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A Doctor's
Year in
Vietnam

by John A. Parrish, M.D.

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WOUNDED KNEE
(From page 29)

sioner his first major crisis) assumed that this quiet, almost avuncular Mohawk with his Rotary Club air and businessman's background would turn out to be an "Uncle Tomahawk."

Nor were suspicions allayed when the new Commissioner hired a couple of former fraternity brothers with no knowledge of Indian affairs to help him recruit a new leadership team to fill the directorships inside the BIA. At the beginning speculation centered on new combinations of the same old names. The group often referred to as the "Haskell Indian Mafia" tried to put its candidates into office, as it had been able to do in the past; and the National Council of American Indians, as the blue-ribbon Indian membership organization, demanded the usual right of review and veto when the top positions were finally filled.

But Bruce, urged on by his superior, Assistant Interior Secretary Harrison Loesch (in a momentary enthusiasm Loesch would later greatly regret), surprised everyone by hiring men unlike anyone who had ever

worked at high administrative levels in the BIA. Leon Cook, a Chippewa who had been involved in civil rights work in Minneapolis, came on as Director of Economic Development. Ernest Stevens, formerly a CAP worker on reservations in Arizona and California, was made Director of Community Services: Alexander "Sandy" McNabb, a Maine Indian with experience as an attorney in OEO, became Director of Operating Services. These young activists, none of them associated with the BIA's past history or beholden to the white careerists clogging its middle levels, became the nucleus of what was called the "New Team," although critics would soon refer to them in more pejorative terms, the kindest being "the Katzenjammer Kids."

But whatever they were called, they began to send shock waves through the normally anesthetized world of Indian Affairs. Cook began to fight inside Interior for land and water rights for the reservations; seeing natural resources as the key to economic development, he loudly accused the Interior and the Bureau of the Budget of conspiring together to commit "fiscal genocide" by limiting the BIA budgetary increases that went into soil erosion prevention, forest management, and other natural resource programs. Meanwhile, Stevens was trying to solve the vexing problems of the urban Indian by conceiving him as part of a city-dwelling tribe, rather than a poorly assimilated member of the melting pot, and tried to extend federal services traditionally denied Indians once they had been persuaded to migrate from the reservation; he tried to decrease the power of the BIA administrators in Los Angeles and other relocation centers by cutting down, as he said, "on the number of Indian hides they get to process every year."

"Sandy" McNabb had taken over contracting, which was at the core of emphasis on self-determination. When he made contracts with the tribes themselves for road construction, the operation of schools and other services that had always before been done for them, it was with an eye toward the day when each tribe would be paid to run all its own services, in its own way. A fourth member of the team, Brown-ing Pipestem, a prominent young Indian attorney who had been hired as

special legal assistant, discovered an obscure 1946 Solicitor's ruling presenting the legal rationale for preferential hiring of Indians at high levels inside the BIA and for bypassing whites for promotion. Soon this too was being acted upon.

While the New Team was making the BIA into the Indian's aggressive advocate inside government, Bruce himself was scourging BIA bureaucrats in the field who had always assumed much of the authority over the tribes' daily lives and who had made careers out of slowly and cautiously climbing the civil service ladder. He made it clear that the area directors who ruled over geographical regions like feudal barons would no longer be allowed their old prerogatives. Then he met with the reservation superintendents, those members of the BIA with the greatest stake in a continued paternalism, and told them that in the future he would reward only those who worked themselves out of a job by turning things over to the tribes for which they worked.

At first there was shock that the clubby and time-honored rules of the Bureau had been so outrageously violated. But by mid-1971, a year after the New Team had been formed, area directors and superintendents were getting together in secret meetings at Phoenix and elsewhere to plot a course of action. Their deliberations developed into an open revolt when they discovered that Bruce planned compulsory rotation for bureaucrats who had been settled into their sinecures for too long a time.

Ironically, resistance coalesced around an Indian, a Choctaw woman named Wilma Victor. A BIA careerist who had been serving as director of education in the Phoenix Area office, she was identified with the Eastern Oklahoma Indian establishment that had traditionally been one of the potent conservative lobbies within Indian Affairs. The kingpin of this power structure was W. W. Keeler, chairman of the board of Phillips Petroleum. Keeler had parlayed his 1/16th Cherokee blood into the chieftanship of the Cherokee Nation and an influential role in Indian Affairs as well as the politics of the Department of Interior and the Democratic Party. He had

been offered the job of Commissioner by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and had refused each time, preferring to work unofficially.

