

**DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: LESSON 4: HANDOUT 4**

**1976 SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE REPORT ON  
REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE AMERICAN  
INDIAN MOVEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

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Left: James Eastland (D-MS), the leader of the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1976.<sup>2</sup>

Right: The official seal of the United States Senate.<sup>3</sup>

**THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The evidence presented to the Subcommittee, which was supported by extensive documentation, established the following basic facts about the movement:

(1) **The True Dimensions of AIM:** The American Indian Movement does not speak for the American Indians. It is a minority movement which, at the most, numbers several thousand followers. It is noteworthy that its most spectacular and most publicized activities have never involved more than several hundred people.

(2) **AIM as a Revolutionary Organization:** It is a frankly revolutionary organization which is committed to violence, calls for the arming of American Indians, has cached explosives and illegally purchased arms, plans kidnappings, and whose opponents have been eliminated in the manner of the Mafia. Some of AIM's leaders and associates have visited Castro Cuba and/or openly consider themselves Marxist-Leninist.

AIM is described as a violent group. Their actions are compared to those of the mafia.

(3) **Foreign Ties:** It has many foreign ties, direct and indirect- with Castro Cuba, with China, with the IRA, with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and with support organizations in various European countries.

(4) **Domestic Extremist Ties:** In the United States, it has maintained contact with and has received propaganda and other support from a large number of left extremist organizations, including the Weather Underground, the Communist Party, the Trotskyists, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the Black Panther Party, fourth Against War and Fascism, the Indo-China Solidarity Committee, the Prisoners Solidarity Committee, etc.

(5) **AIM and the Media:** AIM's commitment to spectacular actions has resulted in massive media coverage. This coverage, while not always uncritical, has generally been sympathetic- perhaps because of the widespread tendency to convert sympathy for the plight of Indian people into sympathy for AIM, without asking certain essential questions. The sheer mass of the media coverage, moreover, has served to foster a widespread impression- in government circles as well as among the general public- that AIM speaks for the great mass of the Indian people. Regrettably, with rare exceptions, the media have not sought to moderate this impression by seeking out the views of the tribal leaders and the other legitimate leaders of the American Indian peoples.

(6) **Support from Federal, Church and Other Sources:** Taking advantage of the massive public relations build-up they have received from the media, the American Indian Movement has been able to obtain many hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of support from various offices of the Federal government and from a variety of religious organizations, Catholic and Protestant. Threats and the physical occupation of buildings have also been used as instruments of suasion in promoting Federal and religious funding. AIM has also received substantial sums of money from business, from labor groups, and from private individuals.

(7) **Financial Abuses:** The bulk of the money given to AIM by the United States government and by the churches has been used to radicalize the Indians, to stage confrontations like the occupation of Wounded Knee and the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and to take care of the personal financial needs of the AIM leaders. Contrary to the

AIM has been communicating with other political groups that are not trusted or supported by the U.S. government.

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AIM has benefitted from lots of media coverage. It makes people feel bad for the American Indians. But the senators say that the media isn't telling the full story.

representations of AIM in soliciting these funds, they have not been used, except to a very minor extent, to improve the lot of the American Indians. In a postscript to his testimony, the witness informed the Subcommittee that, to his knowledge, AIM has never published a financial statement.

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**(8) The Undercutting of Legally Constituted Indian Authority:** The supine attitude of government officials in dealing with manifestations like the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the many hundreds of thousands of dollars they have lavished on AIM for social programs that were never implemented, and the deferential- indeed, almost obsequious- manner in which they have conducted their negotiations with representatives of AIM, have not only strengthened AIM enormously, but have also served to undercut the prestige and authority of the tribal chairmen and of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association. This was the subject of a bitter complaint to Secretary of the Interior, Roger Morton, from the National Tribal Chairmen's Association on November 12, 1973.

The government is giving AIM too much attention, which gives them power. The government should help restore the authority of the tribal chairmen.

**(9) The Case of Judge Nichol:** Important testimony was given concerning the prejudicial attitude of Federal Judge Fred Nichol, who on September 19, 1974, dismissed the charges against American Indian Movement leaders Dennis Banks and Russell Means. In March 1975, the U.S. Attorney's office in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, had filed a strongly worded motion of prejudice against Judge Nichol, asking that he disqualify himself from the remaining Wounded Knee leadership trials. In the supporting affidavit, the U.S. attorney claimed that Judge Nichol often expressed respect for the people who were involved in the Wounded Knee take over, and that during the trial he had attended a luncheon addressed by defense counsel William Kunstler and had led a standing ovation for Kunstler at the conclusion of his speech. The witness testified that in October 1973, Judge Nichol had driven Dennis Banks and his attorney to his residence, where Judge Nichol and Mrs. Nichol entertained the guests with coffee and cookies, and Mrs. Nichol was made an honorary member of the American Indian Movement.

The leaders of AIM are friends with the judge that was in charge of their court trial. The trial cannot be fair if this is true.

There is evidence that the judge had lunch with a leader of AIM in 1973.

<sup>1</sup> <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/1335>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Eastland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Eastland)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Senate\\_Committee\\_on\\_the\\_Judiciary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senate_Committee_on_the_Judiciary)