

Self-Determination, the Right to Secession for the Diné (Navajo) Nation

Mark Evans and Charles Davis, *Workers' Herald*, December 1983

Introduction

The Diné, or Navajo,^{*} people are an oppressed nation within the borders of the United States. They are not, as Anglo-American chauvinists claim, a "disappearing people" who are being assimilated into Anglo-American society. The Diné population today numbers over 175,000 and is growing rapidly.¹ They speak a common and distinct language and have a common and distinct culture characterized by traditional customs and religious beliefs. The perseverance of the Diné culture is demonstrated by the fact that only a small minority have been converted to Christianity, and that Diné Bizaad remains the principal language in the Diné nation. In fact, one-third of the men and half of the women in the Diné labor force do not speak English.²

The Diné people inhabit a definitely delineated territory, the political borders of which have been established by U.S. imperialism as the Navajo Reservation. This reservation occupies a large part of the territory that has been continuously inhabited by the Diné people for hundreds of years. The reservation covers about 25,000 square miles, an area about the size of Costa Rica and El Salvador combined, in the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. It is bordered by four mountains that are central to Diné legend: Debentsa or Big Sheep to the north; Delodo to the east; Mt. Taylor to the south; and San Francisco Peak to the west.[†] The integrity of the Diné nation is spoken to by the fact that nine-tenths of the Diné people live within Diné national territory, despite the low level of economic development and difficulty in obtaining work.



The Diné nation is characterized by a common economic life, as capitalist production relations and modern commerce have been thrust upon the Diné by U.S. imperialism. Within the nation today exist all the major classes which typify capitalist society: the bourgeoisie; the proletariat; and the petty bourgeoisie. Moreover, the Diné nation is tied together by relatively modern means of transportation, communication, and trade. It also has the governmental structures of a bourgeois state. The Diné state, however, is not sovereign; it is subordinate to the colonial administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

The Diné nation's position as an oppressed nation, a nation ravaged by U.S. imperialism, is shown by its economic underdevelopment and the severe poverty suffered by the people. The

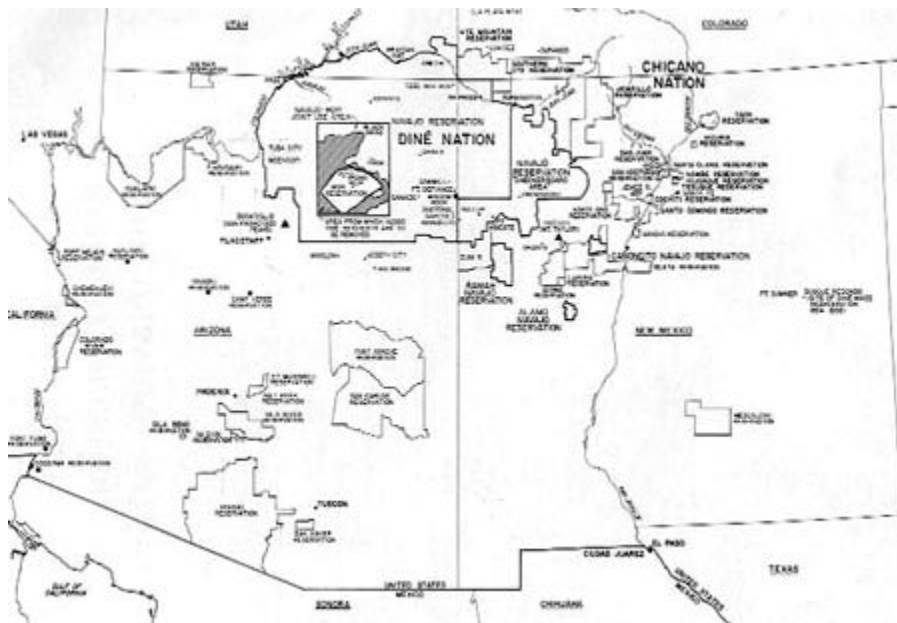
* The name "Navajo" is derived from a Pueblo term *Apaches de Nabahov*, meaning "strangers of the cultivated field." The Navajo people call themselves the Diné, meaning "the people," and the nationally conscious among the Diné use the name Diné rather than Navajo in the English language as well.

† The territory of the Diné nation is distinct from that of the Chicano nation in the Southwest, which is centered in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado to the east of the Diné nation.

Diné are among the poorest people in the United States. Eighty-seven percent live at or near the official government poverty level. In 1973, Diné per capita annual income was about \$900, roughly the same level as in Brazil. Average U.S. per capita income in 1973 was \$4,497, nearly five times the Diné average. Moreover, Diné per capita income has been falling in comparison to the U.S. average. In 1959, it stood at 27.3%, by 1969 it had fallen to 24.1 %, and by 1974 it had fallen to 19%. Because the current economic crisis has hit the Diné harder than most, it is likely that this ratio has fallen even more steeply over the last decade.

Due to malnutrition and disease, the average Diné lifespan is only 45 years, 25 years less than the U.S. average. Infant mortality is twice the U.S. average. There are only half as many doctors per capita as in the U.S. as a whole. In 1975, 80% of Diné homes were judged to be substandard and only 8% had standard indoor plumbing. Over half still do not have electricity. In 1970, the average person in the Diné nation had only completed five years of school.³

This is the legacy that Anglo-American colonization of the Diné people has produced. The Diné territory has been exploited for its abundant mineral resources by U.S. imperialism and the Diné people have been used as a reserve army of cheap labor. The Diné people have endured over a century of abuse, brutality and lynchings carried out by Anglo-American chauvinists and the U.S. police and military forces. Yet despite the poverty, national degradation, and political subjugation, the Diné people have persevered and their national consciousness has not diminished – it has grown.



History

The Diné people are descendants of the Athapascan people who migrated to what is now the southwestern United States about 500 years ago. They migrated as primitive hunters and gatherers in separate clans from the Canadian Pacific Northwest by way of Nevada and California. The first Diné settlements in the Southwest in the early 1500's were east of their present territory in the canyons and mesas of the San Juan River. By the early 1600's, some Diné had settled as far west as Black Mesa. Interaction with the various Pueblo peoples (the Tewa, Zuni, Moqui, and

others) greatly changed the Diné, for it was from these peoples that the Diné first learned sedentary agriculture, especially the cultivation of maize (corn).

The contributions of the Spanish also helped make the Diné character, for it was the Spanish who brought the beloved horse and sheep to the Americas. At first the Diné had almost no contact with the Spanish and kept little livestock. Witnessing the brutal subjugation of the Pueblo peoples, the Diné kept to themselves in the mesas and canyons. From the first, they were totally opposed to the presence of the Spanish colonizers and pressured the Pueblos to resist. A short ten years after Anate and the first Spanish settled in "New Mexico," several Spanish military campaigns were launched against the Diné because they were giving refuge to resistant Pueblos and were holding secret meetings to plan the expulsion of the Spanish. The Diné retaliated for these early raids. After the 1650's, the Pueblos, Apaches, and Diné began open resistance and the Diné supplied warriors in the 1680 Pueblo Revolt that expelled the Spanish from the region.

