

The Grain Grower's Guide

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Direct Legislation

By John Kennedy

EDITOR'S NOTE.—We are receiving continually letters from our readers asking that we give them information on the subject of Direct Legislation and the benefits it will give to western farmers when it becomes law. Many of our readers have asked for copies of The Guide containing the address on Direct Legislation delivered by John Kennedy before the Brandon Convention last December. Mr. Kennedy has given a great deal of study to the subject and his address was full of most valuable information. We feel therefore that we cannot do better at the present time than to reprint the address here. Our readers will see by a study of this address, that Direct Legislation will give the people the complete control of their representatives in the various legislatures and will make our governments in reality governments "of the people, for the people, and by the people."

What we want is not a body of legislators beyond the reach of the public for four or five years, but a body of legislators subject at all times to the people's directions and control.

The Initiative is the proposal of a law by the people.

The Referendum is the submission of the law to the public at the polls.

In Switzerland, Direct Legislation has defeated the monopolists, abolished the lobby, destroyed political corruption, undermined partisanship, and established proportional representation, progressive taxation, home rule in local government, and public ownership and control of railroads, telegraphs, telephones and express service.

It is the line of least resistance in reform to-day.

How important it is that progress should rest with the people, free of hindrance from their rulers, is clearly brought out in this fine passage from the great historian, Buckle:—

"No great political movement, no great reform, either legislative or executive has ever been originated in any country by its rulers. The first suggesters of such steps have invariably been bold and able thinkers, who discern the abuse and denounce it, and point out how it is to be remedied. But long after this is done, even the most enlightened governments continue to uphold the abuse and reject the remedy."

Legislative bribery derives its power from the concentration of temptation resulting from the power of a few legislators to take final action.

"Bribed by the rich to rob the poor," said the Hon. MacVeagh. The poor thieves in legislature and council bought by the rich thieves in the corporations, to give away the property of a million people that has been entrusted in their care.

Elect Good Men

It is said that the true remedy of these evils is to elect good men to office. The advocates of this happy and original idea will have every thing their own way when they show us two things:—First, how to insure the election of good men; and, second, how to keep them good after they are elected. It is useless to expect representatives to be very much better than the people they represent. It is as much as we can reasonably look for if they are no worse. A system of government whose satisfactory operation requires the continual election of arch-angels to office is not a practical working system.

To have a really stable fabric of government we must base it upon enlightened self-interest.

The Referendum will simplify as well as purify. It is much easier to vote upon measures than men. A man is a cyclopedia of measures bound in mystery; even his character is a puzzle for the main business of opposing politicians is to fling mud at each others candidates until

it is impossible to tell how much is man or how much is mud.

Senator James Bradley, of New Jersey, says:—"The present mode of legislation is behind the age. I have become a sincere convert to the Referendum. The mass of bills presented was something to startle one. The provisions of one bill lapped on another, and I believe many an indolent lawyer found it easier to frame a bill covering just what points he needed in some cases he had in hand, than to exercise his brain in looking up the immense number of laws we have on every subject on our statute books. The looseness of legislation should grieve every good citizen of the State, and I hope the day is not far distant when the people will turn to the Referendum and pass laws more general in their character and less of them."

The Will of the People

The Referendum will aid the enforcement of the law, for the people will grow up with it. It will be law because the people want it, and they will stand behind it, and see that it is carried into effect. Nothing is of more importance to the nation, than the deep reverence for law, but reverence dies when legislation is dragged into the mire, and, more so, when the people regard the law-making bodies with dread and disgust. Why is it that we revere our constitutions so deeply? It is because they are the work of the people and not a band of politicians whose motives are open to question. The Referendum will place the whole law in new confidence, endow it with the strength of public opinion and give it new force for the maintenance of order and the accomplishment of progress.

When the people really make the laws, they will arrange things for their interests. They will banish unnecessary offices, reduce the salary of lofty officials, abolish jobbery and extravagance, get rid of the

iniquitous spoils system, cut down the power of corporate wealth, rescind all forfeited franchise and take control of misbehaving monopolies. Economy, justice and purity will go hand in hand. Ring-rule and class-legislation will die and politicians will lose their power because they can no longer command rewards for their supporters, no jobs, no fat contracts, no rich franchises. The cost of taking the Referendum vote will be very slight; not even as much as the saving on many a single contract; not half of the saving on the one item of printing the laws; not a tenth of the value of many a franchise it will keep from being stolen.

Line of Progress

If the mass of the people were really represented, the tide of affairs would be turned from the progressive congestion of the wealth, towards the progressive diffusion of the wealth.

Not the producing classes alone, but every other class in the community will be benefitted by the Referendum. It must be clear by this time that all who wish justice or good government will be benefitted by Direct Legislation, and it is equally true that even the bosses and tricksters will receive a priceless boon by the removal of the temptations that help to make them evil men, and the establishment of conditions tending to lift them to a nobler plane of life.

Under the Referendum, those who desire political power must be true-hearted orators and public-spirited philosophers, instead of being accomplished wire-pullers.

If you have a cook and she makes a broth that you do not like, you do not have to swallow it, and you may discharge the cook if she won't make things right, but legislation soups you have to take, no matter how unpleasant, and you are compelled to wait four or five years to

get rid of the rascally cooks. If your tailor makes a suit of clothes that does not fit, you do not have to wear it, or pay the tailor, either, unless he makes it the way you want it. But, with the making of law you do not exhibit so much sense; you have fixed things so that you are obliged to wear the misfit and pay the tailor just the same as if it were a fit.

Reform in Switzerland

Prof. Louis Waurin, of the University of Geneva, says:—"In the middle of this century the aristocratic regime in Switzerland was succeeded by that of representative democracy. The pure representative system, however, was not destined to last long. The people soon became aware that in the latter regime the country was overridden by political 'coteries' prone to sacrifice the general good to party or personal interests and thus was brought about the development of direct democracy. Then appeared two institutions:—The Referendum and the right of popular initiative, to which of late has been added, as a necessary complement, proportional representation."

Mr. A. A. Brown, speaking of what the Swiss have done with direct legislation says:—"They have defeated monopolies, improved the method of taxation, reduced the rate, avoided national scandals growing out of extravagance; they have husbanded the public domain, for the benefit of their own citizenship; they have destroyed partisanship and established a government of the people; they have quieted disturbing political elements, disarmed the politicians, enthroned the people; by vote of the people they have assumed authority over railroads, express companies, telegraphs and telephones, reducing freight rates, express charges and tolls by 50% for like services under private control."

People's Rule Needed

The final and fundamental argument for Direct Legislation, is that it is necessary to true self government. It, and it only, can and will establish public ownership of the government. It is the only way to prove and overcome misrepresentation with due precision and promptness. It is the only practicable means of destroying the great Law-making Monopoly which holds us in its grip today, and which is not only a terrible evil in itself, but the prolific parent and protector of other monopolies and oppressions. If the control of affairs is put in the hands of a few men for life, without responsibility to the controlled, everybody recognizes the fact that the government is an aristocracy. If the control is put in the hands of a few men for two or three years without responsibility to the controlled during that time, there is an aristocracy just as much as before.

To have a government by the people, the legislative agents must be subject

Continued on page 10



"A three-horse team," belonging to W. A. Chase, Graytown, Sask.