

Direct Legislation

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But why stop here? Can we not in fancy hear this eminent creature of the imagination asking, "Why should we take our religion from Galilee?" and declaring emphatically that "the religion which was good enough for our great-great-grandfathers ought to be good enough for us." We can imagine the effect of this tempestuous oratory upon the free and independent electors of Manitoba, and in fancy hear a mighty multitude chanting in unison that mystic refrain, "Oh, the mistletoe bough," as they follow their leader on a pilgrimage to Stonehenge to perform there the rites and ceremonies of that ancient and truly British system of religion—Druidism. But we must curb our imagination and proceed to disprove that the principle of Direct Legislation is in any way "un-British."

Democracy is British

Howard Masterman, in his "History of the British Constitution," says: "In as much as the course of English constitutional history can be summarized in a phrase, it may be described as 'a drift towards democracy.'" We find that "the idea of government by general consent brought by our forefathers from their German forests has never died out of English life." The writ of summons to the model parliament of 1295 states that "a most just law exhorts and decrees that what touches all shall be approved by all." With regard to constitutional development we read, "At first laws were made by the king with the assent of the peers at request or petition of the Commons, but in the Lancastrian period the Commons secured the right to present bills in the place of petitions."

In Canadian provinces the theory is that laws are made by the legislature with the assent of the lieutenant-governor, at the request or petition of the people. Is it not right in line with constitutional development that the people should now secure the right to present bills in the place of petitions? Many think so: Hence the demand for Direct Legislation.

Professor Lowell, in his book on "The Government of England," contends that "To say that at present the cabinet legislates with the advice and consent of parliament would hardly be an exaggeration." We believe that the drift toward democracy will carry us to a state where the parliament will legislate with the advice and consent of the people. Advice and instruction by the Initiative; consent, expressed or tacit, by the Referendum. Who can doubt that this is the haven of democracy toward which we are drifting? Opponents of Direct Legislation may declare that this principle is un-British until they are black in the face, but the facts are against them.

Eminent British Advocates

Direct Legislation is the inevitable result of the development of constitutional government and has many advocates in the British House of Commons. Lord Hugh Cecil, in his book on "Conservatism," says: "The pretence is that the House of Commons represents the people. But in fact the people have neither the dominant voice in the choosing of the House of Commons nor any certain control over it

THE PARTY ORGANS

"I insist that no man can do his best writing when he has to ask somebody else what to say."—W. Jennings Bryan.

In other words, it might truly be said: The party organ is a pretty useless sort of publication. The editors write under instructions from party bosses. Every city in Canada possesses party organs, either owned or controlled by men closely connected with either of the party machines. The editors must write as they are instructed, otherwise they would be dismissed. After long years of training some of these editors reach the point where they believe what they write. Others, of stronger natures, follow writing merely as a trade. The weakness of the influence of the press lies in the fact that there are too many instructed editors.—Winnipeg Tribune.



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once it has been chosen. The people have, in practice, only an opportunity to choose between the party candidates submitted to their choice. The formidable fact is that the highest authority of our immense and unequalled Empire lies alternately in the hands of one or two knots of vehement, uncompromising and unbalanced men.

The seriousness of the danger is one of the strongest arguments for what is called the Referendum.

L. T. Hobhouse, M.A., in his book, "Liberalism," is no less candid. He says: "The program of any general election is always composite and a man finds himself compelled, for example, to choose between a Tariff Reformer, whose views on education he approves, and a Free Trader, whose educational policy he detests. The average man gives his vote on the question which he takes to be the most important in itself, and which he supposes to be the most likely to come up for immediate settlement. But he is always liable to find his expectations defeated and a parliament which is really elected on one issue may proceed to deal with quite another issue." Mr. Hobhouse does not give the Referendum his unqualified support, but he regrets "so many Liberals should have closed the door on the Referendum," and admits that "there are measures

of urgency, measures of fundamental import; above all, measures which cut across the ordinary lines of party and with which in consequence our system is impotent to deal, and on these the direct consultation of the people would be the most suitable method of solution."

The late Lord Salisbury, for many years prime minister and leader of the Conservative party of Great Britain, once said: "I believe that nothing could oppose the bulwark of popular passion except an arrangement for deliberate and careful reference of any matter in dispute to the votes of the people, like the arrangements existing in the United States and Switzerland."

Professor Lecky, Conservative member of the British parliament, and author of the "History of European Morals," says: "The Referendum would have the immense advantage of disentangling issues, separating one great question from the many minor questions with which it may be mixed. Confused or blended issues are among the greatest political dangers of our time. The experience of Switzerland and America shows that when the Referendum takes root in a country it takes political questions, to an immense degree, out of the hands of wire pullers, and makes it possible to decide them mainly, tho perhaps not

wholly, on their merits without producing a change of government or of party predominance."

Premier Asquith has declared that while not in favor of the Referendum for general purposes, it might be used to solve some otherwise insoluble situations.

Many other British authorities might be quoted, but these are sufficient to show that the principle is gaining favor. Nor is the practice altogether unknown in the British Empire.

In Australia

The Australian constitution passed the British parliament and received the royal assent July 3, 1900. Provision is made for the amendment of this constitution by means of the Referendum. The basis of the South African Union was passed by a Referendum in the state of Natal. Alberta has a Direct Legislation law upon her statute books. The law is imperfect, but its passage indicates the trend of public opinion. The Saskatchewan legislature submitted a defective Direct Legislation Act to a special Referendum vote of the electors in November, 1913. There were 26,696 votes polled for the measure and 4,897 against it. Under the circumstances, this was a remarkable demonstration in favor of the principle. In Alberta and Saskatche-