After the expulsion of the Spanish in 1680, the Diné acquired livestock in large numbers. Diné life was further changed when many Pueblos exiled themselves with the Diné after the Spanish reconquered "New Mexico" in 1693. The Pueblo exiles increased the population in the Diné communities by two or three times and new families, clans, and villages were created. While many of the Pueblos returned to the Pueblo communities around 1775, many others stayed and became a part of the Diné people. Indeed, one Diné clan, which to this day has somewhat distinct traditions (including a greater dependence on agriculture than livestock), is descended from the people of the Jimez Pueblo who joined the Diné en masse after a revolt against the Spanish in 1696.

The eighteenth century was a period of expansion of territory and population and of great social and cultural changes. Agriculture flourished with fields of maize, beans, squash, and peaches. The Diné began to amass large herds of sheep, goats, horses, and mules. Women learned weaving from Pueblo men, and clothing and pottery changed with Pueblo influence. Diné men learned and adapted Pueblo religious ceremonies. Trading with the Spanish, Utes, Comanches, Apaches, and Pueblos became common.

In the 1770's, as many of the Pueblos returned to their homes, the Diné spread out to occupy the land between the Four Sacred Mountains. Raids against the Spanish, and now Zuni and Moqui settlements as well, became increasingly important. After a massacre of Diné women and children in 1804, a permanent state of war and plunder existed between the Diné and the Spanish and Pueblo settlements. Diné raiders stole horses, sheep, and even women and children (to be used as slaves) as far south as Chihuahua and as far east as Kansas. The Spanish, Moqui, and Zuni seized Diné animals and slaves. As the Diné became increasingly wealthy and sedentary, they also became targets of raids by Utes and Apaches. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Diné were becoming a dominant force in the Southwest and envisioned driving the Spanish settlers (who were now independent of Spain and known as New Mexicans or Chicanos) out of the region.

Because of the expansion of their wealth (measured primarily in livestock) and the use of slave labor, Diné society was by this time emerging out of the period of primitive communism and an embryonic feudal-like system was developing. Society was being divided into rich and poor. A few families with large herds of livestock were coming to dominate the life of the clans, making use of the labor of poorer relatives (and in some cases, slaves) and in return providing them with subsistence.

The Diné people had a common language, culture, and history, and had established for themselves a definite and stable territory. The fact that no raiding took place within the Diné was the result of their sense of tribal unity. But the Diné people were not, at this time, united as a modern nation is. The pastoral-agricultural economy of the Diné still allowed each clan and, in fact, each multi-family outfit, to live more or less autonomously. They produced mainly for their own consumption. As of yet, little was produced for trade either among the Diné or with the neighboring people, although this trade had existed on a small scale for many years. This economic autonomy was accompanied by political decentralization. Each clan recognized a number of Headmen (a War Chief, a Peace Chief, and a Medicine Man), but these Headmen did not have absolute authority and, moreover, their authority was limited to the clan. There was no centralized leadership of the entire Diné people; each clan operated independently, deciding on its own where to make its home, whether to live in peace or at war with the neighboring peoples, etc. However, all this was to change rapidly over the next century.⁴

U.S. Conquest

In 1846, the United States annexed what is now the Southwestern United States after defeating Mexico in the Mexican-American War. The Diné, however, did not submit to U.S. rule, as they had not submitted to Mexican or Spanish rule, and remained unconquered for more than 15 years. In 1860, over 1000 Diné warriors led by Barboncito and Manuelito assaulted Fort Defiance, which the U.S. government had built within the Diné territory. Then in 1862, the United States launched a devastating war on the Diné. U.S. Army officer Kit Carson recruited Chicano, Ute, and Pueblo soldiers and waged a scorched-earth campaign against the Diné. Every field crop and orchard was burned, every house was destroyed, every horse and sheep stolen, and many people were murdered. Facing starvation, most of the Diné surrendered. The US Army rounded up the Diné and forced them to walk 400 miles across the desert to a desolate concentration camp in eastern New Mexico known as Bosque Redondo. There the Diné were supposed to be converted into "Christian farmers." Lack of water, alkaline soil, and lack of funds prevented successful farming and four years later the U.S. government grew tired of feeding the people at Bosque Redondo and allowed the Diné to return to their homeland. The long Walk, as the Diné call their forced march across the desert, and the four-year travail of homesickness, illness, and starvation at Bosque Redondo had led to the deaths of 2000 people, about one in five of those who had been incarcerated.

During the ordeal at Bosque Redondo the Diné began to perceive themselves as a political unit. In 1868, the majority of the Diné united under the leadership of Barboncito, Manuelito, and Gannado Mucho to negotiate a treaty with the U.S. government. The Treaty of 1868 allowed the Diné to live in their homeland, but conceded only a small part of their traditional territory. Moreover, this treaty placed the Diné territory and the Diné people under the rule of the U.S. government.⁵

The original 3.5 million acre reservation was expanded numerous times over the next fifty years until it encompassed some 17 million acres. (The Diné's land before conquest had occupied about 20 million acres.) This territory, which is mostly arid, was conceded to the Diné because it was considered useless by most Anglo-American capitalists at the time. Throughout this period portions of the territory were taken back by the U.S. government for mineral exploration, and then returned to the Diné when no minerals were found. Many of the best lands, however, were permanently lost to Anglo ranchers and the railroads.

After 1868, the Diné reconstructed their lives, rebuilding their livestock herds and creating a relatively prosperous economy once again. Elements of a feudal economic system, which had emerged prior to the U.S. conquest, were further developed. A few of the Diné established large herds, the products of which were increasingly bound for trade. The captivity at Bosque Redondo had created a dependency on U.S. goods – especially flour, coffee, sugar, and woven fabric. In exchange for these manufactured goods, the Diné traded wool blankets, rugs, meat, lambs, pinon nuts and silver jewelry.

Trade in the Diné nation was controlled by a number of Anglo "wool traders," many of whom had been officers in the army of occupation. These traders made fortunes selling U.S. manufactured goods at inflated prices while buying Diné goods cheap and selling them in the East for huge profits. The Anglo trading posts became economic centers on the reservation and established a usurious credit system based on the livestock seasons.

In 1899, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior was given the power to grant railroad right-of-ways through Diné territory. In 1900, public roads were added. In 1902, the telegraph came through and in 1910 telephone lines were strung up. In 1904 and in 1917, pipeline right-of-ways were authorized. Then in 1921 and 1922, critical events took place that were to drastically alter the lives of the Diné people: natural gas was discovered at Ute Mountain and oil was found near Shiprock.⁶



Diné leaders Barboncito (left) and Manuelito (right)

The Development of the Diné Bourgeoisie and the Tribal Government

The Treaty of 1868 had stated that no Diné land could be leased without the consent of three-quarters of the male population. However, in 1891, the U.S. Congress unilaterally "amended" these treaty rights, authorizing "a council speaking for such Indians" to sign mineral leases. In 1923, a Diné Tribal Council was created by the Secretary of the Interior. Its only function initially was to legitimize mineral leases drawn up by the Secretary of the Interior and the oil companies. At its first meeting the Tribal Council granted the Commissioner of the Navajos (the Anglo-American colonial governor) the authority to sign "on behalf of the Navajo Indians" all oil

and gas leases on Treaty lands. In exchange for signing away the Diné oil and gas, the Tribal Council members were promised "aid" in securing more grazing land by expanding the reservation. In actuality, the discovery of gas and oil in the Southwest was a critical factor, along with the general Anglo-American expansion into the Southwest, that guaranteed that the U.S. government would cede no more land to the Diné.

