

NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Third World Claims and the Strike: the American Indian View

Although the president of the North American Indian Student Association (NAISA) wrote a letter, published in the Evergreen on May 21, to explain why our group was not listed on the original eleven demands, the turn of events, the rhetoric, and the assumptions during the past three days make it necessary again to present a clarification of the Indian position.

Our president withheld the support of American Indian students originally because he did not personally agree with all the eleven demands, nor was he able to commit the entire association of American Indian students. (No member of the North American Indian Student Association was present at the formulation of the demands.) Obviously, his refusal to commit us ruled us out of the "Third World", because -- except for two calls from President Terrell -- we have not been contacted officially by either the Strike Steering Committee, the Black Student Union and MECHA, or any negotiating committee. Yet the use of the term "Third World" leads many people to assume that we, American Indians, are somehow included among those for whom and by whom the strike is being conducted.

Like those directly involved in the strike, we believe that racism is a critical issue in American society. We would seek diligently a solution to this problem. Yet the method of initiating this action and the behavior of strike leaders, make it impossible for us to support this strike. As this strike is being carried out, we think it is not the most effective, constructive way to seek an end to racism.

Because we were not included in the original planning, those who did write the demands obviously could not take into account the values which are unique to Indians; and this failure to regard these differences, in other contexts, itself is called discrimination. Among the things we have in common with other non-white minorities is our vigorous objection to being stereotyped. This includes our being lumped into the so-called "Third World" in a way which implies we are not distinct from Blacks, Chicanos, or other non-white groups.

The failure to distinguish us and our cultural heritage from other minorities and their heritage is just another example of the errors which this strike is supposedly intended to correct. If the importance of these distinctions is not clear to the participants in the strike, we can't see how the strike can possibly succeed in achieving the goals its leaders claim they are seeking

In the original call to strike, the Strike Steering Committee asserted that the university must deal directly with the "Third World" students. The following would have been included as the American Indians' contribution to the "demands" had we been a party to the preparation of the "Third World" document:

- I. Realistic commitments of financial and faculty support for the Native American Studies Program for Fall 1970.
- II. Establishment of an Indian Cultural Center, which provides a place for Indian students to gather, a center for Indian counselors for Indian students and a symbol of Indian presences on Washington State University Campus.
- III. Extension of university interests in Indian Affairs beyond Washington State University Campus.
 - A. Services of an Indian recruiter ought to be acquired for Fall 1970; with provision for Indian student involvement.
 - B. The Department of Education ought to provide teachers educated to develop Indian students. It is wrong to suppose that a single teacher training program fits all teachers and all teaching assignments. The university ought to sponsor teacher workshops designed to encourage Indian sensitivity in non-Indian teachers.
 - C. There must be a dynamic involvement of the university with the Indian community.
- IV. The services of knowledgeable personnel ought to be secured to fill positions dealing with Indian Student financial affairs.
- V. Washington State University Library personnel ought to organize existing materials in Indian affairs and expand facilities to accommodate new Indian literature, i.e. periodicals, newspapers, current books.
- VI. Increase educational options for Indian students including independent study opportunities, flexible course design, and opening up the university resources to the Indian student, on his own terms.
- VII. Establish a supportive fund for an Indian Artist Series to begin under the Director of the Native American Studies Program in Fall 1970.
- VIII. Explore Health Care programs for Indian students not covered by Federal Government sources.

May the Great Spirit grant us all wisdom and guide us through these trying times.

North American Indian Student Association.