

Indian Students Demand Bill of Rights from U.S.

(From the LOS ANGELES TIMES)

By PAUL HOUSTON

A group of 11 young Indians walked into the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs here Monday and demanded adoption of a "student bill of rights."

All agreed it was something of a historic event. Never before in Los Angeles, and only once before in another city, had migrants from reservations broken with traditional Indian silence and voiced their grievances in a body.

The "bill of rights" document handed bureau officials at the new Federal Building reflects strong dissatisfaction with counseling, job training, job placement, housing subsistence allowances and social-recreational activities provided in the bureau's relocation program.

The document was signed by about 100 of the more than 200 young Indians enrolled by the bureau in vocational training schools.

Students Organize Council

Fresh off many reservations throughout the West, 18 to 26 years of age, the students have in the past six weeks organized an Indian Student Action Council to coordinate the protest.

Council members, accompanied by two staff members of the Indian Welcome House, 2610 W. 8th St., spent two hours Monday going over the "bill of rights" with D. F. Mahoney, director of the relocation center here, and four members of his staff.

In the sometimes acrimonious discussion, Mahoney said he would be happy to review the grievances but would not be able to adopt or reject any parts of the "bill of rights" until he has had to study them.

However, he ordered Jack Mauterer, the chief of counselors, to set up meetings of students, counselors and school instructors to see about unclogging lines of communication.

And he seemed to satisfy a key wish of the students by agreeing to meet with the Student Action Council once a month to consider individual complaints as well as overall bureau policy.

Several of the students, however, expressed belief that little had been accomplished.

The Rev. William Ng, director of the Indian Welcome House and organizer of the protest, said he feels the bureau "will continue to treat Indians as statistics, not as real people with real human needs."

"I feel the BIA office," he said, "is trying to push through as many students as possible to get a name for itself as the largest relocation center in the country."

The first item in the "bill of rights" states that Indian students are entitled to professional counseling.

"Low Image" Cited

"Many counselors have a low image of the American Indian and have set very low goals for him," Ng said. Most young Indians are encouraged to take training in manual skills, such as welding and auto repair, rather than training in professional skills, he noted.

"The BIA is geared toward six- and nine-month vocational training courses rather than two- and four-year colleges," Ng said.

"The BIA needs to experiment with challenging Indians to be leaders—to break the poverty cycle—by enrolling them in colleges. With supportive counseling, they can become teachers and engineers."

(Mahoney told The Times his center is limited by law to offering the type of vocational training it makes available.)

On the counseling item, the students also demanded an improved orientation program as well as regular and convenient meetings with counselors.

The second item in the rights document concerns quality education.

Demands were made for assignment of students to schools located close together so that Indians may join in social, cultural and recreation activities together. Presently, schools are scattered all over Los Angeles and Orange counties.

The students demanded that they be allowed to follow the same course schedules as those of non-Indian students. Some students have had their days extended to compensate for abbreviated course schedules.

They also demanded that the bureau use public instead of private trade schools in order to save money and provide for increased subsistence allowances and more counselors.

Housing Item

The third item in the rights document referred to "appropriate housing."

Two roommates, Judy Campbell, 20, a Spokane Indian, and Vivian Del Court, 19, a Chippewa, said the bureau "tried to put us up in an old hotel with cockroaches" and then placed them in a boarding house with no privacy.

The two cosmetology students found "a half-way decent place" for \$125 a month on their own.

The fourth item concerned "adequate finances." After providing transportation from the reservation to the city, the bureau gives each student a subsistence allowance and medical coverage until his training (paid for by the government) is completed and a job is found.

Miss Del Court and Miss Campbell each receive \$160 a month. After rent and bus fare, "there's hardly enough left over for clothes and personal needs and we kind of scrimp and scrape along," they said.

The students want this allowance increased.