

WAN GRAIN ASSOCIATION

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When Democracy Triumphed

Continued from Page 7.

Luelling estate. The philosophic group still held, their weekly meetings, and constantly discussed their troubles. They could see only one cause for them—Wall Street capitalism, the "money trust," the "railroad trust."

One evening Alfred Luelling brought to the gathering a copy of a new, paper-covered book. It was called "Direct Legislation by the Citizenship through the Initiative and Referendum," and was written by J. W. Sullivan. Strange words, these—Initiative and Referendum. Several years before this, when he was crossing the ferry from San Francisco to Oakland, some one had handed U'Ren a labor union circular on the "Initiative"; but hardly any other member of the group had heard of this governmental device. All were greatly interested, however, while Alfred Luelling read a few chapters to them. He could not finish the book at one reading, and after the meeting had adjourned, U'Ren took the volume and retired to his cabin. There, all night long, by the light of a little kerosene lamp, he pored over Sullivan's work. By sunrise he had read and digested every word.

People Must Rule

"I forgot, for the time, all about Henry George and the single tax," he says. "All these I now saw to be details. The one important thing was to restore the law-making power where it belonged—into the hands of the people. Once give us that, we could get anything we wanted—single tax, anything."

Sullivan's teachings were radical because they proposed to modify seriously the fundamental principle of American government. The men who framed the Federal and State constitutions unquestionably accepted, as a political maxim, the idea that democracy could work successfully only as long as the people ruled, not directly, but through elected representatives. They had no abiding confidence in an unrestrained democracy. Hamilton and his associates had constantly before them the historic failures—the Greek cities—in which the people exercised directly, in person, the law-making power. In the American Constitution, therefore, they separated as much as possible the law-making and the executive bodies from the people who elected them. Virtually all of the American states had followed the Federal example. Oregon, in 1859, had such a representative system. This idea regulated every phase of its public life.

People Treated as Mob

According to the representative idea, the rank and file could serve no useful purpose in making laws. They were a "mob." They were ignorant, capricious, unthinking and were constantly led astray by their own passions. Could a "mob" vote upon laws—give a simple "yes" or "no" upon proposed measures of legislation? The suggestion, of course, was absurd. The one thing that the people could be trusted to do was, at stated intervals, to select, among the candidates proposed by the several political parties the men who should make law-making their exclusive business. After selecting their representatives, the voters lost all control of them. Such legislators simply ruled by royal ukase, for the period for which they were chosen. If they did ill, the people had no recourse; they could not, themselves, undo their acts; they could not obtain the measures that their real interests demanded. Their only recourse was to wait until their representatives' terms had expired, and then elect a new set, who might go on betraying their trust precisely as had their predecessors. Under a properly regulated representative system such as the fathers of the Republic had foreseen, these things, of course, would never have happened. The men chosen by the people would be supremely wise and supremely good; they would be the State's leading men—its great educators and philanthropists, its honorable leaders in business, finance, professional life, arts and letters—men whose only possible motive in public life would be an unselfish interest in the public welfare.

Oregon Constitution

Oregon had adopted a constitution, in 1859, founded upon this idea. How had it worked in practice?

This beautiful far-Western state apparently offered a fruitful field for such an idyllic experiment. Nature had endowed

the soil with almost exhaustless wealth. The "Oregon country" is a lotus-eating land. Roses bloom in December, and crops burst out of the ground with the smallest amount of human labor. Almost tropical in its vegetative exuberance, it has nothing enervating in its climate. The women are robust, animated, alert; the men, tall, ruddy-faced, bright-eyed, are extraordinarily energetic. In its settlement, Oregon drew upon many of the best elements in the American stock. The Western coast was settled largely by New Englanders, many of them seafaring people. There is a tradition that, when the time came to name their leading city, the pioneers tossed a coin to determine whether they should call it Portland or Boston; and Portland, today, with its central green, its general atmosphere of quiet respectability, strongly resembles a New England town. The state has always been mainly agricultural. Even now the population is only about seven hundred thousand. Only one-third live in the cities—the rest are found on the wheat farms, in the apple orchards and berry fields, on the lonely sheep and cattle ranches. Anglo-Saxondom is the largest element in its population, while its foreign population represents the better European peasant types—Irish, Scotch, Germans and Scandinavians.

Here, if anywhere, this unmodified representative system, this full flower of Teutonic civilization, ought to bring happiness and justice to the people. A complete analysis, however, shows that in practically every branch of government it had been a humiliating failure. Even among American state governments, Oregon enjoyed a unique distinction for the corruption and inefficiency of its public life. It had a representative government, indeed, but not a government representative of its people. In 1893, when the Luellings, U'Ren and the Milwaukie group began to reform the state, one could hardly say that popular government, in any real sense, existed at all. There was merely a skeleton—a hollow frame of representative institutions. The power that did select its representatives was made up of the corporations—the street railway, the gas and electric light companies, the banks, the railroads. With these had developed a kind of feudal aristocracy—the "first families of Portland"—which habitually used public powers for private ends.

Party Rule

These several extra-constitutional powers had acquired possession of the government by using agencies the existence of which Hamilton and his associates had not foreseen. The fathers never seemed to anticipate, for example, the inevitable development of political parties. They provided that our representatives should be elected, but neglected an even more important detail—that, before being elected they should be nominated. Under the representative system, the men who make the nominations clearly control the government. In Oregon, as elsewhere, an elaborate machinery had been devised for making these nominations. It was not direct; like the government itself, it was purely "representative." The fact that the people had themselves no immediate choice, but expressed their preferences through representatives chosen by other representatives whom the people themselves sometimes selected, gave them little interest or influence in the proceedings. Thus there grew up a professional class which made a business of working this party machinery.

Oregon's "Wiseest" and "Best"

In character, the representatives thus selected fell far short of the Hamiltonian ideal. There were thousands of splendid, honest, able, patriotic gentlemen in Oregon—but they were not found, except rarely, in the legislature. Instead, there were briefless lawyers, farmless farmers, business failures, bar-room loafers, fourth-of-July orators, political thugs. The larger part of these men were ignorant, illiterate, lazy, politically and personally immoral. As soon as the legislature convened, a troop of prostitutes quite regularly encamped at Salem—the law-makers, in some cases, attaching them to the state pay-roll. Drunkenness and debauchery commonly prevailed throughout the whole legislative session. These legislators organized in the interest of the corporations; the latter named the officers and the committees, and directed legislation.

With Luelling, U'Ren and the other members of the Milwaukie group, these

Continued on Page 23

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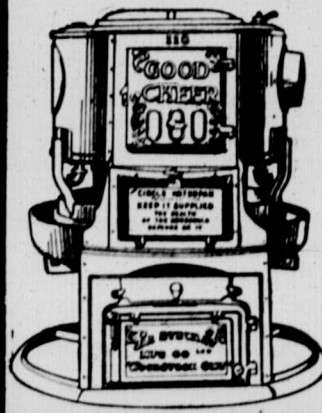
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