In creating the Tribal Council, the U.S. government overrode the traditional authority among the Diné, the Headmen of the various clans. U.S. imperialism had been systematically destroying the Diné's traditional system of authority. For example, the Headmen had been denied any part in the distribution of U.S. government rations, and the Tribal Police Force that was established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior, which serves as the colonial administration over the Native peoples) overturned traditional methods of settling conflicts within the tribe.

The U.S. government promoted the leadership of a few members of the embryonic Diné bourgeoisie who had been educated in U.S. schools and had begun to play the role of compradors. This new Diné bourgeoisie was tied to capitalist economic development, which was being rapidly and forcefully thrust upon the Diné by U.S. imperialism. Embryonic capitalist relations *among* the Diné were exemplified by the development of large *commercial* herds raised for export trade, the founding of Diné owned stores, and the payment of wages by Diné employers to Diné employees. Like all capitalists, the Diné bourgeoisie looked forward to the development of a unified Diné nation, through the expansion of trade and capitalist production relations, and the development of a centralized Diné government. Their national aspirations, however, were limited by their comprador role. They accepted the domination of U.S. imperialism and looked to the Anglo-American capitalists and the U.S. government to promote capitalist development in the Diné nation.

Chee Dodge was elected the first Chairman of the Tribal Council and he dominated Diné politics for many years. Dodge exemplified the embryonic Diné bourgeoisie. He owned a large commercial livestock herd and a general store and was one of the most wealthy of the Diné. Educated in U.S. schools and one of the few Diné who could speak English, he acted as a go-between in the relations of the Diné people and the U.S. occupiers, and was a "natural" choice to head the BIA-created Tribal Council.

Although Dodge promoted the penetration of U.S. imperialism, he opposed the complete subsuming of the Diné people by the Anglo-American nation. He promoted Diné language and culture and waged limited struggles to defend Diné autonomy. He bitterly opposed the assimilationist policies of another Diné bourgeois faction led by J.C. Morgan. Under Dodge, the Tribal Council was expanded and became an organ of the Diné bourgeoisie, taking on some of the functions of governing the Diné people, including the repression of their resistance. The Tribal Code was expanded and the tribal judicial system and the Tribal Police were further developed and placed under the authority of the Tribal Council.²

The Creation of the Diné Proletariat

At the turn of the century, the Diné people were almost entirely a peasant people who lived by the raising of livestock and subsistence cultivation. The development of capitalism in the Diné nation meant the ruin of the Diné peasantry. The encroachment of U.S. imperialism, and the railroads and the large Anglo ranchers in particular, prevented the Diné herders from expanding their grazing area. The limited land on the reservation became severely overgrazed and eroded

and by the 1840's this had brought the growth of Diné livestock to a halt. The small holders began to be driven out, particularly as large livestock owners used more and more of the grazing land.

The problems of the Diné herders were intensified by the disappearance of the rug market and the decline of wool and mutton prices after World War I. The severe economic crisis that began in 1929 had a devastating effect. By 1931, the price of wool had fallen from 25¢ to 17¢ per pound; the price of lambs from 44¢ to 5¢ per pound. The goat market disappeared altogether.

In 1934, the BIA organized the Stock Reduction program, which resulted in the massive expropriation of the Diné peasantry. The U.S. government refused to grant the Diné more land and instead declared that half of their livestock had to be slaughtered immediately to solve the overgrazing problem. BIA agents rounded up the livestock, many times taking the sheep to the desert where they were shot and burned or left to rot – to the horror of the people who saw their only means of livelihood destroyed. The stock reduction program was especially damaging to women whose social responsibilities revolved around the raising of sheep. Women were dispossessed by a program whose only compensation was wage work for men. The stock reduction program is remembered by the Diné as a horror comparable only to the Long Walk.

Between 1934 and 1940, the stock reduction cut Diné livestock holdings from 1,111,589 sheep units to 621,584 sheep units. In 1931, there had been 31 sheep and goats per person; by 1940, there were only eight. Many small holders were ruined. Although the large commercial herds were also reduced, their owners gained in the end, taking over grazing lands vacated by the ruined small holders.⁸

The ruin of the Diné peasantry was accompanied by the growth of the Diné proletariat. As early as the 1870's, many propertyless Diné had been recruited to join labor gangs to build the railroads and harvest crops on the large capitalist Anglo farms that were being developed throughout the Southwest. During World War I, many more Diné joined the wage labor force as the war created a great demand for labor. After the war, the Diné laborers were thrown out of work, returning to the reservation. A typical case, involving Native workers in Southern California (one of the regions where Diné laborers were recruited to work), was described in a report of that period.

Several hundred Indians were brought to Torrence during the world war to work in the steel industry. They were allowed to settle as squatters on land owned by one of the steel companies. A few years ago [early 1920's] the camp was broken up for sanitary reasons, industrial needs and conditions of the town changed, and only a few Indian families remained.⁹

The experience of World War I was to be repeated again many times as the Diné proletarians were used as a reserve army of labor by U.S. imperialism. As the U.S. economy recovered from the post-World-War I economic crisis, Diné laborers were once again recruited to help build the new industrial and agricultural enterprises that Anglo-American capitalists were establishing in the Southwest. Children as young as 11 years old were "recruited" from the federal boarding schools to labor in the beet fields of Colorado and Kansas for 9-12¢ a day.

Until the 1930's, the Diné proletariat was still a small part of the population. Then, as the stock reduction expropriated the Diné peasantry, federal public works jobs were extended to the reservation. Although the public works jobs were short-lived, they introduced wage labor on a mass scale for the first time.

World War II cemented the dependence of the Diné on selling their labor power. Some 19,000 people left the reservation during the war: 3,600 served as soldiers and over 15,000 served as laborers. Many of these new proletarians were recruited to work in the shipyards of Los Angeles and the Navajo Ordnance Depot in Arizona. Others worked in the copper mines, the coal fields, and on the railroads as far north as Idaho. Still others worked the cotton fields of Texas, the lettuce fields of Arizona, and the sugar beet fields of Utah and Colorado. Once again, after the war the jobs vanished and the Diné soldiers and proletarians returned to their homeland. This time, however, the peasant economy and their means of subsistence had been sharply reduced. The war was followed by several years of severe hardship and starvation in the Diné nation.

By this time, the Diné people had been largely transformed into a proletarian reserve army of labor for U.S. imperialism, recruited to work in Anglo-American industry and agriculture as they were required, and subsisting on agriculture and welfare when their labor was no longer needed. By 1958, wage labor provided over 63% of all earned income in the Diné nation. Nearly half of wage earnings were brought home by the Diné railroad labor crews. Statistics from the Arizona State Employment Service in 1957 showed that more than half of all Diné job placements were in agriculture, about 10% were in mining, construction, and manufacturing, about 17% were employed by government agencies, and another 17% were employed as domestic servants.^{[10](#)}



Diné Miners Suffer Extreme National and Class Oppression

The Diné people have suffered immeasurably at the hands of U.S. imperialism. To this day they are threatened with the loss of their land, their means of livelihood and with the destruction of their entire people. They have been forced into wage labor under the worst conditions. The plight of the Diné uranium miners is a case in point.

After World War II, the conditions in the Diné homeland were extremely difficult. Many who had left their homes to seek employment in booming industry or the military during the war now returned. But the traditional economy had almost been destroyed by U.S. oppression and exploitation. Therefore, when U.S. monopolies began uranium mining on Diné land, many men had no choice but to go into the mines.

