

Termination for Colvilles Takes Giant Step

By BRUCE A. WILSON

NESPELEM — Termination of the Colville Indian reservation took a giant step forward here Friday.

In a dramatic reversal of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' previous position, commissioner Robert L. Bennett said it has become the "sense of Congress" that termination be approved.

He said the purpose of last Friday's tribal meeting, which filled the Nespelem school gymnasium with several hundred Colvilles, was to find out what sort of "compromise" might be acceptable to those opposing termination.

There were indications this compromise will take the form of a reduced reservation for Col-

villes wishing to remain wards of the government.

But if recent opinion polls are any indication, perhaps three-fourths of the tribe's timberland would have to be sold to the Department of Agriculture, for inclusion in national forest, to pay

off the tribal members who want out.

FOLLOWING Friday's meeting, which lasted from 10 a.m. until past 4 p.m., Narcisse Nicholson, jr., of Omak, chairman of the Colville tribal business council, told the Chronicle:

"We are much closer to termination than ever before. The mechanics may take six or seven years to accomplish. But it looks like Congress finally will pass the legislation."

Termination for the Colvilles twice has been approved by the U. S. Senate. Both times it died in the House.

Bills have been introduced again — and Bennett empha-

sized Friday that his conference with the Colvilles "had the blessing" of the key figure in the House, Rep. James Haley of Florida, chairman of a subcommittee on Indian affairs.

LESS THAN a month ago, the business council received word that Bennett — himself an Oneida Indian from a Wisconsin tribe — wished to meet with the Colvilles.

Last Thursday, a day before the tribal meeting, he arrived to confer with the business council and other tribal leaders. Until then, not even members of the council knew what his proposals might be.

Some of the 10-4 council ma-

jority favoring termination feared for what they would consider the "worst"—another BIA effort to encourage economic developments, such as a tribally-owned lumber mill, which might forestall termination indefinitely.

To their surprise, Bennett took precisely the opposite tack.

He told the business council that opinion polls and a continued re-election of councilmen favoring termination has convinced key Congressmen terminal legislation is justified.

He said, in effect, that the minority opposed to termination should agree on what they want to salvage so the legislation might enjoy support from an

even greater percentage of the tribe.

But he strongly indicated that lacking such agreement, terminal legislation will move anyway. With BIA and Department of the Interior backing, the measure in effect would become an administration bill.

AS A RESULT, Friday's tribal meeting assumed a markedly different complexion from any of the previous tribal meetings on termination.

Objections still were voiced — by members of the articulate Petitioners' party, by longtime Nespelem councilwoman Lucy Covington, by elderly squaws

who long for the days of the chiefs.

Thomas Edwards of Seattle, a Boeing engineer and past president of the Colville Indian association, urged amendments including one designed to clarify the individual Colville's equity in tribal assets.

The big difference was that while previous meetings have featured bitter disputes between those favoring and opposing termination, this time hardly anyone took the trouble to speak in favor.

Leaders of the Colville Liquidation Promoters, which has spearheaded the termination

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Commissioner Pledges Termination Support

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movement in recent years, felt that with the BIA's reversal, the war essentially had been won.

They seemed content to sit back last Friday, letting opponents have their say.

"We don't care what sort of compromise is adopted," said Mrs. Ruby Babcock of Republic, a former CLP president, "as long as it does not interfere with those who wish to terminate BIA supervision and receive their full cash equity of the tribal assets."

Not a single speaker mentioned "development" Friday. Several persons unalterably opposed to termination admitted, for the first time, at a public meeting, that it has become inevitable.

AFTER THE usual troubles with a public address system, the commissioner of Indian affairs, Bennett, opened Friday's meeting by explaining Congress wants to act on termination and whatever "compromise" proposal he took back to Washington, D.C., would receive serious attention.

"Since the Colvilles want termination," he said, "it is our responsibility to help them work out the best possible terminal plan, keeping in mind the interests of all groups."

Bennett suggested minorities wishing to remain wards of the government could (a) place what was left of tribal land in a trust, (b) create a federally-chartered corporation, or (c) salvage a reduced reservation with continued BIA and Public Health service obligations.

"The Senate and House will accept any reasonable compromise," Bennett said.

THE COMMISSIONER then settled back to listen.

Among the first speakers was former tribal councilman Steve Cleveland of Brewster. He said that at a December 18 meeting in Omak, a group of Colvilles had prepared a "compromise" plan under which anyone who wished to could withdraw while others retained the same status as they presently enjoy.

