

The Referendum in Canada.

THE Referendum is an institution under which no proposal for changing the constitution of a country can become law until it has received the direct approval of the citizens. The case for and against Referendum has been fought out in lengthy debates in many parliaments during several sessions. It exists, though not under the name of the Referendum, in most of the States of the American Union.

Many people take little or no interest in our present system of government. They are not called upon to give their opinions of their sometimes worthless members. If the Referendum were introduced into Canada it would certainly have an advantageous effect. The people would take a far keener interest in politics if they knew that questions might come before them; it would engender a feeling of responsibility, promote national unity, prove a safety-valve for political agitation and conduce to the tranquility of trade and of the colonies generally. It is, moreover, the proper way of recognizing the sovereignty of the people.

The opponents of Referendum may argue as to the fitness or unfitness of the people to judge new laws coming into the country. If the people are able to choose representatives surely, they can pronounce on laws. Electors are only required to give their approval or disapproval to a matter already threshed out. Cannot any common individual do this? Besides, the people are practiced on such questions. They are accustomed to vote on Local Option, the imposition of new rates, etc. The votings on these questions are only Referendums in miniature.

Public opinion is changing in favour of this system, owing in the main to a keen perception of the evils which infect our present parliamentary system and a conviction that these evils might be mitigated by the exercise of a national vote. The chief defect of our present system of government is that the party having the majority can pass any measure they wish. In Democratic countries such as Switzerland and the United States, the articles of constitution are in a strict sense the law of the land. They cannot be altered or menaced by the small and temporary majority of a Representative Assembly. Such a majority may misrepresent the will of the people. The foundations of a country