

The Creation of Poverty

VINE DELORIA JR., a Sioux Indian, writing in the New York Times Magazine of Dec. 7, 1969 ("The War Between the Redskins and the Feds"), refers to the American Indian practice of holding land in common by the tribe, and gives the following bit of history:

"Church pressure to individualize the tribes and dispose of the tribal land estate resulted in the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887. This act divided the reservations up into allotments of 160 acres, and each Indian was given a piece of land for farming. The remainder of the tribal holdings was declared "surplus" and opened to settlement by non-Indians.

"Before allotment was forced on the tribes, there was no poverty on the reservations. The minority report issued against the policy mentioned the complete absence of pauperism among the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma. It suggested that the Indian method of holding land for an entire community might be superior to the idea of non-Indian society, in that this method precluded a class of people that was perennially poor, while non-Indian society was plagued with poverty in its lower economic class.

"The effect of individualizing the tribal estate was the creation of extreme poverty on many of the reservations. Individual Indians, unaccustomed to viewing land as a commodity, were easily swindled out of their allotments. Good farm land often went for a bottle of liquor, white trustees of individual Indian estates often mysteriously inherited their wards' property, and dying Indians were known to have mysteriously given their lands to churches before expiring. One Indian commissioner trod on eggshells during his term because a half-million-dollar Indian estate passed on to a missionary society instead of to the Indian heirs. Between 1887 and 1934 some ninety million acres of land left Indian ownership in a variety of ways. The actual circumstances in some cases have never seen the light of day.

"Indians who sold their lands did not merge into white society and disappear. They simply moved into their relatives' lands and remained within the tribal society. Thus, the land base was rapidly diminishing while the population continued to remain constant and, in some cases, grew spectacularly."



Review and Reflection

BY
ROBERT CLANCY

"THE AMERICAN TAXPAYER is on the brink of revolt". We have been hearing this refrain for a year or more. I would like to believe it—but which way did the revolt go? There are bubblings and groanings, but no explosion.

It has been said that a country passes the danger point when its taxes exceed one-third of the national income. The U.S. has stepped over this line and joined most of the world in this respect (welcome to the club). The real danger is not in revolt but in passive acceptance.

Once upon a time when taxes were light, Americans were quick to create pandemonium over a slight increase. But now that American taxes are approaching the scale of other countries, Americans are becoming as dulled to it as other people.

Although everybody grumbles about taxes, very few really want to do anything about it for fear of losing a government hand-out in one form or other. When Barry Goldwater was running for President in 1964 there was a widespread impression that he wanted to do away with social security. People went into shock over that, and this fear was undoubtedly the chief factor in the worst defeat any major Presidential candidate has ever suffered. (As election time approached, Goldwater became milder and milder about the things he would do. If he had been elected, most people would have surely found their way of life unchanged.)

We might recall that there was a "tax revolt" in France a few years ago, led by M. Poujade, which came to nought, most likely for similar reasons. Taxes in France are like the recipe for a French sauce—a little bit each of a million ingredients, undetectable individually, and keeping the pot simmering but never boiling over (a variation of the Colbert recipe about the goose and the feathers).

Taxes Italian-style are such that if a taxpayer were idiotic enough to pay them all meticulously, he would end up by paying more than one hundred per cent of his income. It is naturally assumed that every Italian taxpayer lies outrageously in making out his tax form, and the government in turn uses a multiplication factor to arrive a little closer to the truth. The result is about the same amount of taxes collected as everywhere else.

In the more "advanced" countries the ability-to-pay