

BRUCE MEETS INDIAN EDITORS

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Explains Recent BIA Reorganization

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Staff Writer

DENVER—"This is one of the highlights of my career in public service," Commissioner Louis R. Bruce told a group of newsmen from Indian newspapers who gathered in Denver Monday afternoon to question him on changes in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"This is the first press conference by an official of the U.S. Government with an Indian press," said the Commissioner among Indian affairs.

He called the press conference to explain the reasons behind recent realignment to Bureau Chief. Among the charges which Commissioner Bruce replied to were those that he had failed to consult with tribal council and native association leaders before realigning field personnel.

"We are trying to set up a system for consult action with the tribes," said the Commissioner. "This would involve a structure composed of tribal leaders across the country."

"We have 30 days to set this group," the Commissioner said. "As of now, changes in the Bureau have not yet become permanent regulations."

Bruce also expressed his intentions to consult and inform

members of the newly formed Indian Press Association which was the basis for the press conference called by the Bureau in Denver. The Denver conference invited 20 editors from Indian newspapers across the country and in Alaska.

"Many times," the Commissioner said, "we faced a situation in the Indian press where some of our news is gotten by rumors. I look forward to seeing you face to face and being able to explain what is going on."

The Commissioner denied that the new reannounced policy for reassignment of field administrator is "negotiable".

"In no case will the BIA allow such an entry without first consulting with the tribe or Alaskan native group," said the Commissioner.

In reference to the policy statement of reassignment of employees: if the people feel the field administrator is doing his job, they would not release him. The new policy requires a review of the field administrator by the local tribes or Alaskan native group involved every six months after the field administrator (formally the superintendent) is initially 2 years in office. He will be evaluated on his ability to involve Indian tribes in the day to day operation of the old programs as well as other areas.

"There are some serious situations in the BIA," admitted Commissioner Bruce.

He described the situations in the BIA where present superintendents and area directors were exacting return on previous favors from tribal council members in votes of support when these BIA officers came

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up for rotation.

A fairly automatic policy, Bruce implied, might avoid these situations. The Commissioner confirmed reports that Morris Thompson, presently in Washington, special assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, will be proposed for the job of Alaskan area director. He anticipated no problems in having the appointment approved by civil service.

The Commissioner seemed optimistic about the appointment of Roger Morton as new Secretary of the Interior. Morton, he told the group, came to his office last week to talk about the Bureau, meet staff members and get some background.

"It was the first time a Secretary or prospective Secretary came over to the BIA offices," said Commissioner Bruce. "He's not in office but I am very hopeful soon he will."

Some problems which remain according to the Commissioner include civil service requirements which often prevent him from putting Indians in high policy positions due to lack of salary requirements.

State programs, he said, pay about half as much as some federal ones. Civil service classifications are judged by salary.

"I am looking to place Indians in the upper grade of the
"Sixty per cent of the BIA staff are Indians," he said.

Members of the Indian press

who attended the conference included representatives of various Indian newspapers throughout the country.

Among them was NCAI Director of Public Relations James Thomas, a Tlingit Indian from Yakutat, Alaska.

The conference was organized by BIA public informations officer Rose Robinson, and Charles Trimble, director of the newly formed Indian Press Association.