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Letter from Ralph M. Galt to Representative Burdick Urging Burdick to Help the Three Affiliated Tribes Buy Their Land Recently Put up for Sale, September 29, 1955

Ralph M. Galt

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Fort Berthold Indian Reservation
Mandaree, N. Dakota

29 September 1955

Senator Milton R. Young
Senate Office Bldg.

✓ Rep. Usher Burdick
House Office Bldg.

Hon. Fred Andahl
Department of the Interior

Hon. Glenn L. Simmons
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Washington 25, D. C.

Honorable Gentlemen:

You gentlemen are of course already acquainted with the Indian lands problems. As I understand it for some years in the past the Fort Berthold Tribal Council has been buying up land on the Reservation whenever it was offered for sale "and then holding it in a land pool until it could become a part of an economic unit". This was surely a good sound way to consolidate small parcels of "fractionated land", and to conserve it for use by the Indian community.

Now, however, because of an administrative order by the Bureau of Indian Affairs the Tribal Council is prohibited from buying land even though it has plenty of funds for doing so. The present policy, as we understand it, is to sell land to the public through "supervised land sales". This means of course that the comparatively impoverished Indians of the community must compete in price offers against every millionaire interested in the land. Thus the community now can hardly prevent its land base from being sold out from under it, or alienated from Indian hands. Surely it is undesirable to force the break-up of this ancestral community, especially so for comparatively helpless Indians who are not yet fully assimilated into the general culture of the United States. Since many of them do not have any other skills besides agriculture and hunting and fishing on the land, they will be forced to become landless unemployed, unskilled labor, or low-paid agricultural laborers. It seems especially cruel to add this burden to the Fort Berthold Indians who have suffered so much from the forced relocation and readjustments due to the Garrison dam project.

Therefore we strongly urge you to do everything in your power, or to use fully your influence to persuade the Bureau of Indian Affairs to reverse its new policy ~~of~~ and to permit and encourage the Tribal Council to buy all Indian lands put up for sale. The Bureau could probably effectively advise the Council on consolidating farms and ranches, and on helping young Indian farmers get a good start on the land. We understand that there is no ~~no~~ change in law involved here, but simply administrative order and policy.

We will certainly very deeply appreciate all that you will do to help American Indians. Thank you very much for your trouble in advance.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph M. Galt
Ralph M. Galt, Pastor.