

### The National Indian Youth Council's *Statement of Policy, 1969*

Since earliest contacts with western man, the American Indian has been considered unproductive, unprogressive, and unco-operative. Because we have been classified as a culturally deprived people, we have been subjected to systematic study by foreign cultures, resulting in the imposition of institutions and programs to "improve our condition." Millions of dollars have been poured into projects by the government to help the American Indian; somehow, this money has bypassed the majority of tribal communities and ended up in the pockets of administrators and so-called Indian consultants.

Abandoning a program of militant extermination of the Indian, the government has tried to dictate, through the establishment of colonial structures, the direction of Indian life. Concepts of tribal integrity and cultural equanimity have been overlooked in favor of enculturating the Indian and assimilating him into the American mainstream as fast as possible. The failure of this policy can be evidenced by the existence of 400,000 Indians still living within a tribal system in reservations through the United States. Most of these people live in communities with economic levels well below the poverty criterion. . . . The unwillingness to submit to the government's system of cultural death by allowing oneself to exist under these living standards seems, to us, to be a fight as real as the Indian Wars of the previous century. The weapons employed by the dominant society have become subtler and more dangerous than guns—these, in the form of educational, religious, and social reform, have attacked the very centers of Indian life by attempting to replace native institutions with those of the white man, ignoring the fact that even these native institutions can progress and adapt themselves naturally to the environment.

The major problem in Indian affairs is that the Indian has been neglected in determining the direction of progress and monies to Indian communities. It has always been white people or white-oriented institutions determining what Indian problems are and how to correct them. The Establishment viewpoint has neglected the fact that there are tribal people within these tribal situations who realize the problems and that these people need only the proper social and economic opportunities to establish and govern policies affecting themselves. Our viewpoint, based in a tribal perspective, realizes, literally, that the Indian problem is the white man, and, further, realizes that poverty, educational drop-out, unemployment, etc., reflect only symptoms of a social-contact situation that is directed at unilateral cultural extinction.

Realizing the rise of ethnic consciousness and the dangers of policies directed at that consciousness, the National Indian Youth Council was formed to provide methods of action to protect the tribal communities through the implementation and co-ordination of educational resources. The nature of this work has, basically, been directed into research, training, planning, and programming at community, tribal, and national levels. Believing firmly in the right to self-determination of all peoples, we attempt to reverse the hierarchical structure of existing agencies such that "the People" directly

determine the policies of organizations and bureaucracies established to serve them: Therefore, we act as resource individuals to serve our people.

The American Indian has been communicating for the past two centuries; it is time that someone listened. The era of the young Indian as spokesman for his people has, we hope, ended. Realizing that we are of a marginal nature, we are not qualified to act as representatives for a tribal people in voicing, deciding and, judging issues relevant to these people. We are prepared to address our people, not as "potential leaders," but as resources. Leaders arise from the people; an Indian leader cannot be delegated by the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] or manufactured out of the tribal community by American society through an education that largely ignores his native culture.