

Editorial Comment—

Terribly Wounded BIA Will Never Be the Same

The seat of the Bureau of Indian Affairs system in Washington, D.C. has been dealt painful wound by the people to whom it administers services — the Native American Indians of the land. Although the Indians who did damage to the BIA are something of a splinter group, mostly urbanized people, they are nevertheless the same people as those on reservations. At any rate, the wound is of such proportions that the BIA will never be the same from here on and into the future. If the agency is to exist, it will have to make a new beginning based on more realistic approaches taking into account the distinctive lifestyle of the people it services as one of the main objectives to aid and abet.

Last week, urban Indians and their leaders took over

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the Washington, D.C. BIA building and held it for a week. During the process, thousands of cubic feet of records were destroyed, furniture was smashed, art objects defaced and stolen. The damage has been set at close to \$2 million. That is a lot of damage. It is most appalling. What is going to be done to those who were responsible? Should they be punished? The latter suggests at once that they would become martyrs if such is carried out. It could make a bad and delicate situation worse if retaliatory moves were to be made. It might be a good idea if those responsible for damages were handled by their own people. It should be remembered that the Indians themselves have their own law ways.

What the Indians did to the BIA building has come out of many injustices. "Trail of Broken Treaties" used as the movement theme denotes the glaring reason behind the Indian action. They have been victims of genocide within the great land they once owned. They have been subjected to the ruthless and relentless effort of assimilation "to the mainstream of American life" for 200 years. This has been one of the most glaring failures of the BIA during the great many years of trying. Still there are people in it today who believe in this inane effort. What the assimilation effort has succeeded in doing is that it has robbed the Indian people of their spirit to meet their problems.

Despite the massive effort of assimilation, great many of the Indian people have managed to hold on to their lifeways, traditions and arts. They still have their songs and dances. They still have their reasoning, fair and wise leaders. These are the basic areas the new BIA, or whatever successor it might be, to take into account and go forward from there. If this direction is taken, who knows, the terrible wound the BIA absorbed last week might heal in shorter time than people expect.