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AIM leader blasts enemies of Indian movement

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Christianity, education under fire

AIM leader blasts

Christianity, education and the United States of America were cited as the three enemies of the American Indian by Russell Means, the American Indian Movement leader who led the siege at Wounded Knee, S.D. last year.

Speaking to 275 people in Bennett Hall Saturday evening, Means asserted the Indians' goal as desirous of complete independence, adding, 'We want no part of the United States.'

AIM, organized in July, 1968, has sought to correct injustices leveled at the Indian. One of the first actions was the seizure of the podium at the annual convention of the Minnesota Council of Churches. 'The Council of Churches had raised over $3 million in the name of aid to the Indians of which none was seen,' said Means. Upon the seizure AIM demanded that an all Indian board be set up to control monies collected and the Council accepted the proposal. Similar action was taken against other church organizations which also accepted their demands, added Means.

Controversy between AIM and the United States concerns the bridging of the broken Treaty of 1868. 'A treaty is on par and equal to the Constitution, if approved by the Congress and approved by the President as ours is,' said Means. 'On the reservation, the treaty supersedes all federal and state laws yet we can't make our own decisions,' added Means.

Means remarked that the Department of Interior holds a great deal of power over the Indians. 'Ducks have more rights to live than Indians,' Means said. 'There are more laws protecting ducks than there are for Indians.'

On the Pine Ridge Reservation, at Wounded Knee the Indians can't buy, sell or lease their land without the consent of the Secretary of Interior, said Means. Yet of the 4,500 square miles on the reservation, 92 percent of the land is leased to local white ranchers and traders by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) who holds the land in trust. Means explained under this system that the Indians get about $3.80 per acre while white ranchers are getting the same land in neighboring Bennett County for about $15.00 dollars per acre. Means wants the acre but allows the white man has no eyes or ears.' It was not until several years later when the AIM leader was in Cleveland and saw the Cuyahoga River burn that he began to realize what his grandfather said. Indians, Means said, are taught that all living things come from one mother, Sacred Mother Earth. When he saw the river burn he realized the white man's destruction of his mother earth, which he again saw later in the strip mining in the southern Appalachians.

In the Wounded Knee trial, Means faces 180 years imprisonment on charges he doubts he will be convicted of. Means added that 139 people are on trial and grand juries are still meeting and handing down indictments. At one time, Means said as many as 600 people were arrested in incidents related to Wounded Knee. 'Mostly these people were arrested on the charges of crossing state lines to incite a riot,' he said. At the trial, the defense is based on the Treaty of 1868. 'If I were convicted,' said Means, 'it would mean there are no treaty rights and that would be a final crushing blow for the Indians.'

Russell Means, leader of the American Indian Movement, told students gathered in Bennett Hall Saturday night. 'We want no part of the United States.'