The leases negotiated between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the monopolies for Diné uranium and coal were little more than legal theft of these resources. There were no protections for the land and environment or for the people who would work in the mines. Kerr-McGee, the

largest uranium mining company in the U.S., opened a mine at Red Rock in 1949. This mine operated until 1969. Kerr-McGee also operated a uranium milling plant near Shiprock. All uranium from this mine was sold to the U.S. government's Atomic Energy Commission.

A spokesman from the Red Rock community described the conditions in the mine:

“The miners drilled, blasted and hauled uranium from the mines in wheel barrows. Thirty minutes after the blasting, the miners were sent back into the mines. It took the uranium dust a long time to settle. They were not given any protective clothing or masks. There was no ventilation or drinking water. The miners drank water that seeped through the walls of the mines. The water was contaminated with radioactive particles from the drilling. The mine was two miles long and one mile deep. For all of this, they were paid \$1.60 an hour.”

No federal or state agency would take responsibility for establishing or enforcing safety standards in the uranium mines. This, despite the fact that the Atomic Regulatory Agency was charged with regulating all aspects of the nuclear energy industry, and the Labor Department had the authority to enforce safe working standards on an industry whose products are produced under federal government contracts. Not until 1967, just two years before the close of the Red Rock mine, were regular measurements taken and some standard for safety set. As a result of the collaboration between the government and the monopolies, the lives of the Diné miners were destroyed.

One former miner describes his experience:

“I had the good fortune to be occupying a mining job, but after a few years the material things started to dwindle. Many of the people I had once been with in the mines were beginning to die. My heart weeps for them. I see Navajo widows trying to eke out a living, holding out their hands begging, trying to take care of their children.”

Of one hundred Diné miners who worked at Red Rock, twenty-five have died of lung cancer and another twenty have already developed the disease. It is estimated that 70% of these miners will die of lung cancer and related diseases. A public health doctor reported on ten Diné uranium miners who died from lung cancer after 1970. The youngest was only 31 years old and the average age for the group was just 45 years. While the average time in the mines was 14 years, one miner had worked there only 5 years and still contracted the dread disease. Besides those who died or were disabled by cancer, the miners suffered from other debilitating diseases including pneumonia, thyroid tumors, heart problems, emphysema, pulmonary fibrosis, chronic bronchitis and other respiratory diseases.

The damage done to the Diné people by the uranium mining is not limited to the murdered and crippled uranium miners, nor to the grief of their families and communities. The extraction and milling of uranium produces thousands of tons of radioactive wastes, or tailings. These tailings were simply dumped near the mine sites or mills. The ground water became contaminated with radioactive wastes. No warnings were posted, nor were the local people told of the dangers of the radioactivity in the tailings. Homes were built from this radioactive material. No study has been done on the damage to the Diné people caused by this long-term exposure to radiation, but it will inevitably increase the rate of birth defects and cancer.

In 1979, there was a major break in a mud dam containing tailings from United Nuclear Corporation's Church Rock uranium mill. The resulting spill was the country's "worst in terms of contamination" according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Nearly 100 million gallons of

radioactive sludge and 1,000 tons of solids spilled into the Rio Puerco, a major source of water for the Diné.



Diné proletarians suffer from both class exploitation and national oppression.

Six weeks after the spill, a tribal survey found that at least fifteen adults and five children became ill from contact with the contaminated water and ten head of livestock had died. Seventeen people were still using river water for their livestock, while others were paying as much as \$2 a barrel for water. Eight families did not have transportation to haul water. Shortly after the spill, the government tested ten children from the immediate area of the spill and claimed there was no increase in radiation. No further testing has been done.

So far the Diné have been unsuccessful in getting any reparations from Kerr-McGee, United Nuclear, the other uranium monopolies, or the federal and state governments for the deaths, injuries, and suffering caused by the uranium mining and processing on Diné lands. In the meantime, massive new uranium development is being undertaken. Government plans call for 100 uranium mines and 10 uranium mills by the year 2000 in the Four Corners area, which is populated primarily by Native peoples and Chicanos. In 1975, there were 380 uranium leases on Indian land (including Diné, Laguna Pueblo, Lakota and others). In 1977, the Labor Department gave Kerr-McGee \$2 million for a training program that would provide 100 Navajo miners annually to meet the estimated need for 18,400 underground and 4,000 aboveground uranium miners by 1990.

The medical evidence shows that working in these mines and mills is a death sentence, yet the government is willing to spend millions to aid the monopolies in sending hundreds of Diné to their deaths. We must support the Diné struggle against this genocide. We must support the struggle for Diné self-determination, the right to political secession and complete control of their resources, lives and land.

The Diné Nation Today

By the end of World War II, the Diné *nation*, in the modern sense of the word, had come into being. Commodity production and commerce had broken down the isolation of the various clans. The Diné were now tied together by internal and external trade. Diné society had been divided into the two principal social classes of capitalism – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The

bourgeoisie had established itself as the master of society and was building its centralized state apparatus, albeit under the domination of the U.S. imperialists. The period since World War II has seen the further consolidation of the Diné nation and the growth of national consciousness and the national revolutionary movement.



[Source: *Tribal People's Survival*, 1979 and 1980. Published by the American Indian Environmental Council, Albuquerque, New Mexico]

The Diné Bourgeoisie

The Diné bourgeoisie is composed of a small number of families who own large stockraising and dairy operations and a number of commercial businesses. The members of these families control the tribal government, which puts them in a position to manage and control the resources of the various tribal enterprises and to lease the rights to the vast Diné mineral resources to the Anglo-American energy monopolies and control the revenues from these leases. In 1969, the latest year for which we have figures) there were 30 Diné families which had annual incomes over \$25,000 (approximately \$50,000 in current dollars). Six of these families earned over \$50,000 a year (\$100,000 today). These families were rich even by Anglo-American standards and were extremely rich in the context of the overwhelming poverty in the Diné nation. (In 1969, the income of the average Diné family was less than \$2,500, while nearly one-third earned less than \$1,000.)¹¹ The richest of all the Diné bourgeoisie is Peter McDonald, the former Tribal Chairman, who is reportedly well on his way to becoming the first millionaire among the Native peoples. He is a member of the board of directors of the American Indian Bank and the Patagonia Corporation and four southwestern colleges. He has also been appointed to serve on the Energy Task Force of the Governor of New Mexico and Reagan's national Energy Task Force.¹²

The Diné bourgeoisie is essentially a comprador bourgeoisie allied with U.S. imperialism in the exploitation of its people and their resources. It is principally an agricultural and commercial bourgeoisie and, not having developed its own industry, it was never in a position to challenge the penetration of imperialist manufactured products in its nation. It has, however, fought a long battle to challenge Anglo-American domination of commerce in the Diné nation. Commerce in the Diné nation was for many years the exclusive domain of a handful of profiteering Anglo-American traders. As the Tribal Council's authority grew, it took steps to break this monopoly,

promote the interests of the small number of Diné traders who had been able to establish themselves, and develop a full-scale Diné commercial bourgeoisie. The ownership of gasoline stations was restricted to Diné franchisees, and Diné businessmen were given advantages in obtaining Tribal Council leases to establish new businesses. Tribal Council regulations sought to break-down the limitations of the trade districts that the traders had established. These trade districts had fostered trade between a single district of the Diné nation and the exterior (through the trader), and the Tribal Council's purpose was to promote a greater degree of inter-district (national) trade.¹³

The efforts of the Diné bourgeoisie were aided by the federal government, which by the mid-1960's had adopted a policy of promoting a limited development of the bourgeoisie among the oppressed nationalities. The purpose of this policy was to strengthen the hand of bourgeois reformism within the oppressed nationalities in response to the growth of the revolutionary national movements. Federal loan programs to Native businessmen on reservations were created to promote "Red Capitalism."¹⁴

Peter McDonald championed the Diné bourgeoisie's desire to control its home market, expressing this bourgeois nationalist desire through the slogan: "Keep the Navajo dollar in the Navajo Nation!"¹⁵ "We must move immediately," he declared, "to designate six locations as economic growth centers, magnets to draw the dollars that now drain off the reservation."¹⁶ The strength of the Diné commercial bourgeoisie is growing, but most trade in the Diné nation is still commanded by Anglo-American merchants both on the reservation and in the border towns.

