

Indian Rights and Lands

by MABEL L. REES

INDIANS, faced with shrinking land rights and the threat of new taxes, now find their problems are increasing rather than diminishing. According to a series of articles this spring in the Syracuse Herald-Journal by George Leidal, who has devoted much study to Indian affairs, there are not only more issues to be solved, but differences of opinion among authorities as to their solution.

Often Indian spokesmen hold one view and government officials, disagreeing among themselves, hold another. Are Indians wards or citizens? Do the Indians constitute a dependent or an independent nation? Must they pay sales or income taxes? Such issues cause endless debate.

A persistent champion of Indians' rights conveyed in long-standing treaties dating back as far as 1794, is Dr. Robert Raybeck, Indian historian of Syracuse University. He supports the views of the owner of a Mohawk Indian craft shop, that Indians do not have to pay sales taxes on the goods sold there.

To those who disagree he declares that "state agencies often act as if opinions were laws," and fundamentally Indians are more determined than

ever to retain what lands they still possess, along with many of their tribal customs.

And Vine Deloria, Jr., executive director of the National Congress of American Indians, reports that the 380,000 remaining on reservations desire help most in developing the resources on their land.

Many tribesmen resent the loss of more and more of their holdings as (in the case of the appropriation of thousands of acres for the St. Lawrence Seaway) old treaties are being steadily disregarded. There may be some hope of improvement, however, now that the Bureau of Indian Affairs has as its newly appointed head, Robert L. Bennett, who is half-Indian. Thus far paternalism and welfare have not been acceptable for the basic needs of Indians. Wider freedom and self-rule may provide a more honorable approach and an incentive to progress.

It was claimed that only thirteen Indian pupils who received government aid were graduated from post high school courses of study, and the total number of Indians in higher educational institutions is less than two percent of their school population.

We need your help if you have an extra copy of the May HGN. There is not even one copy left for future reference. Especially welcome would be unmarked copies, but any you can spare will be gratefully accepted.