

September '00: Indian Affairs Head Makes "Apology"

comments by Eugene Johnson (Selitz) and Jim Craven (Blackfoot)

from AP report by Matt Kelly:

WASHINGTON (AP) - The head of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs apologized Friday for the agency's "legacy of racism and inhumanity" that included massacres, forced relocations of tribes and attempts to wipe out Indian languages and cultures.

By accepting this legacy, we accept also the moral responsibility of putting things right," Kevin Gover, a Pawnee Indian, said in an emotional speech marking the agency's 175th anniversary. Gover said he was apologizing on behalf of the BIA, not the federal government as a whole. Still, he is the highest-ranking US official ever to make such a statement regarding the treatment of American Indians.

The audience of about 300 tribal leaders, BIA employees and federal officials stood and cheered as a teary-eyed Gover finished the speech. "I thought it was a very heroic and historic moment," said Susan Masten, chairwoman of California's Yurok tribe and president of the National Congress of American Indians. "For us, there was a lot of emotion in that apology. It's important for us to begin to heal from what has been done since non-Indian contact." Lloyd Tortalita, the governor of New Mexico's Acoma Pueblo tribe, welcomed the apology but said, "If we could get an apology from the whole government, that would be better." . . . Canada's government has formally apologized for abuses in government-run boarding schools for Indians but has rejected calls for a broader apology.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard also has rebuffed repeated calls for an apology to that country's Aboriginal population for similar abuses there. Gover recited a litany of wrongs the BIA inflicted on Indians since its creation as the Indian Office of the War Department. Estimates vary widely, but the agency is believed responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Indians. "This agency participated in the ethnic cleansing that befell the Western tribes," Gover said. "It must be acknowledged that the deliberate spread of disease, the decimation of the mighty bison herds, the use of the poison alcohol to destroy mind and body, and the cowardly killing of women and children made for tragedy on a scale so ghastly that it cannot be dismissed as merely the inevitable consequence of the clash of competing ways of life."

The misery continued after the BIA became part of the Interior Department in 1849, Gover said. Children were brutalized in BIA-run boarding schools, Indian languages and religious practices were banned and traditional tribal governments were eliminated, he said. The high rates of alcoholism, suicide and violence in Indian communities today are the result, he said. "Poverty, ignorance and disease have been the product of this agency's work." Now, 90 percent of the BIA's 10,000 employees are Indian and the agency has changed into an advocate for tribal governments. "Never again will we attack your religions, your

languages, your rituals, or any of your tribal ways,” Gover promised. “Never again will we seize your children, nor teach them to be ashamed of who they are. Never again.”

Eugene Johnson: Kevin Gover is Indian. An apology coming from him is like having a black official in the U.S. government apologize to the black populace for slavery, Rosewood, the KKK, etc. It's like having a Jew apologize to the Jewish populace for Nazi atrocities enacted during WWII. His apology is truly offensive to me. It reminds me of when the Methodists apologized for Chivington's massacre of the Cheyennes at Sand Creek. Then I found out that it was Indian Methodists who were apologizing.

As for the so-called Indian “leaders” present at his “apology,” who are these Indian leaders? Were they Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) tribal council government “leaders”-- mostly corrupt individuals who would gladly sell their own people off to the highest bidders--or were they traditionalists? Most likely they were IRA leaders, favorite “spokespeople” of the US government which does its best to avoid traditional leaders who can't be manipulated.

Jim Craven: When I read this obscene cover-up masquerading as an “apology,” I immediately thought of Theresienstadt. That was the showcase concentration camp in Czechoslovakia that the Nazis used for Swiss Red Cross Inspections. They would kill off half the inhabitants, rushing them out to Auschwitz on “blitz transfers,” then paint the place up, put on operas sung by the remaining children (only 100 of some 10,000 survived), and even issue camp-specific “currency” in which the “workers” were being paid to give the illusion of paid workers. Of course the usual “Arbeit Macht Frei” was painted over the entrance; the Crematorium was portrayed as a means to insure hygiene and sanitary disposal of any “unfortunate deaths.” This is truly sick. It reminds me of something my mother used to tell me as a child: There are more white trash [and their apple minions] (wearing three-piece suits) on Wall Street and in Washington DC than in the trailer parks of America.

Nuremberg was the major force for the origination and adoption of the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide (this word is **never mentioned** in Gover's “apology”). The US was the major force at Nuremberg despite the fact it allowed US companies like JP Morgan, Standard Oil, Texaco, GM, Brown Brothers Harriman , and individuals like George Herbert Walker and Prescott Bush [grandfathers of George W. Bush] to trade with the Japanese, German and Italian fascists throughout World War II; despite the fact that the U.S. put wanted Nazi war criminals on CIA/US Government payrolls after the War. Yet the US refused to sign the UN Convention on Genocide until 1988. Even then it claimed a “Sovereignty Exemption” that US law would trump the UN Convention in the event of any contradiction (this exemption is itself in violation of Article VI Section 2 of the US Constitution).

Gover has explicitly stipulated to every single type of act mentioned in Article II of the UN Convention on Genocide as constituting genocide while refusing to use that word; killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a group; inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its destruction in whole or in part; conducting measures to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children from one group to another group. And all of this while Canada and the U.S. commit troops to supposedly “stop” genocide in places like Bosnia and Kosovo and presume to lecture countries all over the world about “human rights.”

This is so typical of those who plunder. First they consolidate their positions, then they expect those plundered to just “get over it” while the plunderers keep the very system that was born and nurtured upon ill-gotten power and wealth. Notice the reference in the “apology” to the percentage of “Indians” at BIA. Yet Eugene Johnson (see his comments above), a Siletz Indian who worked for a subcontractor of the BIA, was let go for “failure to pass a security check” (required by all BIA employees so no “radicals” can get in.) After a FOIA request, the agency supposedly giving the security check claimed to have nothing on him. So much for what kind of “Indians” the BIA has working for them. There’s no mention of the fact that the BIA still clings to genocidal legacy of the 25% blood-quantum rule and arrogates the “right” to define who and what an Indian is, the clear intention of which is revealed in the following quote from a BIA Document:

“Set the blood-quantum at one-quarter, hold to it as a rigid definition of Indians, let intermarriage proceed...and eventually Indians will be defined out of existence. When that happens, the federal government will finally be freed from its persistent Indian problem.” (Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* p. 338).

There’s no acknowledgement that the “legacy of racism and inhumanity” mentioned in the “apology” continues today in the more recent use of Indians for medical experiments, as objects of chemical/biological warfare, and in forced sterilizations, among other things. There’s no discussion of redressing broken treaties, or the possibility of reparations. There’s no discussion of the estimated \$3 billion (plus interest) “missing” from BIA accounts. Where is it? There is an estimated \$6 billion (plus interest) in royalties owned to Indian Nations. Where is it? Lost monies mean lost lives here and now.

There is no discussion of Indian Reservations being designated as dumpsites for toxic wastes (the nazis used to bring the victims to the gas chambers, the new nazis bring the gas chambers to the victims.)

Indian Nations are sovereign by the same international law that recognizes the US and Canada as sovereign nations. Nations do not make treaties with their own "citizens." In the case of Canada, “subjects” do not make treaties with fellow “subjects” of the Crown. We do not need permission or recognition of our

sovereignty or nation status; we need only continue to assert them and point out the hypocrisy and intentions of those bent on our extinction.

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