In addition to its private agricultural and commercial businesses, the Diné bourgeoisie has also developed a number of large-scale capitalist enterprises that are nominally the property of the Diné nation as a whole. The most important of these is Navajo Forest Products Industries (NFPI), a large, vertically-integrated timber operation which cuts, processes, and markets the Diné timber resources. In 1977, it was worth some \$25 million, had \$3 million in profits and employed 614 people. The NFPI was created in 1958 using a sawmill built in 1888, and has been expanded and modernized several times since then. A more recent development is the Navajo Agricultural Products Industries which began operating large, capitalist irrigated farms in 1973. The Tribal Council's plans call for the development of 110,000 acres of irrigated farmland, a cattle feedlot, and food processing facilities which would employ a total of 6,000 people. Other tribal enterprises include the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority which provides power, water, and sewage services; the Navajo Engineering and Construction Authority; the *Navajo Times* newspaper; the Navajo Wool Program; and the Navajo Arts and Crafts enterprise. The latter two projects handle the marketing of all wool produced in the Diné nation and a part of handicraft production, and represent efforts to further restrict the profiteering activities of the traders.

These tribal enterprises, while nominally belonging to the entire Diné people, are controlled, through the Tribal Council and the boards of directors of the individual enterprises, by the families which make up the Diné bourgeoisie. The tribal enterprises, like the private Diné businesses, are almost entirely dependent on Anglo-American capital, acquired either from the federal government or private banks and insurance companies. The timber and agricultural operations depend on technical and managerial expertise provided by Anglo-American businessmen and are oriented to produce not for the needs of the Diné nation, but exclusively for the Anglo-American market. Indeed, the Tribal Council is considering proposals from three major Anglo-American agribusinesses to manage the agricultural operations.¹⁷

The Tribal Government

The Treaty of 1868 between the Diné and the U.S. government recognized the Diné as a sovereign people with the right to determine their own destiny. At the same time, and in contradiction with this understanding, the Diné territory (the reservation) was to be "held in trust" for the Diné by the federal government and the Diné people were to be "wards" of the federal government. An early Supreme Court decision interpreted the treaties with the Native peoples this way: "Indian tribes possess all sovereign powers over domestic matters within their territorial boundaries unless the United States decreed to the contrary." The system of government actually established on the Native peoples' territories is very similar to a classic colonial apparatus. The tribal government is expressly subordinate to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which in turn is responsible to the Department of the Interior (DI). The Commissioner of the BIA serves as a colonial governor, enforcing the rule of U.S. imperialism over the territories of the Native peoples. In many ways, the tribal government carries out the functions of a county government. The Diné bourgeoisie, however, is interested in fortifying and extending the authority of the tribal government, pushing for greater sovereign rights. The Navajo Tribal Code, which voices the aspirations of the Diné bourgeoisie, declares that the Navajo Nation is seeking "to work out the relationship of its nation to the United States and the surrounding states" and to require that "these governmental systems recognize the extent to which the Navajo Tribe has become a truly sovereign entity."¹⁸

The efforts of the Diné bourgeoisie to assert its national rights have led to continuing contests over the authority of the Tribal Council in relation to the federal and, particularly, the state governments (Arizona, New Mexico, Utah). In the 1940's, the Tribal Council won the right to exercise control over the funds of the Tribe, which have grown substantially due to revenues from mineral royalties and the tribal enterprises (although this control is still limited by the veto of the BIA). In addition, it pressed to have all government programs in the Diné nation administered by Diné personnel. An ongoing battle has been waged to win the right of the Diné nation to levy taxes, and to limit the authority of the state governments to levy taxes within the Diné nation. As the Diné police and the Diné court system have been strengthened, conflicts have developed over the jurisdiction of the tribal legal system versus that of the state governments. In particular, the tribal government has demanded the right to try non-Diné individuals for violations of Diné law within the Diné nation.

These have been sharp conflicts. While the Diné bourgeoisie has been pressing for the extension of the rights of its nation a powerful section of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie is pressing to have all legal recognition of the rights of the Native peoples annulled. These forces, represented most openly by a number of the energy monopolies and by wealthy western ranchers and capitalists, have launched a major offensive against Native peoples in recent years. The Western Conference of the Council of State Governments and the American Farm Bureau Federation recently passed resolutions calling for the termination of all special treaty rights and the elimination of all Indian reservations. Their object is the division of these territories among the energy monopolies and wealthy ranchers and capitalists. A major spokesman for these interests has been James Watt, who, during his tenure as Secretary of the Interior, was directly responsible for the administration of the Native peoples' territories.¹⁹

The Plunder of Diné Mineral Resources and the Diné Bourgeoisie

The Diné nation contains immense reserves of energy resources. In 1977, the Diné were estimated to have reserves of 100 million barrels of oil, 25 billion cubic feet of natural gas, 80

million pounds of uranium ore, and 5 billion tons of easily accessible coal. These resources are owned by the Diné nation, but are controlled by the Department of the Interior, which actually establishes the conditions of their exploitation. The Department of the Interior has traditionally been controlled by the large mining companies who have used it to gain access to the mineral wealth on lands owned by the government and on the Native peoples' territories for little if any compensation. The contracts signed over the rights to the Diné people's minerals have been among the worst. Among the companies making super-profits in the Diné nation through lucrative deals worked out by the Interior Department are Texaco, Superior Oil, Conoco, Phillips Petroleum, Exxon, Mobil, Gulf, Peabody Coal, Consolidation Coal, El Paso Natural Gas, Utah International, and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Among the most devastating of these give-away contracts have been the coal leases that were signed in the 1950's and 1960's. Millions of tons of coal are strip mined every year from the Black Mesa region to power several huge power plants that provide electricity for Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and a large region of the Southwest. The leases give the coal companies perpetual rights ("as long as minerals are produced in paying quantities") to mine coal at a fixed price of pennies per ton. In 1975, the Diné nation received an average of 17¢: a ton for its coal, a mere 2% of the market value. Electricity produced from this coal is sold back to the Diné nation for between \$150 and \$200 per ton of coal burned. The gross underpayment received by the Diné in return for their non-renewable natural resources is illustrated by the fact that the energy monopolies pay more in taxes to the states of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico for their operations in the Diné nation than they pay the Diné in royalties, rental fees, bonuses, and wages combined. Moreover, the energy monopolies have been known to practice outright thievery, extracting more minerals than they actually pay for while the BIA looks the other way.

