

Conference praises ANCSA

By Sandy Johnson Osawa

The recent Sun Valley Conference on "Indian Self-Rule" produced some critical, often caustic assessments of the Indian Reorganization Act. Historians, scholars, and tribal leaders throughout the country came both to praise and to bury John Collier, the architect of the IRA.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis, however, came from the well-crafted pages of a conference paper prepared by the often witty, sometimes late and always philosophical, Hank Adams. Called perhaps, "the most important Indian of this past half-century," by Vine

Deloria Jr., Hank is best known for his unrelenting struggle for treaty-based fishing rights.

Never one to be brief, Hank was still deeply involved in what was supposed to be a pre-conference statement, when the opening remarks of the conference began. Mid-way through the conference, Hank was still writing long into the earnest hours of the morning amidst books, confidential memos, personal 20-year files, and his own often uncomfortable-for-many recollections. Finally, after an all-night drive from Olympia to Sun Valley, and a quick shave in the park-

ing lot, Hank emerged with zeroxed copies of a "statement" which would eventually total 90 pages.

Red Power

In opening remarks to a panel addressing Red Power, Hank read from an announcement he said he had just received. It read, "John Collier, Dwight Eisenhower, and Arthur Watkins are dead . . . and if they're not, they should be."

While there was laughter from many, there were also blank stares and confusion. One Seattle reporter mis-interpreted the remark to mean that

(Continued on Page Five)

IRAs reviewed critically; ANCSA praised

(Continued from Page One)

Hank laughed at the death of Eisenhower. Hank explained that Indian people have been battling termination for so long that we lose sight of other pressing issues.

Adams rapped historians for their condescending analysis of Indian affairs, noting that most books trace the origins of Red Power to an NCAI parade in the 60's where members of the National Indian Youth Council waved a red flag.

He chided that this is "like explaining that the American Revolution began with Betsy Ross sewing the first American

tive people in this half-century. He noted that both these achievements were brought about by Natives who were not connected with any organization, bureaucracy, or IRA tribal government.

The people who wrought these achievements were not "organization men" whose the pages. In contrast, however, he called the Indian Claims Commission Act, the most "damaging" and "scandalous" policy in 20th century Indian affairs.

Termination had Roots in IRA

Adams further moved to correct the historical interpreta-

By 1948, the Hoover Commission had announced that "assimilation must be the dominant goal of public policy toward Indians." By the end of 1951, field relocation centers had been opened to serve the national displacement of Indians off the reservations.

No Indian Opposition

Adams notes that by the end of the Truman administration, termination policies were already developed, and in the absence of any full scale Indian opposition, the Eisenhower administration simply carried them out.

Equally critical of Indian leadership, Adams says that Eisenhower's name is linked with termination measures simply because no full scale Indian opposition to these deadly measures was mounted until the end of 1954. He credits Wisconsin's Melvin Laird, and Washington State's Julia Butler Hansen for sounding the death knell of termination on the floor of Congress in 1965.

Significant changes began to occur under both the Johnson and Nixon administrations with their stated policies of self-determination and a renewed emphasis on trust obligations. Such policies, however, did not trickle down to those who continued to fight for their fishing, land, water, and treaty rights during the turbulent 70's, typified by such events as the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Bureau of Indian Affairs occupation.

Taking direct aim at the laudatory goals of the IRA to grant Indian Tribes "complete economic independence" and "self-determination," Adams declared that Indian people remain far removed from either goal a half-century later.

IRA Failures

Adams cites the Pine Ridge Reservation today as one of the best testaments to the monumental failures of the Indian Reorganization Act. In this connection, Robert Thomas' classic study of hidden colonialism at Pine Ridge comes to mind.

