

As most of you doubtless know, there has been a great deal of emphasis for many years now on the importance of land resources to the Indian people. To a large extent I share these views and I am deeply opposed to any Congressional legislation or other proposed action that would sell off or liquidate the Indian lands against the wishes of their owners. Certainly everything possible should be done to help the Indians in holding on to those lands which they need and want, and which are important to their economic welfare. At the same time, however, I believe it should be recognized that there are many Indians today who have no interest whatever in agricultural or livestock operations and many who eagerly want to dispose of their allotted holdings and use the proceeds for some other type of economic enterprise. In fact, the old policy of retaining the land in Indian ownership regardless of the wishes or needs of the Indian owner himself has, in my opinion, done far more harm than good. In many more cases than most people realize needy Indians have lived out their entire lives without realizing any appreciable benefits from their allotted holdings and in many situations the land has proved to be a millstone around the Indian's neck rather than a true beneficial asset.

So we have recently changed our policy in one important respect. Until a few weeks ago it was the general practice of the Bureau to withhold a fee patent or unrestricted title even from a competent Indian actively seeking the patent if his holding was part of a forest or livestock management unit. This policy was justified in terms of effective forest and range management which is, in my opinion, highly important but not a good or sufficient reason for penalizing the individual Indian saddled with an unwanted land allotment. Under the new policy the wishes of the Indian owner will prevail and a patent will be issued, if he can demonstrate his competence, regardless of any other considerations. To my mind, this represents the kind of common-sense and flexible attitude toward Indian land resources which should replace the old rigid concepts and which should be brought to bear, wherever pertinent, in all our program deliberations with the tribal groups.

And now for that final word on the nature of the consultation process. If these conferences are to be truly productive and significant, it seems to me obvious that there will have to be a spirit of compromise and give-and-take on both sides of the table. What I have already said about the importance of open-mindedness and similar qualities on the part of Bureau representatives is, of course, equally applicable to the tribal delegates. Most of the Indians, I feel sure, realize that they cannot always have their own way in everything and few of them have any such expectations. But some non-Indians are now talking as though this principle should be the keystone of our national Indian policy and are contending that anything less would be alien to our best American traditions.

Frankly, I believe that the people who argue this way are overlooking the true significance of the trust relationship between the Federal Government and the Indian people. If we ever reach the point where the Bureau of Indian Affairs can take no action or make no decision without the approval and concurrence of the Indians involved, then I think the question might very logically be raised whether a trusteeship is any longer needed. If we are to continue as trustees, we must exercise our trust responsibilities and that means occasionally saying "no" to the beneficiary. But, as I have already