In addition to miniscule compensation, the energy monopolies have become notorious for their practice of job discrimination against Diné workers and for their contempt for the Diné land and people. They have failed to adequately reclaim strip mined land or provide for environmental protections. Two of the huge coal-fired plants alone spew 465,125 tons of pollutants into the air yearly, leaving a haze over the Diné nation. In fact, astronauts orbiting the earth reported that the only manmade feature they could see on earth was the thick black cloud produced by these power plants. Diné uranium miners have been subjected to dangerous levels of radiation. At least 25 miners have already died from lung cancer and it is estimated that one out of six of the miners employed during the 1950's and 1960's will die as a result.

Large scale exploitation of Diné mineral resources began in the 1950's and over the last three decades a large part of their reserves have been removed by the Anglo-American monopolies. Oil and gas reserves have been largely depleted and revenues from these resources have already begun to drop off. Coal and uranium reserves could be depleted in 20-30 years. The exploitation of the Diné's non-renewable natural resources is taking place under conditions controlled by the Anglo-American monopolies. Minerals are extracted and exported, usually in crude form, to the imperialist nation to be processed and used as dictated by the needs of its economy. The profits made are not reinvested in the Diné nation but concentrated in the hands of the U.S. monopoly capitalists. This process has generated superprofits for the energy monopolies; on the other hand it is leaving the Diné with nothing but gaping pits, a depleted water table, poisoned air and water, crippling diseases and little or nothing in terms of capital accumulation or economic development.

The Diné bourgeoisie, from Chee Dodge forward, has placed itself at the service of the Anglo-American energy monopolies in facilitating their plunder of the Diné natural resources. The Diné bourgeoisie has led the Tribal Council to agree to all of the outrageous arrangements proposed by the monopolies and their agent, the Department of the Interior. These agreements were made in exchange for the continued financial and political support by the U.S. government and the U.S. capitalists for the efforts of the Diné bourgeoisie to strengthen its political and economic position and increase its wealth. The energy leases promised immediate royalty payments, which have been the mainstay of the Tribal government's budget, and are in turn the source of high bureaucratic salaries, business loans, and the expansion of the tribal enterprises and the government apparatus. For these reasons, the Diné bourgeoisie has consistently fought all efforts by the Diné people to prevent the energy monopolies from destroying their land, plundering their natural resources, and ruining their livelihoods.²⁰

McDonald and Zah

Peter McDonald, Tribal Chairman from 1970 to 1982, had institutionalized the alliance between the Diné bourgeoisie and the energy monopolies to a greater extent than any of his predecessors. In 1974, he was instrumental in creating the Council on Energy Resource Tribes (CERT), which brought together the chairmen of 23 Native tribes to collectively organize the exploitation of their energy resources. CERT was promoted as the "American Indian OPEC" and its pronouncements were couched in talk about "Indian rights" and "self-determination." In reality, CERT was initiated and funded by the energy monopolies and the federal government to promote the orderly exploitation of energy resources on the lands of the Native peoples. Its purpose was to cultivate an elite group of comprador agents for the energy monopolies among the Native peoples. Jerry Bathke, an Anglo-American "Indian affairs specialist" for ARCO Petroleum and a founder of CERT, explained that the United States "isn't going to have successful natural resource developments on Indian lands unless tribes have qualified leaderships experienced in the energy business."²¹ McDonald was, in the Anglo-American imperialists' eyes, the perfect example of this "leadership." Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement, spoke of McDonald in less gratiating terms: "Peter McDonald is the shah of the Navajo. He is being sodomized by the multinationals and the U.S. government and enjoying every minute of it."²² McDonald showed how appropriate the comparison with the Shah of Iran was when he hired Ahmed Kooros, the former minister in charge of oil production under the shah, as CERT's chief economist. (Kooros is certainly intimately familiar with the U.S. energy monopolies!)

Even the most reactionary comprador politicians like Peter McDonald press for more independence from the BIA, the right to tax, etc. and make a habit of speaking about "self-determination." But for McDonald "self-determination" does not mean the right to secede and form a genuinely sovereign state, it means *reforms* in the relationship between the Diné and Anglo-American bourgeoisie, *within the context of U.S. imperialist domination*. The programs of reformist politicians like Peterson Zah, who defeated McDonald in the November, 1982 tribal elections and became the new Tribal Chairman, do not differ fundamentally from those of McDonald. Zah, who characterizes himself as a "Kennedy-type Democrat," has promised to institute a number of reforms such as the renegotiation of unfair mineral leases, the protection of the land and the traditional occupations of the people from the rape of the energy monopolies, the withdrawal of the Diné from CERT, and the retrieval of the Lincoln Continentals from the top bureaucrats in the tribal government. Because of the strength of the Diné national movement, he may actually be able to make some reforms. But even if he does make some reforms, he does not intend to

change the fundamental relations of national and class oppression in the Diné nation. He accepts the basic pre-conditions of bourgeois rule and U.S. imperialist domination. Since Zah was inaugurated in January, the Diné people of Big Mountain in the "Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area" have already noted that the confiscation of their livestock by BIA agents has been stepped up and Zah has done nothing about it.²³

The Proletariat

The Diné proletariat continues to be primarily a reserve army of labor for U.S. imperialism and suffers from low wages, high rates of unemployment and a constant fluctuation in employment. But, precarious as wage labor is in the Diné nation, the dependence of the people on wage labor increases from year to year. The continuing contraction of the traditional sector of the economy and expropriation of the smallholders is expressed most clearly by the continuing sharp decline of stock animals per capita: in 1931, there were 21 sheep and goats per person; by 1974, there were only 3.6. Since 1974, the sheep population has been declining at an average annual rate of 5%.

By the mid-1970's, wage labor accounted for about 60% of the Diné community income and welfare accounted for another 26.6%. The traditional sector accounted for only 13.5% (livestock 10.1%, weaving and singing 2.3%, agriculture 1.1%). The Diné proletariat continues to have the characteristics of a rural proletariat. Despite the small amount of income generated by traditional occupations, at least 65% of the potential labor force is engaged in these activities to earn at least part of their living. In other words, most Diné families still raise sheep and plant crops to supplement their income, although they are mainly dependent on the wage income of family members who are employed.

As we have said, the main jobs available to the Diné proletariat have traditionally been in the Diné labor gangs that are recruited to work on the railroads and harvest crops throughout the West. A large number of Diné women have also been recruited to work as domestic servants. These continue to be important sources of income today, although their importance has fallen sharply since the 1950's due to the decline in the number of workers needed in these sectors, and the increase in the number of other jobs available to Diné workers. Today, some 2,500 Diné workers in migratory agricultural labor crews work in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho. With the development of large-scale mining and oil production in the 1950's and 1960's, many Diné workers began to work in the mines and construction projects associated with mineral and energy production. The construction projects typically employ a large number of workers for a relatively short period of time, while mining jobs fluctuate depending upon the requirements of the economy. In 1974, some 1300 Diné workers worked in the mines or the other energy related industries.

The Vietnam War, like the wars that preceded it, brought about a new demand for Diné labor in the war industry. Two major electronics firms, Fairchild and General Dynamics, established factories in the Diné nation to exploit the labor of Navajo women in the production of electronic components for armaments. Wages were set slightly above the level of welfare payments for a mother with four dependents. After armaments orders declined with the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, however, Fairchild closed its plant permanently, laying off over 1,000 workers.