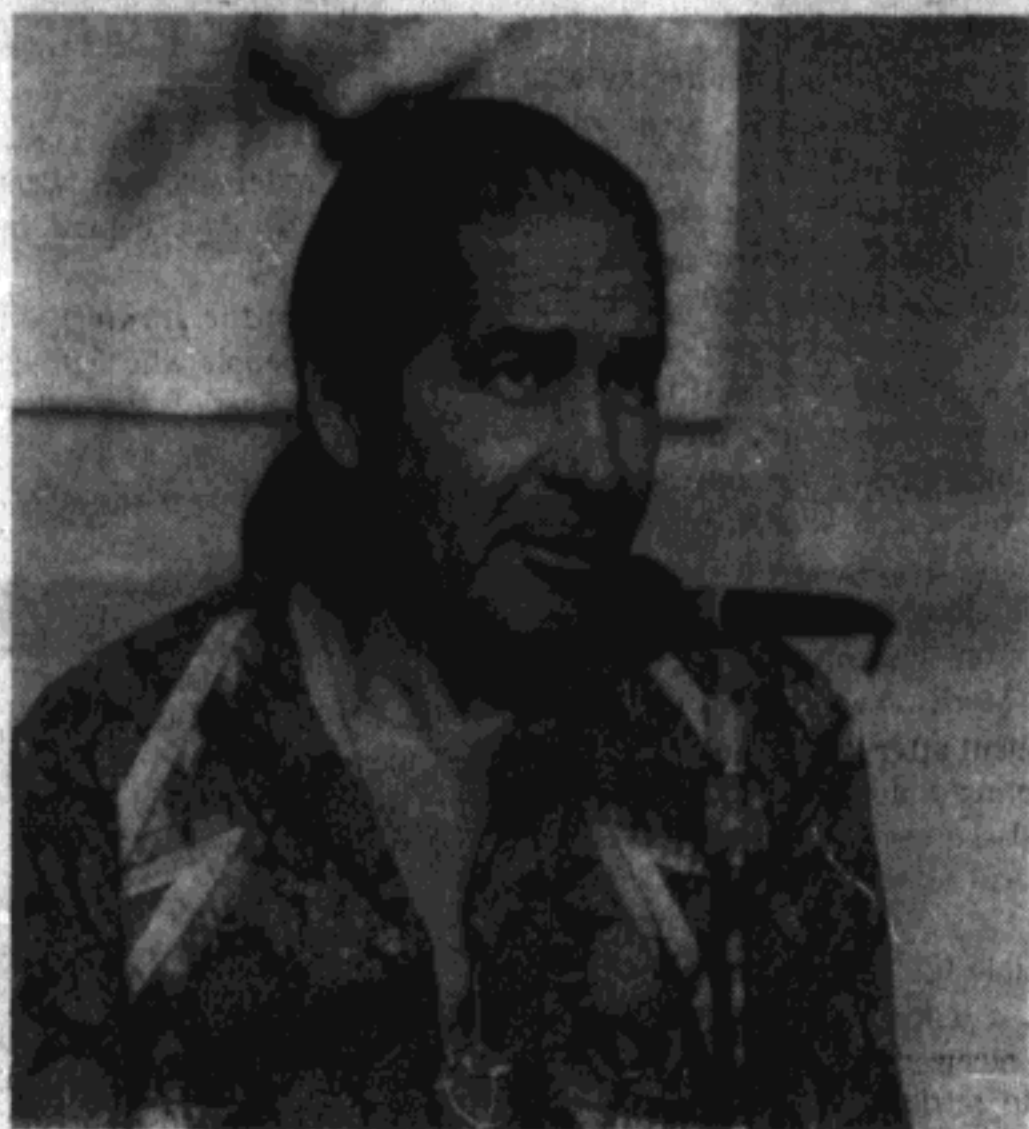
His essay on "Powerless Politics" takes a raw look at the structure of the Pine Ridge tribal government and other

tribal governments. Thomas concluded that real power rests outside the structure of tribal governments and usually outside the reservation as well. Since Thomas has been brilliantly assessing Indian self-rule for many years; his omission from the list of scholars was unfortunate.

In highlighting IRA's failure at Pine Ridge, Adams points to studies showing how that reservation had been devastated by the imposition of an alien government. The reservation has never been allowed to recover, he says, because the IRA tribal constitution has

gress of non-IRA tribes vs. IRA tribes. In essence, what tribes have had for the past 50 years is not self-rule or self-government, but a limited form of self-administration. Tribes manage and administer, but they do not govern or rule, notes Adams. This is the state of our affairs as accurately envisioned by John Collier.

Adams is a keen observer of the media and the power of the press and he notes that one of the most severe maladies afflicting tribes today is the absence of a community free press—not to be confused with house organs.



Oren Lyons said the IRA replaced and restructured a people. He warned those who look only to economic advancement that you "can't make a profit on the heads of your grandchildren."

flag." He disagreed with conclusions that Red Power and activism began in the 1960's with the National Indian Youth Council.

The fishing rights struggle in the Northwest, for example, were marked by century-old struggles of tenacious resistance to the erosion of those rights. His paper requested that future historians not continue to perpetuate myths and inaccuracies in their assessments of the last 50 years.

