

BLACKMAIL ASSESSMENTS *

UPON investigation just completed I find that for years it has been customary for State and congressional campaign committees, systematically, to levy political assessments on the government employees in certain Indian reservations and Indian schools in Kansas, to a less extent in Nebraska, and especially in South Dakota. This practice is most rife during presidential campaigns. It obtained four years ago under the Democratic Administration, but this is no excuse for the fact that it is now prevalent.

Within the last month there has been a bold series of efforts to practise this series of blackmail. On most of the reservations and in the Indian schools which I have mentioned attempts of the kind have just been made by local, State, and congressional campaign committees. At one agency, for instance, the agent received the following communication, "Send me a list of all parties at the agency, including all teachers, helpers, etc., showing name of each and salary per year, so I can make up my assessment list soon and correctly"; signed by the chairman of the Republican State committee. Be it remembered that these teachers are mostly women, and the helpers Indians; there is an infamy of meanness in trying to extort money from such defenseless employees.

At another agency the sums assessed were stated outright, ranging from one hundred dollars for the agent to

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ten dollars for the lower-grade teachers; at one school two per cent of the salaries was specified, and so on and so on.

I wish publicly to assure the governmental employees in the Indian service that they need not pay a dollar to any political party at all unless they wish, and that if they do wish they can pay it to whatever party they prefer. Immediately on my return to Washington I shall lay all the information I can collect in each case before the department of justice so that whenever practicable the persons offending against the law prohibiting political assessments may be prosecuted.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.