

# Forced Navajo Relocation

**"We are told to move out. It's as simple as that, to move out. Carry nothing, just leave. That's how the law is interpreted to us."**

It is not only the natives of Guatemala and El Salvador who have become refugees as a result of the struggle between a native economy and corporate interests. Here in the southwest a similar thing is happening to their Navajo brothers and sisters. As of July, 1986, 10,000 Navajos from the Joint Use Area in northeast Arizona will be forcefully removed from their ancestral homeland, if they have not already left willingly. According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Navajos will leave to settle the "Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute." However, most Navajos see the "land dispute" as a fabrication of government-corporate interests which for decades have been unable to acquire the rich Black Mesa coal fields which lie below the land.

For centuries the village-oriented, farming Hopi and the more scattered, sheepherding Navajos have shared the land in northern Arizona and New Mexico. They related well, intermarried, and according to their cultural tradition, did not consider the land as something to be owned. It was the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) which, in 1882, created a distinct Hopi Reservation in the area and designated the major portion of it as the "Joint Use Area" to accommodate the fact that the land was home to both nations.

Throughout this century the minerals -- coal, oil, uranium, and natural gas -- that exist under lands designated to the Indians have been eyed longingly by energy development companies. Since the majority of Indian spiritual leaders and elders have not been willing to relinquish their homeland for mineral develop-

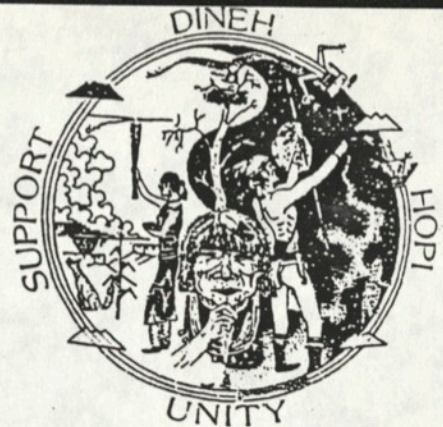
of the Joint Use Area -- hence, the "Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute" evolved.

By 1974 legal action had created Public Law 93-531. It mandated a 50-50 division of the Joint Use Area, and a Relocation Commission to remove all Navajos on the Hopi side. This involves over 10,000 persons, one out of every 15 of the entire Navajo Nation. It also disrupts their cultural center, the place where many who have left the reservation return to gain a spiritual and cultural strength. About 100 Hopi have lived on the "Navajo side." These persons, too, have been forced to move, but for them it has been a return to their villages. In order to facilitate the Navajo's "voluntary departure," P.L. 93-531 also ordered a halt to all building and improvement to property. Schools, roads, and health facilities have not been maintained since 1966.

Massive resistance by Navajos, especially women, who hold responsibility for passing on their homes and material possessions to their children in this matriarchal society, have prevented the implementation of some of P.L. 93-531's provisions. The 300-mile barbed wire fence expected to divide Hopi and Navajos has been continually delayed, as has the attempt to reduce livestock herds to 10 percent of their original size. The greatest resistance has come from the Big Mountain Nation. The Big Mountain Support Committee and the Big Mountain Legal Defense/Offense Committee, composed of Indians and non-Indians, work to inform persons of the situation and to fight for Navajo rights. Hopi leaders have spoken repeatedly in support of the Navajos. It is not the Hopi way, they say, to relocate anybody.

Many of those Navajos who have already moved away from their land have become victims of manipulation. Placed in homes in somewhat hostile Arizona towns, the Navajos have not been prepared for a money-based society. Many have been swindled out of money or lost their homes. Unemployment is high, morale is low, and their culture is disintegrating. In 1982, the Executive Director of the Relocation Commission resigned on the grounds that the relocation is an unprecedented disaster. The Fourth Bertrand Russell Tribunal in the Netherlands, 1980, judged that the actions against the Navajos constitute a crime of genocide. However, pressure from Washington continues to increase. Both former Secretaries of the Interior Watt and Clark have been sent to negotiate with the two nations, and President Reagan has said that he will impose his own "solution" if they do not "resolve their differences" soon.

For those of us who struggle to support the right to self determination now being waged in Central America, it is important to see its relationship to the Navajos' struggle. It is only the White Man's notion that the cultural



traditions of indigenous people are less valuable than the minerals within their land. Such exploitation leads to fulfillment of the ancient Hopi prophecies that the White Man will destroy himself by destroying Mother Earth for greed.

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**Please send contributions to:**

To support the legal work:

**Big Mountain Legal Defense/Offense Committee**  
124 N. San Francisco #B  
Flagstaff AZ 86001  
(602) 774-6923

Resources:

"Navajos Resist Forced Relocation," Albuquerque Big Mt. Support Group, P.O. Box 2253, Albuquerque, NM 87193 (\$1.00).

"Big Mountain News," quarterly newspaper; Big Mt. Support Group, 1412 Cypress St., Berkeley, CA 94703.

"Geopolitics of the Navajo Hopi Land Dispute," by John Redhouse, 1985. (\$7.00) Redhouse/Wright Productions 160 Washington S.E., Box 90 Albuquerque, NM 87108

NAVAJO RESERVATION and FOUR CORNERS STATES



ment, the BIA has created "Tribal Councils," which it funds and operates. These Councils, which consist of a few pro-development tribal members, have over the years, signed leases, allowing an energy boom on Indian lands. The lack of environmental regulations please the developers, and the pro-development minority within the tribes gain financially. However, for most of the tribal members, development has meant a disruption of their lifestyle and the destruction of lands which hold the spirits of their ancestors.

The 21-billion ton Black Mesa coal field was discovered in the Joint Use Area in 1950. In spite of a bitter dispute between tribal elders and the Hopi Tribal Council, leasing rights to a portion of the coal fields were granted and strip mining is in progress. But the majority of mineral rights within the area cannot be granted without consent of both Navajo and Hopi Tribal Councils. In the '50s the Hopi Tribal Council, with financing and support from the BIA, began a long pursuit to gain control