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THE AMERICAN INDIAN FEDERATION

Non-sectarian and Non-partisan
116 C Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.
March 28th, 1937.

TO: THE INDIANS OF THE UNITED STATES

GREETINGS:

On March 1st, 1937, Honorable Burton K. Wheeler and Honorable Lynn J. Frazier, jointly, introduced a Bill, S. 1736, to repeal the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act which became a law on June 18th, 1934. The members of this organization endorse that Bill and have pledged support of it to the Senators.

The American Indian Federation is an all-Indian organization with membership limited to Indians and intermarried husbands and wives. Our purpose is to secure the rights, privileges and responsibilities of American citizenship for all Indians. We believe that our race is just as capable of being citizens as any other race or nationality within the United States. We believe too that the Indians themselves must lead the way in solving Indian difficulties. We are an organization, of Indians, for Indians and by Indians. In August, 1934, at the Constitutional Convention which was held in Gallup, New Mexico, we adopted a resolution asking for the repeal of the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act. Since that time, we have worked unceasingly toward that goal. We asked for the repeal of that Act because:

1. It nullifies the Citizenship Act of 1924 which made all Indians citizens.
2. It forever sets the Indians apart from other citizens; compels them to live in a segregated status of communism, with all property and resources held in common; and to "farm and graze and cut timber on a communal basis" under a dictatorship.
3. There is no self-government in the Act. Final authority is left in the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs which is exactly where all authority in Indian matters has rested for the past 100 years and which system of "ward and guardian" basis of dealing with the Indians has resulted in the depleted condition of Indian resources and other conditions of poverty, misery, lack of self-sufficiency, education and initiative which may exist among the Indians today.
4. It does not provide land for "landless" Indians. All Indians who receive land under its provisions become only tenants on government-owned land and subject to removal at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior. Further than this, the Act can be employed to bring all land-owning Indians who accept its provisions into a like condition.
5. It perpetrated against the Indians the gross injustice of making them unwittingly change their legal status from that of "involuntary" to "voluntary" wardship. Indians were made wards without their consent in the first instance. They have continued as "involuntary" wards, being born into that status. ALL Indians who voted to accept the Wheeler-Howard Act thereby gave full consent that the Bureau of Indian Affairs remain forever in control of their affairs and thus became "voluntary" wards.

The passage of the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act was opposed by intelligent Indian leaders all over the United States. That honest, sincere opposition from the people directly concerned was drowned and lost in a flood of propaganda which flowed from the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the organizations and individuals who had assisted in having the Commissioner appointed to office. Congress and the American public were propagandized into believing this Bill, which was introduced at the request of the Commissioner, enacted into law. In some instances, Indian opposition to the Act and the program which is being carried out under authority of the Act, has been silenced by the old Bureau method of promises of jobs; and in many, many instances, the opposition has been stilled by the statement that "opposition to the program will mean dismissal" or words to that effect contained in a letter signed by the Secretary of the Interior, dated April 30th, 1934, which was sent out to all persons employed by the Indian Bureau and on the work relief projects controlled by the Bureau.

Indian opposition has nevertheless continued and in some instances, after a trial of the Act, it has increased. Because of the continual appeal from Indians for relief from the provisions of the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act, Honorable James E. Murray of Montana, Honorable Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, Honorable

Pat McCarren of Nevada, Honorable Usher L. Burdick of North Dakota, Honorable John Steven McGroarty of California, and Honorable Thomas O'Malley of Wisconsin, have all introduced Bills into the present Session of Congress to amend the said Act to exclude certain Indians or change some of its provisions. Because of the increasing Indian opposition to the Act, the present Bill, S. 1736 to repeal the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act was introduced by Senator Wheeler and Senator Frazier who are recognized as outstanding authorities on Indian questions and as friends of the Indian people.

