

BIG MOUNTAIN UPDATE

On July 16, 1986, we spoke with Corey Dubin, one of two media coordinators for the Big Mountain Legal Defense/Offense Committee in Flagstaff, Arizona. He gave us this update on the Big Mountain struggle:

"Although there were no direct Federal actions on the July 7th, what we are most concerned about is the ongoing relocation program and the escalating intimidation and terror tactics by the Hopi Tribal council and the United States government. For example, Hopi Tribal chairman Ivan Sidney has moved two members of wealthy Hopi cattle ranching families onto Hopi partition land in the Joint Use Area. They are setting up water diversion projects which are drying up the wells of the Dineh who depend on these wells for their survival. Hopi Tribal chairman Sidney has given the Navajo Nation 30 days with which to come up with a plan for the removal of those Navajo remaining in the Joint Use Area. However, Sidney has no legal standing with which to back up this demand. Sidney's demand is based on his belief that the Navajo are trespassers. However, under Public Law 93-951 the Navajo are clearly defined as 'relocatees awaiting relocation' and therefore cannot be designated as trespassers. We believe that Chairman Sidney and the Hopi Tribal Council is trying through intimidation what it does not have standing to do in the courts.

We are also very concerned about the actions of the United States government. There are regular low-level helicopter overflights of Navajo communities in the Joint Use Area. We are also seeing regular overflights of F1-11 fighter bombers in the Big Mountain area. These jets are flying at 200-300 feet at roughly 600 miles/hr. These flights, we believe, are designed to terrorize the population into leaving their homes. The Big Mountain Legal Defense/Offense Committee is again calling for the immediate cessation of these tactics by the Hopi Tribal Council and the United States government. We are also calling for the repeal of Public Law 93-531. That is the main focus of our efforts. We believe that the climate on Capitol Hill is improving on a daily basis for the passage of repeal Legislation."



PRINCIPLES AND DIRECTION

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MOBILIZATION AND LOGISTICS:

This refers to the intense efforts focused on the July 7, 1986 deadline and beyond, and the possibility of government implementation of forced removal. The Mobilization will remain in effect until the Relocation Act is repealed. Several principles were defined:

1. There is presently NO call for a massive presence on the land by support workers for July;
2. Top priority are actions NOW which will best eliminate the possibility of any confrontation this Summer. Specifically pressure on Congress to repeal the Act would serve this need.
3. The essence of the mobilization is a commitment to **stand with the people**. This should be done within your own community and does not require your literal presence on the land.
4. Any call for a presence on the land will be issued ONLY through either the support network (via BMLD/OC) or by way of Fort Defiance (Larry Anderson). There may be a "limited" call for only those persons who have already experienced the "survival" nature of the Joint Use Area.



92 year old Askie Betsie, who is a medicine woman and active in the resistance against the forced displacement of her people.

Facing up to racism

Big Mountain support has brought together an extremely varied group of people in terms of backgrounds and purposes. There is strong feeling among 'veteran' non-Indian organizers that the main obstruction to solid support and solidarity is racism. This brief essay is directed from and to non-Indians.



The racism with which we must deal is both our own and that of the people we seek to educate about the issue. Without an understanding of both, our work becomes quite ineffective.

Our Own:

At one level, 'taking direction' from the traditional Native American leadership requires setting aside our white skin privileges, privileges which we may have limited awareness of.

At a more subtle level, racism becomes an issue whenever we are in the presence of the Elders or others in positions of giving direction to the struggle. In order to accurately perceive what the people are saying, or want, it is crucial to set aside our white industrialized training (obviously this implies not only consciousness of race, but also of class and sex). There is an interpretation required, which necessarily challenges our ability to "objectively" hear what is said, rather than what our training and backgrounds have prepared us to hear.

Dealing with our racism requires that we not insist that the traditional leadership work within our definitions, preconceptions, or even our language. It is a reality of indigenous resistance struggles that they take strength from their own language.

Finally, if we are honest about our own racism, and the difficulties of overcoming it, then we can better avoid self-righteous attitudes which also obstruct our organizing and educational efforts.

In Others:

If "the public" was free of racism, we probably wouldn't be engaged in the present struggle [no offense to marxists intended]. Racial arrogance is to be expected as we go to the public, and we have to know how to deal with it in a good and constructive way, or else not waste our time. Racism often appears in the form of cultural arrogance, but regardless, it takes place across the racial line and is racism. Here are some of the ways in which it reveals itself:

- * economics and lifestyle: "why don't those Indians quit living in the stone age?"; "Obviously they have to mine the coal."
- * presumption of the colonizers' version of history: "the marauding Navajo" and the

"depredations of the Navajo" were the Spanish/Mexican description of the Indian resisters. When non-Indians accept such definitions they distort and liquidate much of the history of the Southwest.

- * the White Man's Burden: this myth presumes that it is up to the white man to solve any disputes (and decide if there are any) between Indian people, for instance Navajo and Hopi. A similar missionary attitude reveals itself when "sympathetic" observers attempt to evaluate such questions as "how these blithely presume that the Hopi should govern themselves with a 'majority-rule' or 'democratic system.'" Like white people. Both ignore the legitimate forms of self government practiced by these people for millennia. All such attitudes depend on the presumption that the white man's way is better.

- * sheer hypocrisy: settling this dispute by removing Indian people when all other Indian land claims have been settled with money.

There is no simple formula for confronting these attitudes. If we as non-Indians want to bring about change in the American public's attitudes, however, we must set aside our own angry inclination to "let them have it" and consider the tools of humour, patience and compassion, while insisting on the seriousness of the situation. There will be no simple answers when the stakes are the relationships between the original Red inhabitants of these lands and the white newcomers.

Indian Racism?

The Native American leadership of the struggle has been forthright about racism occurring on all sides. But to insist on struggling over Indian attitudes towards whites is to insist on white privilege itself.

Most non-Indians have little experience of genocide, and little ability to evaluate the challenge faced by (especially) the younger Indian people who are under the threat on a daily basis. As a young Dineh resister offered at the Gathering, we will overcome our racism by working and sweating together towards the same goals.

"If the White man and their respective leaders had a heart, free of prejudice, why can they not visualize our plight and put themselves in our position? If they did, how would they react to the assault of one's culture and land if the Indians were to dominate and disrupt their order of harmony?"

Askie Betsie

From *Big Mountain News*, July 1986

