

NCAI Not in Accord with Poor People's March in Washington

The National Congress of American Indians has made a declaration that the organization is not in accord with the Poor Peoples March presently in progress in the nation's capitol.

In a statement from the Washington, D.C. office of its executive director, John

Belindo, the NCAI representing some 105 major American Indian tribes and Alaska native villages made a declaration clarifying its position after a special session of its membership recently.

"In view of the common bond of concern and experience that links the American Indian community with other sectors of the disadvantaged population, the membership of NCAI is near unanimous in its belief that present political, economic and social conditions justify the March and that its ultimate goals and aims are legitimate," the statement declared.

"Where there is not unanimity in the NCAI membership is in the conviction that the March as it is presently conceived—with particular respect to the intended and prolonged camp-in in Washington—holds no particular optimistic prospects for pro-

ducing satisfactory results relevant to the wants of its participants before their thresholds of frustration have been exceeded."

The statement said that
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the Poor People are supposed to stay encamped until Congress responds with a legislative program satisfactory to the interests of the Marchers.

However, the statement continued, there is no defined criteria as to what a satisfactory program would be, hence, what achieved goals will terminate the March.

"Even if Congress," the release stated, "knew exactly what legislative measures the marchers deem necessary, and if Congress were completely cooperative and sympathetically inclined to pass this legislation, it is doubtful that the mechanics of legislative procedure would grind out a program that would produce visible results in a short enough time period to satisfy the Marchers."

"Moreover, Congress is not composed of members of this persuasion; there are too many hostile Southerners and Conservatives."

The NCAI membership felt that in spite of the avowed and sincere dedication of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the principle of non-violence, and because of the tinderbox mood of the City of Washington this summer, there are latent implications of potential violence.

"And here lies an irony," the statement said. "If it were not for this latent potential for violence, it is probable that much of the Establishment would give the concerns of the marchers mild consideration at best."

"Yet if actual violence does erupt out the March it is quite possible that the only result will be a Congress even less receptive to the demands of the Marchers."

The NCAI members cited that they were not necessarily against the use of violence as a means of defending group interests against encroachments by the mainstream society.

It pointed out the experience of the Indians within the last 150 years concerning violence and found the results sufficiently disenchanting so as to necessitate weighing the alternatives with carefully measured considerations.

"Violence would be used if—and only if—it holds some promise of producing certain results," the statement stated.

The NCAI said that according to the press some of the Marchers are wanting to return to their homes and are doing so.

The organization sees it

that as time wears on, only the most militant and dedicated will remain concentrating the intensity of the mood at the camp—in.

"As time goes on, the Marchers will become bored and unoccupied, crowded and uncomfortable—conditions certain to amplify their sense of frustration. When this set of circumstances takes place in a city already in a restless and dire mood, the situation looks extremely volatile," the statement said.

In concluding the statement, the NCAI said the success of the Poor People's campaign will depend largely on the success of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to juggle with iron discipline the politically awesome threat of the potential violence against the rigid restraint of that violence.

"We offer the SCLC every encouragement in doing this," NCAI stated. "If SCLC is successful, it will be a monumental victory deserving complete endorsement of their right to leadership in social issues."

"It will also provide the country, white and black, red and yellow, with a model of what is truly possible in American life."

"However, in this—not-so—best-of-all—possible world, complete success seems doubtful. And it is this doubt which restrains much of the membership of NCAI from giving its unqualified endorsement to the campaign."