

No celebration for Indians

The Bicentennial is "no celebration" for American Indians, Phillip Deere, a Creek-medicine man and spiritual leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM), told an audience of about 200 persons at the University of Minnesota this week.

"I cannot go along with that celebration until they give me the same freedom they (the white men) were looking for when they landed here," Deere said. "Until that day comes when we are all equal, there will be no freedom and, perhaps, no peace."

Deere pointed out that the last 200 years' history for Native Americans includes President Jackson's drive to remove Indians from the eastern United States, the Wounded Knee massacre and the Sand Creek massacre.

"That is called civilization," he said. "We were a civilized people in our way before the white men came. We had no jail houses or insane asylums. Can you establish a country or a nation any better than that?"

Deere, who is also the firemaker for the Creek nation in Oklahoma, said Indian people cannot be "first-class citizens" as long as their lives are controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "There is no bureau for white people, yellow people or black people," he said.

"When I talk about being free, I don't mean the freedom to go in bars or stay in fancy hotels," Deere said. "I mean the freedom to raise my children in the Indian way—the freedom to practice my religion."

"We do not have freedom of speech," he said. "The Sioux people who are now in Washington are not allowed to talk to President Ford—this is not freedom of speech." (He was referring to a delegation of Oglala people who have requested a meeting with the President. At this time their request has not been met.)

"The press has been unfair to us," Deere said. "At Wounded Knee (in 1873), they took a picture of a young Indian boy with a gun and planted seeds in the hearts of American people. Now when you hear about AIM, you think about a boy with a gun or a building being taken over."

"They say AIM is violent. If an animal is wounded and protects himself—is that violence?"

"AIM has restored pride to Indian people," he said. "Today voices of Indians are heard throughout the country."

Deere also criticized the United States for the energy crisis, pollution and dependence on other nations.

"We have gotten so far away from the original instructions of life, we are afraid to drink the water," he said. "After 200 years, we are not self-sufficient, we are dependent on others to fill our stomachs—look at the shelves in any grocery store."

"The Indian way of life has been tested over thousands of years—and I see no energy crisis, no pollution," he said. "Only Indian people are concerned about the unborn."

Deere's talk was sponsored by the American Indian Student Association.