Steering Committee Recently Created To Prepare Declaration of Indian Purpose

According to a press release dated February 15, 1961, an American Indian Steering Committee has just been created to prepare at the grassroots level a declaration of purpose to be presented in June to a national conference at the University of Chicago.

The purpose of the conference will be to consider and act on the "declaration of Purpose" as a guide to official and private organizations concerned with Indian affairs. President Kennedy will be invited to receive this document, if adopted, on behalf of the American people.

Dibbon Cook, Secretary of the General Council, and an active member of the National Congress of American Indians, was appointed to the Steering Committee and received a special invitation to attend the Chicago conference.

D'Arcy McNickle of the Flathead tribe, Acting chairman of the new steering committee pointed out that "this is the most intensive effort ever made to get the view of the Indians in every part of the U.S. including many groups now officially recognized as Indians by the Federal Government."

At the June 13-20 American Indian Chicago Conference representatives of the estimated 800,000 U.S. Indians will meet for four days to discuss Indian problems and to complete the draft of the statement. The final two days will be a joint session with officials, scholars, churchmen, and others concerned with Indian affairs.

Claims Commission Extension Sought

On January 18, 1961, the Indian Claims Commission submitted to Congress proposed legislation which would extend the life of the Commission an additional ten years. Under the present law, the Commission's activities are to terminate April 17, 1962. The Commission proposed amendment to the Indian Claims Commission Act would extend the Commission's existence to April, 1972, or the date of completion of the Commission's work if that should occur before 1972.

Copies of the proposed amendment were sent by the Commission to the Vice President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Commission's letter which accompanied the proposed amendment made the following statement in part of extending the life of the Commission:

A large number of claims filed with the Commission remain undecided. Some 468 petitions, or docket numbers, are in this category of undecided cases. Each petition sets forth a claim which is highly complex, frequently covers vast areas of land, may involve large sums of money, and requires long study by experts before proof can be introduced. Claims by the government in the form of offsets and counterclaims must also be considered by the Commission. Additional time consumption is present in those situations where an appeal of the Commission is taken to the Court of Claims.

Moreover, the Commission further noted, the Indian claimants and the United States have already spent large amounts of money in preparing their claims and defenses.

Exec.-Comm. Names Delegates To Attend Regional Conferences on Indian Affairs

A quorum of six executive committee members was present to hear a report by Emmet Gulley, American Friends Service Committee representative, and to take action on various resolutions pertaining to Klamath tribal matters, on March 28.

Gulley, reporting on his recent trip to the east, gave his impression of current developments in Washington. He was a participant in a conference in Philadelphia sponsored by the AFSC and also had an opportunity to meet with government officials. "There is a greatly awakened feeling in government circles," he said, "regarding matters affecting Indians." A detailed account of Gulley's impressions may be found on page 4 of this issue of the tribunal.

The recently appointed "task force," a group of five members who were assigned the job of studying Indian problems and who are responsible for the making recommendations to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was introduced by Executive Committee members. The "task force" is holding meetings with Indian representatives in all parts of the United States and is scheduled to hold conferences in this region in Reno on April 13, and 14. The possible help the "task force" might give in solving some Klamath problems was also explored by the committee.

It was revealed that another important meeting on Indian Affairs will be held in Seattle on April 15 through April 8. The purpose of this conference in Seattle is to lay more groundwork for the American Indian Charter Convention which is scheduled to be held early in June. Dibbon Cook participated in the preliminary discussions recently in Chicago, and has been designated general chairman of the Seattle conference.

It was felt that the Klamath tribe should be represented at these conferences and that the particular problems of the tribe should be brought to the attention of the conference leaders. A motion was passed authorizing Joe Ball, Boyd Jackson, and Nathan Davis to attend the meetings being called by the Task Force in Reno, and Jesse Kirk, Seldon Kirk and Dibbon Cook to attend the regional conference of the Indian Charter convention in Seattle.

Among the resolutions passed by the committee was one calling for a museum to be established as soon as possible to the Klamath Tribe. This resolution states in part: "There will be no return to the bow and arrow, and the woven basket will hold only memories, but we feel this is the time for our government to pay tribute to all Klamath Indians Past, Present and Future with the establishment of a museum located within the boundaries of our reservation. The Winema National Forest is a fine tribute to one woman. Now we feel that there should be a place where the story of the past can live for the future."

Dibbon Cook and Boyd Jackson were appointed as a committee of one to work with the Chiloquin Chamber of Commerce in establishing such a museum.

Seldon Kirk commented that he had long favored such a museum and was glad it would now be realized. He called upon tribal members to contribute their effort and support to the project.

By a vote of two to one, a resolution was adopted calling for the continuation of hunting and fishing rights for enrolled members. Questions were raised by committee members regarding the abuse of these rights by members and the implications that the resolution has upon the hunting and fishing rights of the remaining members.

In another resolution passed unanimously by the committee, a recommendation for the continuation of the educational program created under Public Law 287 was made. According to the resolution, "we hereby urgently recommend that some such education program be continued and whether on basis as now operated, or some other workable program as may be formulated as will serve the educational possibilities for the enrolled members of the Klamath Tribe. We think the educational need still remains unsolved. And we believe that the educational program should be continued for at least a four year period."

The executive committee meeting which was held in the Education Office's new location was attended by Seldon Kirk, chairman; Joe Ball, Dibbon Cook, Nathan Davis, Boyd Jackson, and Jesse Kirk. Emmett Gulley representing the American Friends Service Committee and Bill Norm and H. Zakoji representing the Education Program were also in attendance.