

INDIAN TRADERS.

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JULY 15, 1882.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

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Mr. HASKELL, from the Committee on Indian Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT :

[To accompany bill H. R. 6611.]

*The Committee on Indian Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 6611) to amend section 2133 of the Revised Statutes, in relation to Indian traders, respectfully submit the following report :*

Section 2133 of the Revised Statutes of the United States, which this bill seeks to amend, is as follows :

SEC. 2133. Any person, other than an Indian, who shall attempt to reside in the Indian country as a trader, or to introduce goods, or to trade therein without such license, shall forfeit all merchandise offered for sale to the Indians or found in his possession, and shall moreover be liable to a penalty of five hundred dollars.

The necessity for the amendment of the section above quoted is best shown and fully appears in the letter of the Hon. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, under date of July 8, 1882, given in response to a communication from this committee for advice on the subject-matter of this bill, which letter is appended hereto. For the reasons therein set forth the committee recommend the passage of the bill.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
Washington, July 8, 1882.

SIR : Learning that the subcommittee in charge of bill H. R. 6611 desired an expression from me to accompany their report, I beg to say that, as proposing an amendment to statute section 2133, regulating trade with Indians, the bill has my entire approval.

My first reason for such approval is, that the ambiguous wording of the statute in question has given rise to contradictory rulings, some favoring half-breed traders, some discountenancing them. This state of things has led to complaints and charges from one side, and denials from the other, involving a vast amount of correspondence and investigations, at a great expense to the government and a serious interference with the real work of this department. Another reason is the encouragement at present given to unprincipled white men availing themselves of the permission given to half-breeds to trade. Men whose character is such that they never could obtain a license use some half-breed as their instrument, and under his name supply goods, own buildings, and secure profits, while they break down all management, evade responsibility, and defy the efforts of the department to protect the Indians from extortion or illicit traffic.

Another reason for favoring this amendment is the gross injustice done to legitimate traders by the present system. This department regards the tradership system as material to the welfare of the Indians and the continuance of peaceful relations between them and the general government. Hence all the rules and regulations prescribed for traders, the scrutiny of their character, and the bonds required of them. Assuming

their positions under such circumstances, it is but just that they should be assured of an opportunity to enjoy commensurate advantages, and it seems to me unjust that such traders should find themselves confronted by an unscrupulous, irresponsible set of men, who make use of some half-breed to compete with the regular trader and drive him from the field. The man under bond to act in all things so as to please the government and benefit the Indians sees his prospects destroyed by men who are not under bond, and who are encumbered by no moral or legal obligations. It is the duty of the government to sustain the legitimate trader and not to reduce his appointment to a farce.

The amendment proposed by this bill will, I think, give definiteness to the statute and settle a most vexatious question. Without it, or something like it, we shall lose proper control over the trade with Indians, by which they in the end would be the sufferers.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

H. PRICE,  
*Commissioner.*

Hon. D. C. HASKELL,  
*Chairman Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives.*

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