

TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

Prior to the occupation of the Southwest by the United States, the Navaho existed as groups of people, usually either clans or groups of clans. They were united only by language and by tribal culture, but they had no political entity or sense of responsibility to unrelated groups. There were chiefs, or head men, chosen by each group, but there seemed no need for any further government. Certainly the Spanish Government of the 17th to the early 19th centuries did not realize the independence of these Navaho groups, nor did the Mexican Government during its twenty five year duration. Nor was it fully comprehended by our Government until the time of the exile to Fort Sumner. It was during these years that General Carlton tried to establish a simple form of self-government, but the old order of family and clans seemed unchangeable and any other form was incomprehensible to the Navaho. There were many notable characters among the chiefs of the early 1800s, most of them destined to become prisoners of war,- exiles to Fort Sumner. Their names appear on the treaty of 1868, signed by General Sherman for the United States, and by twenty eight Navaho leaders, including Barboncito, Manuelito, Narbona, Ganado Muchos, and others.

After the return to the reservation in 1868 and the establishment of the Agency at Fort Defiance, the old order continued. The first civil Agent to the Navaho was Captain Henry L. Dodge, who had much understanding of and sympathy with these Indians. He utilized the Navaho leaders to assist him in maintaining law and order. As time went on, and more agents appeared on the scene, they found it necessary to be more autocratic.

By 1901 the Bureau of Indian Affairs divided the Navaho Country

into six districts (including the Hopi) with an agency in each. This system of smaller areas of jurisdiction greatly facilitated the work of each agency, but it did nothing to bring the tribe together as a whole. Communication was still difficult, and in many areas, travel was still possible only by foot or on horseback. Each political change in Washington brought a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs and usually each had new ideas and adopted changes in policy that must have been bewildering to the Navaho.

But it was the discovery of oil on the reservation in 1921, that brought to focus the need for a Tribal Government for all the Navaho People. This discovery, located in the San Juan District near Shiprock, immediately brought about the discussion as to whether oil leases were to be executed by this District or by the Tribe as a whole. Article X of the 1868 treaty, required the consent of at least three fourths of all adult male Indians from any part of the reservation, to determine the cession of any region. Therefore the Department of the Interior ruled that these oil leases should be for the benefit of the whole Tribe, and authorized the Commissioner to sign oil and gas leases in their behalf.

The establishment of a governing body, however, was a slow process. The Department of the Interior notified the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that a Council of Navaho men from all districts must be created, whose members were qualified to act on matters concerning the Tribe. Thus began the task of developing a democratic representative Tribal Government for the Navaho People. The first council was selected in 1923 and held its first meeting on July 7th of that year. The Chairman was chosen outside the Council Membership with one of the delegates being chosen as Vice Chairman. Meetings were called by the Navaho Agent, rather than the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and could not be held except in his presence.

In 1927 Superintendent John Hunter of the Leupp Agency, in the Southwestern part of the Reservation, developed a local community organization called a chapter. These chapter meetings made it possible to bring the people of the region together where representatives from the Bureau of Indian Affairs could discuss the Bureau's efforts for the improvement of agricultural conditions, the improvement of livestock, and the necessity for schools. This Chapter plan proved most beneficial as the people got together to discuss among themselves any problems they had, and the idea spread rapidly to all the other districts, bringing better understanding between the Navaho and the Bureau.

The first Council of 1923 called for one delegate from each of the six districts with six alternates. This was quickly found to be inadequate and was followed with revisions, a second in 1923, again in 1927, and 1928. ^{when voting rights for women were added.} Then again in 1931, when the council was increased ^{seventy four} ^{were} to its present number of delegates, these to be elected by the people of the several districts in accordance with the population of each district. Ribbons of different colors were those first ballots. Terms of office were set at four years and individual could serve more than two terms. By 1936 the Council Membership was criticized as not representing the leadership of the Tribe. The people were still having difficulty in comprehending leadership beyond the local level. It was the issuance of grazing controls that brought home to each locality that the Council rather than the local head men were the decisions.

In 1938 voting registration was adopted and ballots with pictures of the candidates were used as there were still so many who could not read or write.

the
of money were coming into the treasury from uranium mines and the new oil fields. Much of this income has been soundly invested, the rest providing many new benefits for the Tribe such a greater water development, new and better roads, new hospital facilities in collaboration with the U.S. Public Health Service, the establishment of the Education Scholarship Fund, the Tribal Enterprises, the ten day work program whereby every adult Navaho in need of work is guaranteed ten days of work a month; an impressive list of accomplishments.

To the outside^r, it seems that on the whole the wealth that has come to the Tribe, has been wisely used, yet in the 1963 election campaign, unproved accusations of misappropriation of funds were made. After sixteen years of comparatively smooth progress the newly elected Chairman, Raymond Nakai, has created controversy in the Council. In his eagerness to bring reforms with his administration, difference of opinion has arisen, and a division has taken place within the Council. Good may come from this, for the people as a whole have become aware that some Tribal matters have come to a standstill, and they are realizing the importance of the individual vote. These troubled times may well lead to a more truly democratic government and even to a two party system. The situation at Window Rock today, might be compared to a President of the United States elected by one party, while the majority of the Congress belongs to the other. Doubtless the 1967 election will resolve the differences.

Aside from this momentary situation, the record of progress and development of the Tribal Government since its inception in 1923, is most remarkable, for the People, who formerly had no governing body other than the leadership of chosen head men in clan groups, now are welding themselves into a tribal entity^{unity?}, showing great advancement in consideration for the people as a whole.

the
of money were coming into the treasury from uranium mines and the new oil fields. Much of this income has been soundly invested, the rest providing many new benefits for the Tribe such a greater water development, new and better roads, new hospital facilities in collaboration with the U.S. Public Health Service, the establishment of the Education Scholarship Fund, the Tribal Enterprises, the ten day work program whereby every adult Navaho in need of work is guaranteed ten days of work a month; an impressive list of accomplishments.

To the outside^r, it seems that on the whole the wealth that has come to the Tribe, has been wisely used, yet in the 1963 election campaign, unproved accusations of misappropriation of funds were made. After sixteen years of comparatively smooth progress, ~~the newly elected Chairman, Raymond Nakai, has created controversy in the Council.~~ In his eagerness to bring reforms with his administration, difference of opinion has arisen, ^{between the older members & the newly elected younger members} and a division has taken palce within the Council. Good may come from this, for the people as a whole have become aware that some Tribal matters have come to a standstill, and they are realizing the importance of the individual vote. These troubled times may well lead to a more truly democratic government and even to a two party system. The situation at Window Rock today, might be compared to a President of the United States elected by one party, while the majority of the Congress belongs to the other. Doubtless the 1967 election will resolve the differences.

Aside from this momentary situation, the record of progress and development of the Tribal Government since its inception in 1923, is most remarkable, for the People, who formerly had no governing body other than the leadership of chosen head men in clan groups, now are welding themselves into ^{unity?} a tribal entity, showing great advancement in consideration for the people as a whole.