

# Indians face new land challenge

**A**MERICAN Indians have yet to find a successful formula for recovering their birthrights: their ancestral lands, most of which have been appropriated by white men, writes Paul Knight.

Their economic plight has deteriorated further since Ronald Reagan arrived at the White House, but the Federal government believes that the nation's 283 tribes could go it alone.

All they need is some entrepreneurial flair, say spokesmen at the Interior Department in Washington.

● Federal funds for the Indians have been cut from \$3.5 billion to \$2 billion in the last three years.

● But the tribes between them own 51.9m acres of land, including 5 per cent of the nation's oil and gas reserves, 486 billion tons of coal and half the nation's uranium – estimated, in all, to be worth \$400 billion.

Even so, the Indians are not well placed – in terms of entrepreneurial skills or access to capital – to exploit their resources.

So there is deep resentment at the government's cut-back on direct assistance. This has led President Reagan to back the claim of a New Mexico tribe for the return of 25,000 acres of national forest.

The Federal government originally opposed the claim, but the Indians were able to prove that a document which purported to prove that their land had been sold to a Spaniard in 1805 was a fake.

Now Reagan is believed to be trying to mend his relations with the Indians by throwing the weight of his administration behind the demand for the return of the land to the Pueblo de Cochiti Indians.

Their case is unique. They can produce a deed to prove that they bought the land in 1744. But the U.S. Agricultural Department opposes the claim because other tribes have stronger claims to ancestral lands.

For generations now, the Indians have tried, unsuccessfully, to recover possession of their hunting grounds.

Should they now change their tactics, seeking a formula for sharing the nation's resources with the white man so that everyone benefited from a revised system of land tenure?

## 'OUR LAND'

THE CANADIAN government has agreed, in principle, to the creation of new territory called Nunavut, which means "Our Land" in Inuktitut, the language of the local eskimos.

The Federal government in Ottawa, anxious about the separatist demands of French Canadians, has long opposed the creation of a new political entity north of the treeline in North-west Territories.

But Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau has now relented, and the new territory will come into existence when existing native land claims have been settled.

## Tribal rights

**A**LASKAN Indians are trying to outflank corporate investors who are expected to try to buy their way into native land.

In 1971, a law was passed which divided public domain land and \$1 billion cash among 13 corporations.

The Indian members of these corporations derive income from the land – and free access to their ancestral grounds.

Outsiders will be allowed to buy stock in the corporations in 1991, and if they make "hard to refuse" offers, this could lead to the alienation of native land rights.

The Alaska Federation of Natives is now seeking ways to prevent this happening.

## No sex please . . .

**PAIUTE** Indians cultivate their reservation near Las Vegas, but the soil is so poor that they have sought permission to open a brothel.

Permission was initially granted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but now the Reagan Administration has blocked the plan. A spokesman explained: "Commerce generated by prostitution is not the kind of economic development envisioned by Federal policy".

The Paiutes claim they have to seek alternative sources of income because the Federal government has cut its assistance to the tribe from \$1m a year to only \$200,000.

The 71,000-acre reservation is home to 315 members of the tribe, and unemployment is about 40 per cent.

## LAND TAX

● From P.15

Present day taxation, I realised, is so levied as to restrict production, and it has to be screwed up more and more to dispense subsidies or pay for costly pro-poverty expedients in the attempt to undo the evil it causes.

"With all the burdens removed," I read, "which now oppress industry and hamper exchange, the production of wealth would go on with a rapidity now undreamt of . . ."

"Give labour a free field and its full earnings; take for the benefit of the whole community that fund which the growth of the community creates, and want and the fear of want would be gone. The springs of production would be set free and the enormous increase of wealth would give the poorest ample comfort."

**W**HO could dispute that? When treating a sick patient, a doctor is now rarely content merely to give him a bottle of medicine. He tells him that he must live under more healthy conditions, that he must cut down this and that, and generally give his body a chance to respond to the treatment. Otherwise the doctor will not be responsible.

It was easy to imagine Henry George saying to this sick country: "If you follow my advice, it will mean leaving behind you the unhealthy, enervating luxury of land monopoly, the suffering that springs from it, and the anomaly of having great wealth on the one hand and extreme poverty on the other. Take my advice, act with courage, and I promise you that before many years you will be strong and fit again."

This country cannot prosper while the land monopoly continues to exact its ruinous toll. Free the country from its throttling grip, and we would at once breathe more freely. New life would flow into the national activities, and with the burden of land monopoly would go many other burdens that now weigh us down.

By these steps it became clear to me, after so sceptical a beginning, that in our enormously increased national and local expenditure may be found not an argument against the Henry George idea, but a convincing argument for it.

Our difficulties are now too great to allow us to trifle any longer with the taxation of land values and the untaxing of industry; and my vote, for what it is worth, will certainly go to the political party that will put it into practice.

## LAND RIGHTS