John Cleveland, five times chairman of the tribal business council, added that while he didn't feel the Colvilles were ready for termination, its passage seems inevitable and "we have no objection to those who want to get out and be paid."

Louie Wapato of Manson, another former business council chairman and a forceful, finger-wagging speaker who resembles a defense attorney making his final plea to the jury, urged that only people living on the reservation should decide the issue.

This phase of the program ended when Guy Wagner, jr., of Monse suggested the previous speakers' "backward way of looking at things" is the reason they are former councilmen. He saw no merit in a reduced reservation.

SEVERAL OTHER tribal members were followed by Edwards, the Seattle engineer who holds two degrees from the University of Washington.

Edwards had brought mimeographed copies of 11 resolutions he hoped Friday's meeting would adopt. Most were amendments to S. 282, Senator Jackson's termination bill.

Later in the day Mary Wong of Tacoma, another CIA leader, told the Colvilles that "Thomas



Tribal Members Give Opinions

Susan Morgan of Nespelem (left) held mike while Madeline Moses, whose father was a nephew of Chief Moses, spoke in her native tongue at Friday's meeting. Then Mrs. Morgan translated.

E. Edwards is your last hope if you want to keep your holdings."

She moved the adoption of Edwards' Resolution No. 2, covering numerous amendments to S. 282, and also asked for a second to the motion, though Bennett was presiding.

Bennett remain calm and unperturbed, answering questions quietly and even permitting a vote on Mary Wong's motion, which lost by a forest of hands to approximately eight.

FOLLOWING a buffet luncheon Helene Foster of Portland charged the BIA with treating Indians like a "herd of cattle" and said: "The government has done nothing for us except to blow up a smokescreen to cover its mistakes."

Then a series of speakers from the Petitioners' party, which claims 460 members, opposed termination in any form.

The party's chairman, T. B. Charley of Malott, said Colvilles who remained could not exist on a reduced reservation.

Paschal Sherman, one of St. Mary's mission's most distinguished graduates and a long-time federal government official in Washington, D.C., said even if a compromise is adopted, Congress might reject it or the President might veto the whole bill.

"No need has been shown for additional national forest in this country," Sherman said. "On two occasions the Bureau of the Budget has opposed allocating funds to buy the tribal timber assets. Without these funds, a liquidation becomes impossible."

Louie Camille of Inchelium said, "I want all of my reservation, not just part of it," and William Charley of Malott said because of increasing land values, the reservation is becoming a "gold mine" and should not be destroyed.

THE PETITIONERS were followed by a procession of elderly squaws in colorful costumes. Susan Morgan of Nespelem served as their interpreter, though several of the ladies finally expressed themselves in English.

Madeline Moses, whose father

was a nephew of Chief Moses, said, "We get all of our food from the land and the lake, and if all this is ended, what are we going to eat?"

"I want to keep my allotment for my grandchildren to play, that's all I want," said Suzie Cawston, also of Nespelem. Also voicing objections was Sadie Moses, a granddaughter of Chief Moses.

Through the afternoon hours, an unending procession of Colvilles continued to flow to the tiny witness stand equipped with a microphone.

Ronald A. Neilson of Inchelium, current president of the CIA, said he did not see how a reduced reservation could be assembled since Indians wishing to remain live throughout the entire area.

Former council president Harvey Moses of Nespelem urged that no action be taken now.

Mose George of Wenatchee, who attended Haskill institute with Commissioner Bennett, spoke in a colorful vernacular: "God bless you, brother, stay in if you want; God bless you brother, take your money and get out, if you want." He drew quite a hand.

Retired superior court judge Joseph Wicks of Omak, now an attorney to the business council, urged that all parties get together in working out a compromise.

Arthur Kamiakin went back to hunting and fishing rights guaranteed by the Treaty of 1855, which his grandfather had signed, and Lucy Covington, while declaring that people with only a little Indian blood were the ones seeking termination, admitted:

"This may or may not be the last meeting we will have to decide this matter."

Nicholson told the Chronicle he hopes Senator Jackson will hold a hearing on S. 282 in a month or six weeks. He said the hearings probably would be conducted in Washington, D.C. He said the House might — or might not — hold another hearing out West.

If it doesn't, last Friday's tribal meeting may have been the last as far as deciding the essential issue is concerned.



Elderly Woman Expresses Her Views

Mrs. Morgan served as a translator for several elderly squaws who opposed termination. In foreground were Narcisse Nicholson, jr., Omak, tribal business council chairman, and agency superintendent Elmo Miller. In the first row behind "witness stand" were (from left) Louie Camille, T. B. Charley, Paschal Sherman, and Joseph Wicks, tribal attorney.