American Indian Life

CONGRESS DID NOT FAIL . . .

It passed the Wheeler-Howard Act. It is not the all-inclusive New Deal conceived in the original draft. It contains compromises with the old order which must be abrogated—outstandingly, the exclusion of Oklahoma's 100,000 Indians from the Act's most important benefits. But its objectives are fundamental; its approach sound. At last economic reconstruction and racial cohesion are integrated in law.

This Act and the Allotment Act of 1887 are the two most important Indian statutory forces. Setting aside the evils of the Allotment Act, let us recall what many of its really sincere proponents did on its enactment: they forgot it. They said, in effect: "This piece of paper will turn these pagan warriors into Christian homesteaders. Let us rejoice and return home to our own affairs." They pinned their faith on a statute, and left its administrators to do with it what they would. True, some individuals and groups cried against its workings, but no organized force of public opinion challenged its absolutism, its philosophy until forty years of devaluation had had their way.. This fatal faith must be remembered in the development and administration of the Wheeler-Howard Act. Though it wipes out many of the evils of the allotment system, the Act is not perfect. But it allows of growth—and needs growth—and every Indian and friend of the Indian should keep this need alive and articulate. *Organized public opinion will decide whether the law shall be static, or perverted, or propelled to the full measure of its aims.*

To the Commissioner of Indian Affairs first credit is due for this victory. From his exact knowledge of Indian problems, his immeasurable vision, his faith in the Indian, he patterned this legislation. His courage and conviction routed the ill-informed and the predatory, and won a host of advocates who would be recorded here, if only space allowed. Conspicuous