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Draft of Statement: "Fort Berthold Indians on the War Path," by Representative Burdick, January 25, 1952

Usher Burdick

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Fort Berthold Indians on the War Path

Statement by Walter L. B - M.C. — Jan. 25, 1952
The Fort Berthold Indians are aroused over the manner in which

the payments for the lands to be taken for a Garrison dam reservoir is being handled. It seems that this act of congress was not approved by the indians in a ~~regular~~ ^{REGULARLY} called election, but that a resolution agreeing to the settlement was taken around house to house. Many who signed up wanted to withdraw when they found out ~~about~~ what the resolution meant.

These Indians who ~~oppose~~ ^{oppose} what is being done by their tribal Business Council and the Indian Bureau have organized among themselves, representing a complete majority of the Indians on that reservation, and have selected the following Indians as their committee men:

Oscar Burr, Percy Rush, Rufus Stevenson, and Jim Black Dog

These representatives appear to have the full backing of the ~~disappointed~~ ^{CONTENTED} Indians. Their first job was to secure ~~council~~ ^{COUNSEL} or attorneys to handle their case. The regular approved attorney for the Tribal Business Committee of course could not properly represent them, as he is on the side of the Business Council and the Indian Bureau. The above named committee did succeed in getting attorneys and selected Claude L. Dawson (Known in North Dakota as "Dad" Dawson), and Tom Busha of Montana, both American Legion men as ~~is~~ ^{ARE} MR. BURR MR. RUSH Oscar and Percy Rush.

One of the great points of dissatisfaction is that when the agreement to part with their lands was ~~embodied~~ ^{embodied} in the resolution, no mineral rights were reserved except coal. Of course at that time no one had heard of oil, but inasmuch as the government purchased this land for a reservoir, they did not purchase it for oil rights. The consideration is silent on oil rights, and it is a question of law whether the government can claim any oil rights since they did not ~~buy~~ ^{SPECIFICALLY} buy oil rights. This oil interest may amount to millions if oil production keeps coming in as it has in that

AREA

and may mean many times the value of this land as fixed in the

resolution that was privately circulated approving the government offer.

~~The matter is getting all set to test whether or not~~ WE MAY EXPECT SOON A TEST TO DETERMINE FIRST, WHETHER there was any approval

of the government offer, and (2nd) whether any oil rights (WERE) ever sold by the

Indians with their knowledge, and (3rd) an accounting of what money the Tribal

Business Council has spent since the circulation of this resolution of

approval.

Having set up their own attorneys to represent them, this committee will soon be on the road home to give an account of their action to the Indians

who are signing up to back them in this effort. If successful, it is believed

that the return of these oil rights (EVENTUALLY) will mean many billions to these Indians.

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This committee of Indians have had , they say, an ^{unhappy} ~~unhappy~~ experience in Washington. They have tried time after time to get some understanding with the Indian Bureau and the Department of Interior, but they have been given the usual Washington run-a-around. Referred and referred with nothing done. They feel now according to their statement this afternoon that they are up against a solid wall in dealing with their Business council backed by the Indian Bureau and the regular approved attorney for the tribe and that the action they have taken is the only method available to them to make an attempt to protect the rights of the Indians on that reservation.