Opposition to the passage of S 1736 started at once. It is being carried forward by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the same organizations and individuals who assisted the Commissioner into office in the first instance and then assisted in propagandizing Congress and the American public into believing that the Indians approved of the so-called Wheeler-Howard Act. Opposition to the passage of S 1736 arises from several sources which might be roughly classified as follows:

1. The radical, subversive forces who, according to their own statements, seek to establish Communism in the United States; with whom the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is in perfect agreement; whose members drafted the original Wheeler-Howard Act; and whose purpose, it is our opinion, was to use the Indians as the spearhead in the establishment of their Goal, COMMUNISM.
2. Those groups who wish to have the Indians preserved in the ways of their ancestors on reservations, wearing Indian costumes, making Indian pottery, beadwork and basketry, doing Indian dances; living like monkeys in a zoo for the entertainment of the rest of the American public, particularly the tourist trade to the National Parks.
3. Self-styled humanitarians who honestly and sincerely believe that it is their right to direct what shall be done TO the Indians; that they "know what is best for the Indians"; and who are willing to do everything FOR the Indians, as long as they direct it, except to grant to the Indians the God-given and inalienable rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and "equal justice under law" which is guaranteed to every American citizen by the Constitution of the United States and which is extended to and enjoyed by all who dwell in the United States except the First Americans.
4. Selfish interests (to borrow a favorite phrase from the Commissioner) who profit either directly through the Indian Bureau itself, the fact that the Indians are held as wards, or some provision of the Wheeler-Howard Act.

Much of the opposition to the Bill S. 1736 arises and will arise from people who do not believe that the Indian is either capable or entitled to the rights of citizenship in the land of his nativity. The present Commissioner of Indian Affairs expressed his views of this subject very clearly in 1935 during a Hearing before a Sub-committee of the House Indian Committee. More recently, his view has been reiterated in a press release which attacks Senator Wheeler and Senator Frazier for the introduction of the Bill, S. 1736. As quoted in the New York Times for March 14th, 1937, the Commissioner said:

"INDIANS DETACHED FROM THEIR NATIVE LIFE AND THROWN INTO OUR MODERN MECHANIZED SOCIETY, DROP FOR THE MOST PART TO THE LOWEST SOCIAL STRATUM, COMPLETE MISFITS".

That is what the Commissioner thinks about you, Indians. In other words, you are not fit to be American citizens, because when you are released from Government wardship, you "drop to the lowest social stratum". Those words are both an INSULT and a CHALLENGE to EVERY INDIAN in the United States, and particularly those Indians who are not under the control of the Indian Bureau.

Are you fit to be an American citizen? Do you want to be an American citizen and enjoy the rights and privileges of American citizenship? Or do you want to continue as an incompetent ward with a Government Bureau forever in control of your affairs, your lives, your property, and the lives of your children?

THAT HIS FOR YOU TO ANSWER.

The time has come for an answer, a real, united answer from the First Americans. We of this organization have carried on the opposition to the Wheeler-Howard Act at the cost of privations, hardship and personal sacrifice, because we believe that YOU, our people, are just as capable, and just as intelligent, as any other group of people in the United States, and therefore equally entitled to enter into the life stream of American citizenship, and to take your places there with honor. WE BELIEVE IN YOU. If you believe as we do; if you believe that the Wheeler-Howard Act is a detriment to the Indians, then we ask you to circulate the enclosed petition supporting the Bill S 1736 to repeal that Act. We ask you to do this quickly because the opposition to the Bill is being promoted by the Commissioner with his unlimited resources and by other amply financed groups. Return the petition with as many signatures as possible just as soon as you can do so. Copies of it will be made and given to the Senators and Representatives of your State and to others. We shall do our part here.

Honorable Burton K. Wheeler and Honorable Lynn J. Frazier, and the other Senators and Congressmen mentioned herein BELIEVE IN THE INDIANS. The Bill, S. 1736 has been introduced to give Indians the opportunity to SPEAK THEIR WISHES. What are your wishes, First Americans? Are you men or are you "misfits" who will sink to the levels of the underworld without the Wheeler-Howard Act?

SPEAK YOUR WISHES!

DO IT NOW!

Very sincerely yours,

Joseph Barrow

National President, The American Indian Federation.

