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"ZUNIS TAKE OVER BIA" said the headline in the local newspaper.

The event was not an insurrection or a sit-in on the part of Zuni Indians from the historic New Mexican pueblo, one of Coronado's seven cities of Cibola.

It was a proud and peaceful demonstration of tri al initiative under a new Federal policy which encourages tribal governments to direct the activities of Bureau of Indian Affairs employees on their reservation.

The actual takeover was officially ratified at Zuni on May 23 when Assistant Secretary of the Interior Harrison Loesch and Zuni Governor Robert E. Lewis signed two sets of documents -- one set in English the other in Zuni - giving Lewis the responsibility for directing Bureau activities at Zuni.

Legal authority for the takeover was discovered when Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis R. Bruce ordered an extensive review of Bureau policy to find ways to create more Indian involvement in Federal policies and more Indian control over Indian community affairs.

In the 1834 legislation creating what is now the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the following appears: ''Where any of the tribes are in the opinion of the Secretary competent to direct the employment of their blacksmiths mechanics, teachers, farmers or other persons engaged for them., the direction of such persons may be given to the proper authority of the tribe." The Indian

Affairs Office was originally located in the War Department, and was transferred to the Department of the Interior when the latter was created in 1849.

To the Zuni tribe, Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel will give the responsibility for directing Bureau programs and employees on its 405,000 acre reservation which has a population of 5,000. Commissioner Bruce said the Zuni agreement "will be just the first of many. Each will be tailored to meet the specific needs of the tribe involved. In some cases only specific functions will come under tribal direction as a tribe assesses its needs and its capabilities.

''We are determined to carry forward President Nixon's pledge to give Indian communities a far larger voice in determining their futures,'' Bruce said.

"We may not find any more old legislation to help us out, but we will be ready to meet Indian initiative with the flexibility and quick response necessary to get the job done. We will not force initiative on any tribe, but we will be ready when they are."

At Zuni, tribal Governor Robert E. Lewis will direct the activities of Bureau employees at Zuni, fulfilling the function now carried out by the Bureau Superintendent. Federal employees will be given the option of staying at Zuni and working for the tribe or working on another reservation. Those who stay will retain all Federal civil service protections and pay.

Those Federal employees working under tribal direction, carrying out the responsibilities local governments, will at the same time be training a Zuni replacement. Eventually non-Indians will be employed by the tribe only at its discretion.

The turnover agreement includes all the functions the Bureau normally performs at Zuni but it does not change the Secretary of the Interior's trust responsibility for Zuni land. Further, Bureau consultative services, such as real estate and community development advice will be available from near by Bureau offices.

The agreement provides that either party can cancel the arrangement on 180 days’ notice or the reservation would revert to its former management set-up.