The expansion of the Diné tribal government apparatus and the creation of federal jobs programs (particularly CETA) created many government jobs in the 1960's and 1970's, and in fact, led to a situation in which most people employed in the Diné nation worked for the government. These

jobs, however, also proved to be unstable. The drastic cutback in social programs (once again, particularly CETA) by the Reagan administration has led to massive layoffs in the Diné nation.

Employment in the Diné nation fluctuates drastically. Even in times of economic expansion, however, the level of unemployment remains high. In 1973, at the height of an economic "boom" period, when Fairchild's war plant was still open and power plant construction was taking place, 35% of the Diné workforce was unemployed and another 21% were only seasonally employed. By 1982, the economic crisis and government cutbacks had driven the unemployment rate up to 80%. The tremendous rate of unemployment is the result of the severe underdevelopment of the Diné economy and its dependence on U.S. imperialism, which uses the Diné territory as simply a source of raw materials and the Diné people almost exclusively as a reserve labor force. The Diné are only able to survive under these conditions through subsistence agriculture and stock-raising, welfare, and the sharing of income with relatives – a strong Diné tradition originating in the clan system and the pastoral economy.²⁴

The Diné proletariat, like all proletarians, has moved to organize itself to fight collectively for its interests. This has long been true of the Diné railroad workers and in recent decades the Diné miners have become the most highly organized contingent of the Diné working class. Nearly two-thirds of all Diné miners are members of the mineworkers' union, and this high rate of unionization has been achieved in a region where the coal monopolies have been very successful in keeping the union out. Other sectors of the Diné proletariat have also attempted to organize themselves. The occupation of the Fairchild electronics plant in 1974 was the most dramatic of these attempts, although this effort was cut short by Fairchild's decision to close the plant.

The struggle over the workers' right to organize unions has brought out the deep and inherent conflict of interests between the Diné bourgeoisie and the Diné proletariat. While the Diné proletariat has strived for union organization to protect itself against the capitalists, the Diné bourgeoisie has declared itself completely against union organization. Not satisfied with Arizona's already extremely restrictive anti-union "right to work" laws, the Tribal Council moved to make all union organization illegal in the Diné nation.

The Struggle for National Liberation

In recent years, as the Diné nation has developed and its interests have come into increasing conflict with U.S. imperialism, national consciousness has grown. This has been reflected in the rise of national demands and of the national political movement.

The late 1960's saw the beginning of a great upsurge of the national movement in the Diné nation, and among all the Native peoples. This upsurge drew inspiration from the revolutionary national movements among the Afro-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican and the other oppressed peoples within the United States. In 1974, workers at the Fairchild Semi-Conductor plant in Shiprock, led by members of the American Indian Movement, occupied the plant to protest massive layoffs that were taking place. During the same period there were militant protests by Diné construction workers against hiring discrimination by construction companies and the AFL-CIO building trades unions. Also in 1974, demonstrators were organized in Farmington, New Mexico, an important border town, to protest the murder of three young Diné men by white racists. Similar demonstrations were held in both Gallup, New Mexico and Farmington to protest police brutality against the Diné. Other protests were organized in the border towns against racist, profiteering Anglo merchants and politicians.²⁵

Demands were raised for education in the Diné language and culture. The BIA schools and public schools had been notorious for their determination to wipe out all traces of the Diné language and culture, punishing children for even speaking their own language in school. Determined to put an end to this system, the people have waged an ongoing and militant struggle for education in their own language and culture, organizing mass protests, recalling many school board members and forcing the dismissal of a number of school superintendents. In the 1970's, a number of reforms were won including bi-lingual, bi-cultural programs in the public schools and the establishment of a particular Diné curriculum at the Navajo Community College.²⁶

The Diné national movement has also involved an ongoing struggle against the energy monopolies' plunder of the Diné people's land and resources. In 1978, over 1,000 people led by the Coalition for Navajo Liberation occupied and closed down all oil operations in Aneth, the main center of oil drilling in the Diné nation. They occupied the oil fields for 17 days until the four oil companies – Texaco, Superior, Continental, and Phillips – agreed to 18 demands to curb the companies' abuse and disrespect of the Diné people, their livestock and their land. (The companies, however, refused to agree to the main demand: renegotiation of the leases.)

The oilfield occupation was the most dramatic of a series of protests that have taken place throughout the Diné nation. Major resistance has developed against the destruction of Black Mesa by the coal companies, the proposal to build two huge coal gasification plants that would intensify the destruction, and the uranium mining in the Dalton Pass area. This resistance has taken the form of lawsuits, mass meetings of the local chapters* to vote down and condemn these projects, the occupation of the Tribal Council chambers, and mass demonstrations.²⁷

The Diné people are also waging a struggle to prevent the federal government from removing 14,000 Diné from a large region known as the Hopi-Navajo Joint Use Area. In 1974, the U.S. Congress passed a law requiring the division of this region into separate Moqui (Hopi) and Diné districts. The law further required that all 14,000 Diné residents living in the territory designated as Moqui be removed by 1986. The law was promoted by the energy monopolies in collusion with a number of the Moqui bourgeoisie who have close ties with the Anglo-American capitalists. The energy monopolies want to facilitate the exploitation of large coal and uranium reserves in the area by establishing definite title to the land by one tribe (and not both), and by removing the population of the area. Since most of the people living in the area are Diné, the region would be essentially depopulated if the capitalists' plans are realized. The Moqui bourgeoisie have schemes to use the region to greatly expand their own large cattle operations. Over 10,000 Diné have refused to leave. They have won the support of many of the Moqui who recognize the law as a maneuver intended to spur division between the Moqui and Diné people for the benefit of the Moqui bourgeoisie and the Anglo-American imperialists. Already BIA agents are attempting to enforce the reduction of Diné livestock in preparation for the final eviction, and have arrested a number of people resisting those actions. The federal government has threatened to bring in the National Guard if the Diné remain in the area in 1986.²⁸ The Diné residents, on the other hand, have stated that, as a sovereign people, they will resist all actions of the U.S. government to remove them.

“We the people of Big Mountain, Diné Nation, do hereby declare total resistance to any effort or influence to be removed from our homes, ancestral lands, and to be relocated from the land of

* Chapters are local political divisions of the Diné nation. Chapter meetings have been important organizing centers against the comprador policies of the Tribal government since the 1930's.

Big Mountain. We further declare our right to live in peace and harmony with our Moqui neighbors and cooperation between us will remain unchanged.”²⁹

The Diné bourgeoisie are terrified of revolution and they will never venture beyond reformism. The bourgeoisie played an important role in developing the Diné national consciousness. But they are essentially a comprador bourgeoisie, bound to U.S. imperialism by a thousand strings. The Diné people's revolutionary resistance against imperialism has been carried out by the laboring classes – the proletariat, the semi-proletariat, the peasantry, and the revolutionary intelligentsia. Unlike the bourgeoisie, these classes have no great privileges to defend and no reason to maintain the status quo. It is these laboring people who have marched in the streets, who seized the Fairchild plant and the Aneth oilfields, and who joined the armed fighters at Wounded Knee. Of these classes, the proletariat is the strongest, the most politically consistent and the most revolutionary. The proletariat is the *only* class that can carry the national liberation struggle through to the end, breaking completely with imperialism and establishing genuine socialism.