Victor's career had suffered a setback in 1970 when she had been serving as superintendent at the Intermountain Indian School in Utah and the treatment of the students there became a public scandal. (They were punished for misbehavior by having their heads dunked in the toilet, it was revealed, and were heavily dosed with thorazine for alleged drunkenness.) This had taken her out of contention for power during the early days of the Nixon Administration. But she had known and worked closely with Rogers C. B. Morton during World War II, and, when he succeeded Hickel as Secretary of Interior, Wilma Victor suddenly became his Special Assistant on Indian Affairs.

Operating directly out of the Secretary's office, she began to harass Bruce and his team. At the same time that she was lobbying with Morton against them, she was trying to poison the minds of tribal leaders against their experiments, playing on the pervasive feeling Indians had developed over the years that any new program aggressively merchandised from Washington had to be bad. Then, late in July 1971, Victor was given the honor of announcing that John O. Crow, a Cherokee mixed blood and former top-level bureaucrat who had been banished from the BIA years earlier for "lack of imagination" by Secretary Udall, was being given the post of Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Crow's authority, as determined by Morton, was to be actually greater than that of Bruce, his nominal superior.

Soon Cook, Stevens, McNabb and all the rest were forced to sit back and watch helplessly as Victor and Crow consolidated their bureaucratic coup and began turning back the clock to what they regarded as the good old days. It was announced that new team member William Veeder, a white BIA attorney and the country's acknowledged expert on Indian water rights, was being transferred to the Phoenix area office. For years Veeder had been patiently, if somewhat illogically, sitting in Washington writing masterful treatises on the embezzlement of Indian water rights that were ignored un-

til Cook came along and began to use them in his struggle to preserve natural resources. But now Veeder was to be removed and be required to work on implementing the Central Arizona Project, a program he had been denouncing for years with the lonely regularity of a Cassandra as an atrocity that would kill the possibility for economic self-sufficiency in any of the Colorado River tribes.

The BIA was moving back to the chaos and inertia that had always been standard operating procedure. On the weekend of September 22, 1971, tribal leaders from all over the country came to Washington to find out what was going on and to protest the fate of Bruce and the New Team. While they sat in a crisis meeting in the Interior Department, a joint demonstration by AIM and the National Indian Youth Council at the BIA building across the street suddenly erupted into a free-swinging melee with the Washington, D.C. police, ending in 24 arrests.

Soon a hint of the byzantine internal politics swirling through the BIA corridors began to make its way into the newspapers. When asked about it, President Nixon told reporters that he had, as a matter of fact, just instructed Secretary Morton to "take a look at the whole bureaucracy handling Indian Affairs and shake it up, shake it up good." The trouble was that this advice came at exactly the moment when the BIA bureaucracy had settled back into power by pulling off an Administration-sanctioned counterrevolution.

A month or so after the blowup in Washington, I spent some time talking to members of the New Team about what had happened. By then a tenuous balance of power between them and the Crow-Victor faction had been achieved. The transfer of William Veeder had been killed by a mobilization of congressional support on his behalf. ("We've turned on the lights around this place for the first time ever," Veeder told me, "and I don't give one hoot in hell what they finally do to me, they'll never be able to shut them off again.") Yet there was a *fin de siècle* mood and a universal feeling that Bruce's experiment was over even though opponents had not yet managed to formally kill it off.

Lee Cook was most bitter of all. "When you talk about education, housing, roads and that sort of thing," he said, "the Indians out there will nod their heads politely and agree. But when you start talking about grazing fees, timber, water—that sort of thing—they really listen. Indians know their boundaries exactly; they can tell you exactly what their land and resources are. And they know when they're getting screwed, which is always. Sure, they care about health, education and that sort of thing; but they can always get that sort of thing in the city, and they know it. What I tried to do here is to make the trust relationship work, make the trustee—that's this office—really *accountable* for the lands and resources he takes care of.

"This land is the last land around, and white interests really want it. I learned how that works on my trips over to the Interior Department. And as for your average BIA career guy, he could care less about the Indians' land and resources, just so his bureaucracy holds up. Sometimes I think we'd be better off if they'd call the reservations nesting grounds and us an endangered species. Maybe they should just scrap the BIA and start putting us on stamps and devoting money to our survival the way they do the bald eagle."