ANCSA

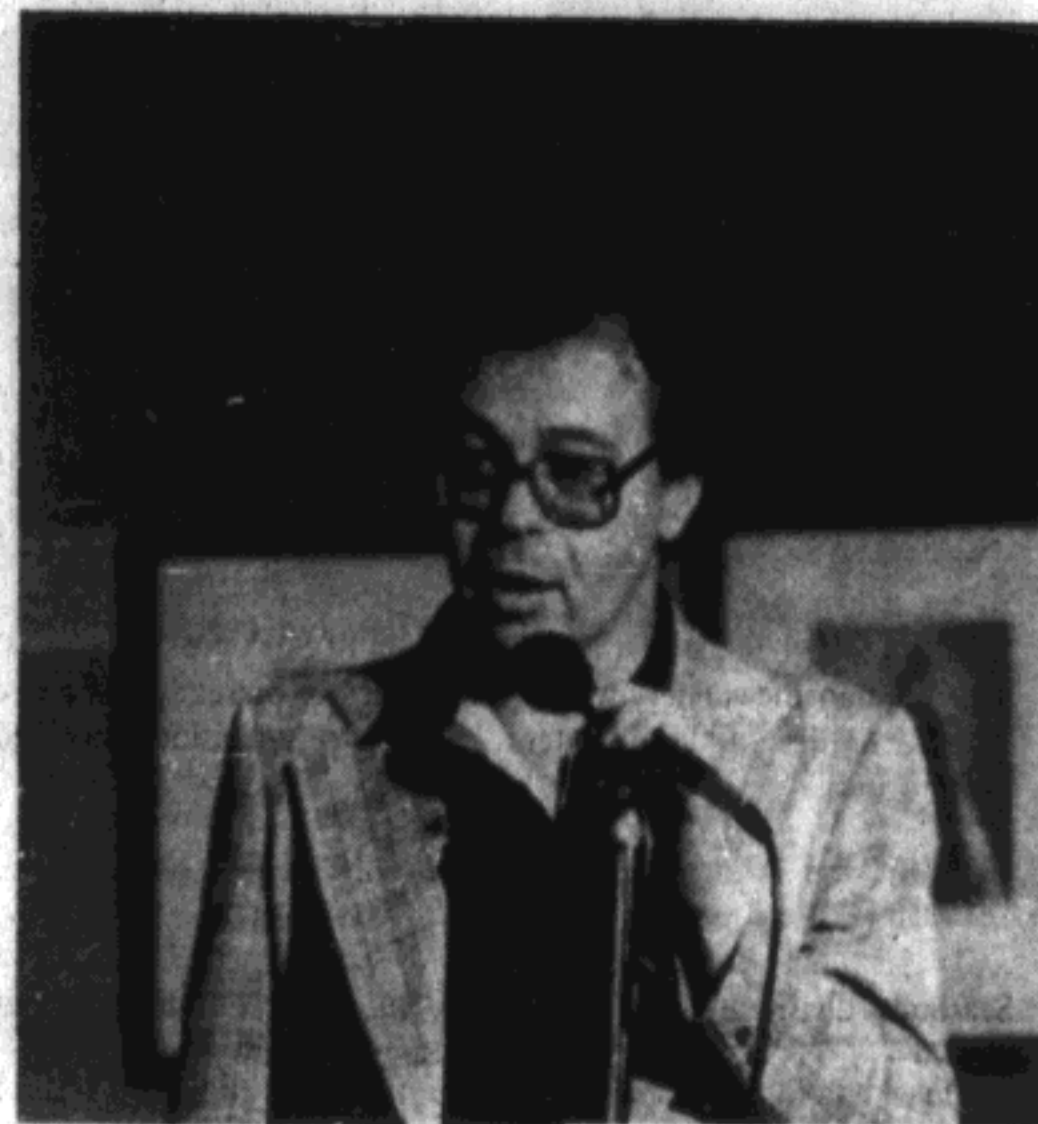
Most Important Achievement

In spite of some problems, Adams singled out the Alaska and Eastern Native Claims Settlements as the most important achievements by Na-

tions of termination policies, noting that such policies began earlier and ended later than most historians indicate. He revealed that termination had its basic roots in the IRA where the buying out of Indian "shareholders" had been anticipated and advised.

The 1906 partitioning of Osage Tribal funds and assets furnished the pattern for the termination of the Ute Tribe, under the guiding hands of Watkins, Wilkinson and Cragin's law firm, he said.

By 1940, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs talked of "divesting its authority among the local state and county governments," an idea expressed earlier in 1933, by John Collier.



PHOTOS BY SANDY J. OSAWA

Hank Adams notes that the ANCSA was one of the most important Native achievements of this half-century.

never been followed.

Adams charges that the IRA goal of "economic independence" is a farce at Pine Ridge where only 8.4 percent of the reservation's lands were leased by tribal members with one-half or more degree of Indian blood. In 1975, he notes that non-Indians directly and indirectly controlled 50 percent of reservation land.

Self-Administration

Further testimony to the failure of the IRA can be found in the fact that non-Indians on most reservations still control the primary benefits of Indian land and natural resources. Adams also notes that there is no significant difference between the pro-

The lack of any viable press severely limits any possibility of self-rule for it restricts creativity, accountability, and lessens any chance for qualitative tribal reforms.

Adams concluded by declaring that 50 years of aberrational history under the flawed vision of Collier and his cohorts is not cause for celebration. He challenged tribal people everywhere to shed their twentieth century "ghost shirts" which are not protecting them. He reminded us that the ghost shirts of 1893 did not offer the hoped-for protection; the Indian people did not become invisible. By clinging to the Bureau of Indian Affairs "shirts" of today, warns Adams, Indians just might find that invisibility.