

FACTS RELATING TO THE INDIAN FISHERY AT CELILO FALLS, OREGON

When the Indians of the Northwest Territory had been subdued by the United States army, Isaac I. Stevens, Governor of the Northwest Territory, acting on behalf of the President of the United States, in 1855, made a Treaty with the various Indian tribes whereby they ceded to the U. S. A., vast areas of land which now form most of the States of Washington and Oregon. The Indians agreed to restrict themselves to limited reservations.

Since the Indian tribes people had always lived along the river courses of the Columbia River Basin, subsisting by the annual take of foodsalmon, the treaty stipulated that they were to be allowed to continue their fishing outside the limits of the Reservation at their usual and accustomed fishing stations,— that is, at the falls situated on the rivers.

The terms of the Treaty were not observed for long on the part of the government. Indians began soon to be excluded from one after another of these accustomed fishing places. With the passing years, dams were constructed at these points, with no indemnization to the Indians. Today, if an Indian appears at one of such places he is immediately thrown into jail, if he attempts to fish there.

Celilo Falls, on the Columbia River, was the most important of the Indian fishing places in the Northwest. By the terms of the Treaty it was set aside as a fishing site for the Indians, "as long as the river shall run, as long as the sun shall shine, and as long as the snows remain on Mt. Adams."

Today three-fourths of the Yakima tribe, and an equal number of the Umatilla and Warm Springs Indians, make their living by fishing for salmon at Celilo Falls. The Indians living in the Columbia River basin have always been fisher folk, from time immemorial.

Now the government wants to deprive them of their last traditional fishing site.

Early in June, 1950, the Army Engineers, appeared at The Dalles, Oregon, just thirteen miles below Celilo Falls, and began work on a dam. This they did without any previous notice or consultation with the Indians, who would be most affected by the construction. For the dam, when completed would impound the waters from above and completely inundate and destroy Celilo Falls. All the tribes who fish at Celilo began to send delegations to Washington to protest the breaking of their treaty. But to no avail. Sometimes their delegations get the ear of some minor official. Most of the visits have been futile. The work goes on. The Engineers figure they can complete the dam by 1957.

The Engineers have lately begun to talk about indemnization. The Indians all along have maintained that they do not want indemnization; they prefer to continue their fishing at Celilo.

The white lawyers for the Indian tribes have told them that it is no use continuing to fight the project; that the dam will be built in spite of their protests. Two of the Tribes have agreed to negotiate for compensation. The Yakimas last August at a Tribal meeting when most of the Indians were fishing at Celilo, acceded to the pleading of their lawyer and voted to negotiate. Later, some of the chiefs claimed the vote did not represent the majority opinion. So they continue to make a strong fight to preserve their treaty. The other two tribes can receive nothing unless the Yakimas also agree to capitulate to the army engineers. Some of the chiefs have been here to our Mission to seek help. We have told them that if they will hold together we will try to get their problem before the American people.

Most of the denominations affiliated with the National Council of Churches of Christ in America have just concluded a study of "The American Indian and Human Rights," in their Home Missions courses. In the light of the treatment the Yakima and other tribes are receiving from the government, the churches have an opportunity to do a little clinical practice following their theoretical studies.

The Army Engineers claim they are building the dam at The Dalles for purposes of flood control. Yet, near the Canadian border there is the Grand Coulee Dam; down near Portland is the Bonneville Dam. Near Pendleton, Oregon, the McNary Dam will be completed this year. In the Spokane area, Chief Joseph Dam is well on the way. All of these are on the Columbia River. Why should another dam be necessary in between McNary and Bonneville dams? During the past several years the Pacific Northwest has been suffering from a power shortage, due to lack of water in the Columbia and its tributaries! Some people think the dam is being built simply to occupy the Army Engineers and supply people with jobs.

If a dam were needed in this area it could just as well be located above Celilo Falls, at a distance of three miles from Celilo, where the Deschutes River empties into the Columbia. In fact, that is what some of the people are demanding. They want to save Celilo as a tourist site. For there is nothing like it anywhere else in the United States. At no other place in America can the people/Indians fishing for salmon just like their ancestors fished at this same place five thousand years ago. At Portland a committee, called "Save-the-Columbia-River-Gorge" Group" has recently been organized to fight the construction of the dam. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation are reported to be interested for the same reason. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt is to meet with the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs on March 30th. to talk over the situation. The Yakima chiefs are to return to Washington at that time.