The others were also despondent. As Ernie Stevens said, "We've pretty much been reduced to sitting here and playing the adversary and making sure that even if we can't do anything ourselves, at least we're able to get on the phone and tell the people out on the reservations when they're getting screwed." Given the \$40 million Adult Vocational Training program (the euphemism which had officially, but not practically, replaced "Relocation"), Stevens had first tried to keep Indians from being shipped thousands of miles from their homes and then had tried to emphasize college scholarships with the budgeted money instead of using it, as had been done before, to get Indians into courses in cosmetology and auto mechanics. "Even if you try something as mild as this," he said, "they oppose you. They just love this goddamned relocation program. It terminates individuals."

Cook resigned from the BIA shortly after I spoke to him. Stevens and

McNabb stayed on out of a sense of loyalty to Bruce and to make sure that the Victor-Crow forces had opposition. For the next year they existed in a kind of limbo, as the BIA once again became a hotbed of paralysis. This stagnation was paralleled in Congress where hard line Westerners whose states include substantial Indian lands continued to tie up the legislative program the Nixon Administration had proposed for Indians two years earlier.

Things can and do stand still in Washington, but laws of motion are not so easily suspended elsewhere. On reservations throughout the country, the mood turned from cautious optimism back to bitterness and despair. Their consciousness of their "plight" was more developed than ever before because of Great Society rhetoric and the Republicans' extravagant promises. This made them doubly conscious of the fact that things were going backward with dizzying speed. Strip mines were gouging the heart out of Indian lands from New Mexico to Montana; Indian water was being diverted from the Paiutes' Pyramid Lake and other Indian areas; hereditary fishing rights were being denied the galaxy of small tribes living along the waterways of the Pacific Northwest; and everywhere, from Pine Ridge to California, more and more land was going out of Indian hands and into white control.

By the fall of 1972, the American Indian Movement and other militant organizations had combined to organize the Trail of Broken Treaties, a caravan bringing protestors from all over the country to Washington for the eve of the national election. At issue was not only the fate of Bruce's New Team, but a whole range of critical issues including guidelines the Indians had developed for the protection of their land and resources. When it became clear that nobody in the government was willing to hold serious discussions, the Indians occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, the scene of past and present crimes. They brought in arms and explosives, and only a dramatic last minute appeal by Louis Bruce, who had his finest hour, kept the riot-gear D.C. police from being ordered to storm the building.

Ernie Stevens, who was there for some of the negotiations and who stayed with the protestors during the

occupation of the building, says: "We'll never know what the Commissioner saved us from. After the stand-down, I was talking to one of the police lieutenants who told me it might cost as many as 20 police if he had been forced to move on the building. God knows how many Indians.")

In the aftermath of the occupation and the spectacular vandalism that caused some \$2 million worth of damage, Bruce and the remnants of his New Team left the BIA, as did John Crow. Early this year, Marvin Franklin, a part Indian with an almost mystical belief in private enterprise as a solution for Indian problems, was brought to Washington from Phillips Petroleum, where he had been W. W. Keeler's special assistant. When Franklin was made Temporary Commissioner of Indian Affairs, it was a final insult, but by then it didn't matter. The battle lines seemed clearly and inescapably drawn, and the spirit of hope and promise that had characterized the government's attitude toward Indian affairs some three years earlier had been replaced by an ugly and vindictive mood.

It was the dead of winter, 1890, when several hundred Sioux, alarmed by news of the recent report of a new war with whites, decided to journey to the agency at Pine Ridge for security and protection. At an obscure spot called Wounded Knee Creek, they were suddenly surrounded by U.S. soldiers and told to surrender their arms. The warriors were then ordered to come out and sit in the snow while their tipis were searched. When the troopers handled some of the women and children roughly, some of the warriors jumped up, and when one of them fired a single shot from a concealed pistol, the soldiers loosed a point-blank volley into the Indians while Hotchkiss guns at the rim of the encampment poured down explosive shells into their midst. When the shooting ended, there were more than 140 Sioux dead, some of them having fled three miles into nearby gullies and ravines before being cut down. By the time the cameras were set up, the troopers had piled up the bodies. Squinting up at the photographer, they posed with thumbs tucked into their Army issue suspenders, ready to



COURTESY OF NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Massacre at Wounded Knee, 1890

tip the frozen corpses into a common grave.

These photographs are a terrifying summary of the long death of the Plains Indian and a testament to the demonic innocence of our national past. The American Indian Movement went to Wounded Knee, however, not only because it was the most symbolic landmark on the bloody map of Indian history, but also because they felt that the place comments on what is happening now that massacres are no longer crude affairs, but achieved subtly and without bloodshed.

