

Graham D. Taylor. *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-45*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980) 203 pp., \$14.50.

John Collier became Indian Commissioner during the New Deal Administration of Franklin Roosevelt. For more than a decade Collier had been a severe critic of the Indian Bureau; his appointment marked a significant break with past governmental attitudes which had been implemented under the General Allotment Act of 1887, and had resulted in immense land transfers to non-Indian ownership.

The heart of the Indian New Deal was the Collier-sponsored Indian (Wheeler-Howard) Reorganization Act of 1934 which aimed to develop tribal economic resources and to restore Indian self-determination through the revival of tribal governments such as the 1887 law had discouraged. Professor Taylor focuses his study on these two aspects of the Indian New Deal that Collier himself considered fundamental, ". . .tribal political reorganization and its integration with the development of Indian economic resources." (p. xiii) What Professor Taylor does, he does very well. He demonstrates that ". . .the Indian New Deal, however enlightened in contrast to previous or subsequent Indian programs, was fatally weakened by its emphasis on tribal reorganization and the assumptions about contemporary Indian societies which formed the basis for the tribal idea." (p. xii)

Despite his use of the words "fatally weakened" above, Taylor understands that the ". . .record of the Indian New Deal is not unrelievedly bleak," (p.xiii) yet this reviewer perceived over-kill in Taylor's approach to the weaknesses of New Deal Administration. It is all relative. What failed--the authors of the 1934 law, the administrators, the Indians themselves, or all of these? The 1934 Reorganization Act did not represent Indian majority view; many refused to share allotted lands by placing them in a common pool. Off to such a bad start, even the most skilled administrators would have a difficult time. Taylor relieves Congress itself of primary blame, but states that it was indifferent or even hostile to the reform program and did hamper it. Nevertheless, the reformers, in control for more than a decade, both surmounted many difficulties and bungled many actions. But would not the successful areas of action be enough to temper the words "fatally weakened"? When something is fatally weakened, it is dead. But it may be argued that for some Indian Americans there were advantages

to tribal organization (reorganization) under the 1934 law. As late as 1963 the Wisconsin Winnebago organized under the Reorganization Act. Afterwards, they were hindered in their decision-making because, as Taylor notes generally, tribal governments today are not what Collier "intended or anticipated, and are today focal points for rivalry and contention among Indians rather than spokesmen for the aspirations." (p. xiii)

But would not the Indian people develop factions just as whites do, no matter what form of government they have? The Indian New Deal was a failure relative to what? The 1934 law ended allotment in severalty. Federal loans enabled Indians to buy back some land. Are not those Indians who do have tribal councils and reservation lands better off than those who lost land as an aftermath of the 1887 law? Professor Taylor does note improvements in Indian health and education, and has written an excellent study of both the success and failures of the Indian New Deal.

George W. Sieber
University of Wisconsin--Oshkosh