But the church people of America should be doing ~~something~~ in this case for reasons other than that of preserving an historical site. The case is well put for the churches by the Rev. L. Roy Cronkhite, of Niantic, Illinois:

"Our treatment of the minority groups is a test of national integrity. When we set aside an obligation to those unable to defend themselves we are operating at the level of the Communists and put a loaded gun into their hands. The American Indians have already suffered too much at the hands of the white man. If we shamelessly disregard our obligations in keeping faith with them we commit an ~~in~~excusable crime against human rights".

Why not suggest to your government representatives in Washington that the work now started at The Dalles be abandoned, and that the dam, if needed, be built three miles above Celilo Falls, at the place where the Deschutes River flows into the Columbia? By doing this we shall be keeping our treaty with the Indians, and saving our honor before the world.

N I A N T I C C H R I S T I A N C H U R C H

N i a n t i c, I l l i n o i s

L. Ray Cronkhite, Minister

December 13, 1952

Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

I am much concerned over the proposed building of a dam across the Columbia River in violation of our treaty with the Indians which guarantees their fishing rights there. The fact that the treaty is an old one has nothing to do with its validity. One might as well argue that the law of gravity is obsolete because it is old.

Our treatment of the minority groups is a test of our national integrity. When we set aside an obligation to those unable to defend themselves, we are operating at the level of the Communists and put a loaded gun in their hands.

How can we point an accusing finger at the Communists if we practice the same tactics? Truth, honor, justice and fair play belong as much to the American Indian as to those little nations behind the Iron Curtain.

The American Indians have already suffered too much at the hands of the white man. If we shamelessly disregard our obligation in keeping faith with them we commit an inexcusable crime against human rights.

There is still a sense of honor and a belief in the sacredness of human rights in the hearts of the common people of this nation. If those in authority set aside these rights because it seems expedient, they will be cutting away the ground beneath our nation. I trust it is not too late to correct this proposed folly.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

L. Roy Cronkhite

(You could help the cause of human rights if you should send a letter somewhat of this nature to either one, or all of the following persons:

Hon. Douglas McKay, Secretary of the Interior, Washington, D. C.
Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

To the Representative from YOUR district in Congress

Hon. Styles Bridges, Chairman of Appropriations Committee, Senate Building,
Washington, D. C. This is very important, as the new appropriations
will be presented to Congress soon; the Army Engineers are sure to
ask for from forty to sixty million to continue work on the dam)

To your two Senators.

The new appropriations bill will be presented to Congress within the month or so. Requests by the Army Engineers for funds to continue work on the dam at The Dalles, are sure to be included in the Appropriations Bill before Congress. They may run as high as a hundred million dollars.

I am writing below the names of those members of the Appropriations Committee to whom it is important that every friend of the Indians write a letter protesting the construction of the dam at The Dalles, Oregon which will destroy the Indian Fishery at Celilo Falls. This fishery has been guaranteed to the Indians of the Northwest as a salmon fishing site, in perpetuity, by the Treaty between the President of the United States and the Fourteen Yakima Tribes, and other minor tribes.

Sen. Styles Bridges, Chairman Committee on Appropriations,
Senate Office Building, Washington, D. C.

Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Senator Homer Ferguson, of Michigan,	Senate Office Building
Senator Gay Cordon, of Oregon	" " "
Senator Leverett Saltonstall, of Mass.	" " "
Senator Milton R. Young, of North Dakota	" " "
Senator William F. Knowland, California	" " "
Senator Edward J. Thye, of Minnesota	" " "
Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, of Wisconsin	" " "
Senator Karl E. Mundt, of South Dakota	" " "
Senator Margaret Chase Smith, of Maine	" " "
Senator Henry C. Dworchak, of Idaho	" " "
Senator Everett McKinley Dirksen, of Ill.	" " "
Senator Carl Hayden, of Arizona	" " "
Senator Richard B. Russell, of Georgia	" " "
Senator Pat McCarran, of Nevada	" " "
Senator Dennis Chavez, of New Mexico	" " "
Senator Burnet R. Maybank, of So. Carolina	" " "
Senator Akken J. Ellender, of Louisiana	" " "
Senator Lister Hill, of Alabama	" " "
Senator A. Willis Robertson, of Virginia	" " "
Senator Warren G. Magnuson	" " "

It would be well to write at least the chairman of the Committee, and the Senator from your state. This list was sent to me by the Four Yakima chiefs in Washington

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This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration and faint smudges, characteristic of old paper. A vertical crease is visible near the right edge, suggesting it was once folded. There is no text or other markings on the page.

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This image shows a vertical strip of aged, stained, and discolored paper, likely a book cover or endpaper. The paper has a mottled appearance with various shades of brown, tan, and grey, indicating significant wear, discoloration, and possibly water damage or mold over time. There are no visible markings, text, or illustrations on this strip.

Faint vertical text or markings along the right edge of the page.

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