what is going on.

The mood of Congress is such that at any time Indians could be completely cut off from all services and programs, their tribes scattered and destroyed and their rights trampled under foot. Congress is not responding to the Poor People's march. Instead there is a good chance that some type of vengeance will be taken on those groups that are agitating. If so, the brunt of the disaster will fall directly on the tribes NOT demonstrating, not on the demonstrators.

The time for dodging the issues is now over. We must not condemn the wrong people. If tribes were unified and working together we would have been able to solve many more of our problems and gotten more progressive programs for our people. We would not have Indians demonstrating in Washington.

For 24 years the National Congress of American Indians has tried to hold the line against bad legislation and promote the good legislation. Tribes have been content to sit by and benefit from the hard work of a few individuals and tribes. Now the crisis we have been trying to prevent is upon us. There is no place you can hide.

The only way out now is absolute unity of purpose and programs. Indians are the only people with a direct legal relationship with the United States -overnment. We do not have to demonstrate to get what we want. We have the legal rights to get all the services we need from the Federal Government. BUT we must know what we want and we must use the proper means of getting it.

BUT tribal councils have sat back and allowed disunity and unwillingness to work together create a violent crisis in Indian Affairs. WE MUST UNITE NOW AND PLAN A UNIFIED INDIAN POSITION BEFORE WE ARE COMPLETELY OVERRUN WITH VIOLENCE.

For your own good and for your future, we urge you to join the National Congress of American Indians and help us push through constructive legislation and present a rational non-violent approach to Indian problems before it is too late. A membership form is included, pass the resolution to join at ypur next council meeting and help us developa strong unified position on legislation that will soothe the hurts and agitation in Indian Affairs and develop a reasonable answer to the problems of Indian people. We have only about 1/3 rd of the recognized tribes in the organization. There can be on other way than unity now, Let's have total unity as quickly as we can so that we can present a unified Indian community to the rest of America.

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE FOR US

STATEMENT BY WILLIAM BYLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
of the  
Association on American Indian Affairs  
at a  
News Conference held at the Overseas Press Club,  
New York City - July 16, 1968

---

President Johnson has stated that:

"It is a fact -- a shameful fact -- that America's first citizens, our Indian people, suffer more from poverty today than any other group in America ...."

Here is the harsh profile of poverty among American Indians:

Unemployment	--	between 40 and 50%	--	more than 10 times the national average
Average schooling	-	5 years		
Family income	-	\$1500		
Housing	-	90% of it below minimum standards		
Average age at death	-	44 years		

It is difficult for most Americans to comprehend the appalling conditions in which the nation's half million American Indian citizens live.

There are Indian people today who live in abandoned automobiles and freight cars; and I know of one Indian family in North Dakota who lives in an outdoor toilet.

An Indian child may die because the mother does not know what a doorbell is, and the doctor does not know that the Indian mother does not know.

As sad and as terrible as the conditions are that Indian children must face as they grow up, nothing exceeds the cruelty of being unjustly and unnecessarily removed from their families. Among more visible kinds of poverty, this problem has gone unnoticed. On the Devils Lake Sioux Reservation approximately 25% of the children born on the reservation are eventually taken from their parents to live in adoptive homes, foster homes, or institutions. This is 50 times the rate for our nation as a whole. Fifty percent of the children placed in foster care in the States of North and South Dakota are Indians, yet Indians represent only 3% of the population of these two states.

The Devils Lake Sioux people and America's Indian tribes have been unjustly dispossessed of their lands and their livelihoods, and now they are being dispossessed of their children.