There are things that they can be faulted for—a lack of clarity in their pronouncements, a theatricality that occasionally threatens to cheapen their protest, and an involvement in the factionalism that has always debilitated Indian politics. But all these things notwithstanding, AIM's basic purpose is clear: like an Indian ritual from the past, their acts are dedicated to achieving power and renewal for their gravely menaced community.

Far worse than any pretensions these Indians may have about themselves, however, is the government's delusion that the current crisis in Indian affairs is the result of "trouble-makers" who have created unneeded confrontations. Dividing Indians into "hostiles" and "friendlies," of course, is nothing new. And indeed, perhaps if Russell Means, Dennis Banks and a few of the others can be convicted and thrown in jail, things might return to normal for awhile. But normalcy, where Indian affairs are concerned, is a kind of institutionalized criminality that passes for administration, and in the long run there would be resistance even from the traditional and moderate sectors of the Indian community, who have seen in the past three years exactly what the stakes are.

Hard times have returned for the first Americans, at a moment when the country seems to have become desensitized about their problems. But even if Indians are not as fashionable as they were a couple of years ago and we don't care about their travails, we would do well to remember—as the eminent jurist Felix Cohen once pointed out—that the red man has always functioned in this society as a sort of miner's canary: the way he is treated tells how much poison there is in the political air around us. ■

LAND IN CHILE

(From page 20)

just how this works out. It is a courageous political act because rationing has never been popular with any electorate.

It was surprising to learn from conversations with Jacques Chonchol, minister of agriculture until last November, and Rolando Calderon, the present minister, that the government knows these problems intimately and does not shrink from them. (Chonchol worked for FAO once, and also in Agrarian Reform under the Christian Democrats until he broke with them, and is undoubtedly an expert; Calderon is of peasant origin and worked his way up through peasant unions from the days when such work had to be clandestine.) Both men take the recommendations of ICIRA seriously, but see the problems involved as complexly political rather than simply technical. For example, all the agencies involved with land reform (and besides CORA, there are half a dozen others engaged in distribution, purchasing, rental of tractors and machines) do not all belong to the Ministry. The Agrarian Reform Law does not provide for distribution or purchasing cooperatives; for this the government has had to find old, little-known laws. Parliament, in the hands of the opposition, controls the budget. The political hurdles seem endless.

The Unidad Popular appears divided these days between those who believe that the middle class and professionals must be wooed and those who advocate more militantly socialist measures. Consolidation or expansion? I asked Calderon where he stood. "There can be no consolidation without expansion," he replied. Consolidation means to him that more people must be brought into the new farms, better financing arranged, a more efficient organization of all work teams developed, and the peasants imbued with greater consciousness of discipline. But expropriations must not stop; there are many estates that under the law are expropriable, and the 35 percent now in the social area cannot guarantee the grand objectives of Agrarian Reform: the end of food imports.

There was no criticism I raised—from my finding asentamiento presidents wasting days getting into town to find CORA bureaucrats to my pre-

dicting future conflicts between asentamientos and the still landless afuerinos—that Calderon did not know about. "I have taken that problem up to cabinet level," he responded a couple of times and then became understandably vague about what was decided there. Agrarian Reform, he believes, is part of a nationwide socialist program and its problems cannot be solved without a national effort. "There are great sacrifices to be made," he said, "and the workers and peasants will understand."

That last was said with great feeling, but it is, after all, rhetoric. The problems remain. The political future of the Unidad Popular depends on the solutions it finds for them. The opposition has been incensed by the methods and the pace that CORA has taken in the last two years. My one sure conclusion is that the changes are irreversible. Many things in Chile make this clear—their legalistic tradition, for one—but an exchange I had with Marileo, the Mapuche president of Huichahue, convinced me in the human way that gives authority to politics.

We were standing on a hill overlooking the pastures of Huichahue, and Marileo pointed to the lands of the new asentamiento across the road. The members of Huichahue had been helping them with advice and machinery. "Do all of you live better?" I asked. Marileo replied seriously, "There is no comparison."

I tried again: "Are you happy?"

He nodded and then slowly smiled. "I was talking to the president of the new asentamiento the other day and he asked me. Do you think a new government will try to take our lands? I told him no. If they try, he said, there will be civil war. I said yes." ■

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