The Struggle for Genuine Self-Determination

U.S. imperialist domination over the Native peoples has always been officially packaged in hollow, meaningless declarations about "sovereign rights" and "self-determination." Even Ronald Reagan, the representative of the most chauvinist reaction, cloaks his policies in platitudes about Native rights. "I endorse 'Indian self-determination' as a national policy," says Reagan. He adds, "The traditional 'government-to-government' relationship between the Federal government and Indian governments should be continued." Putting the words "self-determination" and "government-to-government" in quotation marks seems to express sarcasm. He later explains that, for him, "self-determination" means "consulting with tribes and their leaders in the development of Federal Indian policy."³⁰



The U.S. government's declarations about the "self-determination" of the Native peoples are lies soaked in blood. How can a people enjoy sovereign rights when their land is "held in trust" by the Department of the Interior, and they are officially "wards" of the Bureau of Indian Affairs? How can the Native peoples carry out government-to-government relations based on equality when the decisions of their governments can be vetoed by the U.S. government? How can they determine their own destiny when they live under the guns of the U.S. Army, the National Guard, the F.B.I., and the state police forces?

Genuine self-determination means the right to secede from the United States and form a completely sovereign national state. Only when the oppressed nations have the right to secede can they freely determine their relationship with all other nations. Short of this right, any talk of "self-determination" is a farce. It is clear that the Native peoples do not have this right today, nor can they have this right as long as the BIA exists and the U.S. police and military forces continue to occupy their national territories and prevent them from organizing their own independent states.

The demand for the right of secession by the oppressed nations within the borders of the United States is a revolutionary demand, and it cannot be otherwise because it raises the question of a new state power for the Diné nation. To realize self-determination, the state power of the Anglo-American imperialists must be destroyed within the territory of the Diné nation. And this state power must be replaced with the state power of the Diné people. To bring this about a revolution is necessary.

For the Anglo-American bourgeoisie the borders of the United States, which were established through wars of aggression against numerous nations and peoples, are "immutable" and the bourgeoisie will never surrender peacefully the right to secede to any subject nation. They conquered by armed force, they suppress every movement for national liberation by armed force, and they will only be defeated by armed force.

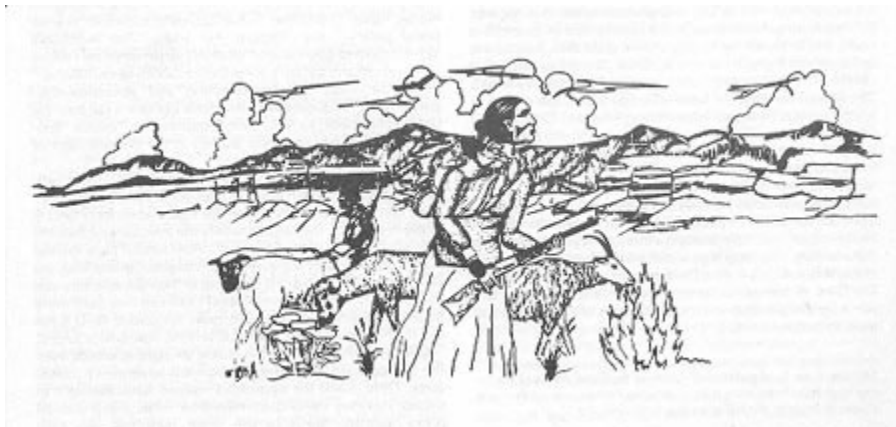
The proletariat of the United States must support the right of the Diné nation to secede and determine its own destiny. Only on this basis can **genuine unity** be built between the proletariat of all nationalities within the United States. Revisionists of all hues, including the Communist Party U.S.A., the Communist Labor Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Communist Workers' Party, the League of Revolutionary Struggle, and the Socialist Workers' Party, all deny the Diné people their national rights. They all accept the basic premise of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie that the Diné people must live under the rule of the Anglo-American state. Their programs in relation to the Diné and other Native peoples consist of platitudes about "equal rights" and "greater autonomy" (within the U.S. state). But the Diné people can never have genuine equal rights until they achieve the most basic right of all nations – the right to establish an independent state. Lenin denounced the thinly disguised social-chauvinism of the German revisionist Kautsky on precisely this point:

“The most plausible formulation of the social-chauvinist lie, the one that is therefore the most dangerous to the proletariat, is provided by Kautsky. In word, he is *in favor* of the self-determination of nations... *In deed*, however, he has adapted the national programme to the prevailing social-chauvinism, distorted and docked it; he gives no precise definition of the duties of the socialists of the oppressor nations and patently falsifies the democratic principle itself when he says that to demand 'state independence'... for every nation would mean demanding 'too much'... 'National autonomy,' if you please, is enough! The principal question, the one the imperialist bourgeoisie will not permit discussion of, namely, the question of the *boundaries* of a state that is built upon the oppression of nations, is evaded by Kautsky, who, to please the bourgeoisie, has thrown out of the programme what is most essential. The bourgeoisie are ready to promise all the 'national equality' and 'national autonomy' you please so long as the proletariat remain within the framework of legality and 'peacefully' submit to them on the question of *state boundaries*! Kautsky has formulated the national programme of Social-Democracy in a reformist, not a revolutionary manner.”³¹

On the question of state boundaries, of the right to secede, of the right to organize a sovereign state, the revisionists are either silent or they break into chauvinist refrains about how this right supposedly "divides the proletariat in the struggle for socialism." This chauvinist stand on the part of the revisionists, which places them on the side of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie in denying the Diné people their national rights, can only inspire righteous indignation on the part of the Diné proletariat and the Diné people as a whole. How can there be proletarian unity in the fight for socialism when the proletariat of the oppressor nation sides with its "own" bourgeoisie in denying the just national rights of the people of the oppressed nations?

The U.S. proletariat must support and fight for the treaty rights assured to the Diné and the other Native peoples when they were conquered by the U.S. government. These rights, including the protection of Native peoples' land, resources, and limited political autonomy, are under severe attack today. The proletariat must go even further than simply defending the treaty rights. The treaties between the Native peoples and the U.S. government are annexationist treaties, forced upon the Native people with a gun at their heads. They legally encode the subjugation of the Native peoples and the inequality of nations within the U.S. multinational state. These colonialist treaties must be replaced with new treaties between free and sovereign peoples. In order for a treaty to be based on genuine self-determination it must:

1. Recognize the right of the Diné to secede from the United States.
2. Remove all U.S. military and police forces from the territory of the Diné nation.
3. Recognize the right of the Diné to establish their own sovereign government. This means the dissolution of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the entire colonial state apparatus of U.S. imperialism within the Diné nation.
4. Democratically establish the boundaries of the Diné nation based on social and economic conditions and the will of the people. On this basis, areas on the border of the reservation, including border towns such as Gallup and Farmington, must be considered integral parts of the Diné nation.
5. Recognize Diné sovereignty over their land and natural resources. This means the abrogation of the existing mineral leases with the Anglo-American capitalists.
6. Establish reparations for over a century of plunder by U.S. imperialism.



As part of the continuing struggle against national oppression, the Diné people of the Big Mountain area are resisting U.S. government's attempts to remove them from their homeland.

Footnotes

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3. Lorraine Ruffing, *The Navajo Nation: Cultivating Underdevelopment*, Akwesasne Notes, Autumn 1978, pp. 7-11; Lynn Robbins, *The Navajo Nation and Industrial Developments*, Southwest Economy and Society, Spring 1977, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 47-69; *New York Times*, December 16, 1981, p. 20.

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