

Young Indians Take to Demonstrations Protesting Job Discriminations by BIA

Many groups of young people have turned to demonstrations and take-overs to make their voices heard—and the Indians are now no exception.

Their target: the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Their complaint: that the agency discriminates against Indians in its hiring and promotion policies.

The demonstrations originated last month in Littleton, Colorado the site of the BIA's Plant Management Engineering Center.

Inspired by the Littleton group, other Indian young people in North Dakota, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Washington, and Wisconsin have made plans to stage similar protests against the BIA.

A spokesman for the growing movement said that this is the first time Indians have acted so massively around a single issue.

He pledged that the protest would continue until the BIA enacts policies to prevent discrimination against Indian employees and until those running the BIA respond affirmatively to Indian people.

Officially, the movement is sponsored by the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), an affiliation of 3,000 Indian young people nationwide.

It was this group that filed a formal complaint of discrimination against the BIA's Plant Management Engineering Center in

Littleton on March 12.

The complaint noted that the center employs 120 people of which only 17 are Indian despite the fact that the BIA has a policy of Indian preference in hiring.

It further alleged that the Littleton office discriminates against Indians in promotions, training opportunities, and policies regarding sick leave and annual leave. The complaint led to a demonstration on March 14 in front of the center's office followed by a sit-in and then occupation of the facilities.

For three days, 30 local Denver Indians held the building. During this time they drew up 11 demands.

These demands were presented to BIA commissioner Lewis R. Bruce who flew in from

Washington, D.C. to meet with the Indians in the occupied building. Commissioner Bruce expressed sympathy for those involved in the Littleton situation, and signed eight of the demands presented to him.

According to reports one of the Indians stressed to him why they were taking such action.

"To Indians," he said, "the BIA is not just another agency. It determines where, who and what we are taught in school. It determines who our tribal leaders are and who will receive assistance from the government. While non-Indians are in some way affected by a variety of government agencies, we Indians are totally controlled by only one. What this one agency, the BIA does, is of the utmost concern to us."

The demands signed by the Commissioner, call for an all Indian BIA, the suspension of the three top officials of the center in Littleton.

As also signed by the Commissioner, the Indians demanded that the BIA's policy of Indian preference in hiring be extended to cover all personnel policies such as promotions, and selection of training, and that a review board be established to insure that the Indian people receive fair treatment in the BIA.

One of the demands which Bruce did not sign was one calling for his own removal. Though Bruce is an Indian, the group charged that the Republican administration has chosen a man who has no concern for the welfare of American Indians.