

Advocate for who

In the United States the situation of Indian people continues to deteriorate. While Assistant Secretary of Interior for Indian Affairs, Ken Smith, moves selectively around the country touting the administration's great Indian record, his own agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), continues to release statistics on the rapid Indian social decay.

Indians have never had it good since the European invasion, but in the last two years Indians have experienced community and family break-up on a scale unknown during the previous period that Smith's boss, James Watt, has described as "socialism". With an unemployment rate of 80 percent among a small national group of around two million people, one wonders why things have not begun to burn down. Any other group in the country with a similar situation would not be so constrained.

Indian people are now being treated to a bureaucratic road show in which Ken Smith is travelling the country defending the Administration's notion that budget cuts are good for Indians. His main defense of that policy is that private enterprise is inherently better than government intervention regardless of how much suffering results. This is a fairy tale about a fairy tale.

He insults our intelligence by telling us that things have never been better in Indian country. He could give us a little credit for intelligence if he were merely preaching that prosperity is just around the corner. In these meetings he has an amazing capacity to bear up under a torrent of verbal abuse from the tribal chairman and demonstrates an almost comical ability to smile off any criticism.

Ken Smith is the first Indian head of the BIA in recent memory who has seen his job as primarily justifying the government's Indian policy to Indian People rather than explaining to the government what Indian problems and concerns are.

His response that his critics are just professional trouble makers has managed to earn him the enmity of both principled men and crass opportunists alike. He seems to be travelling across Indian country on a Seventh Calvary passport. Either he knows what he is doing or he is the greatest somnambulist in Indian history.

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BOTTOMING OUT

