

The Prohibition Plebiscite

A MESSAGE



TORONTO, December, 1898.

To The Prohibitionists of Canada:

The Executive Committee of the Dominion Alliance respectfully requests a careful consideration of the present position of the prohibition reform, in view of the Plebiscite of September 20th last.

The Figures.

All the returns of the voting have been received, excepting those from a few polling places in a remote part of British Columbia, which may be delayed till navigation opens next spring. Omitting the few returns thus delayed, which cannot affect the general result, the vote polled was as follows:

	VOTES POLLED.		MAJORITIES.	
	Yes.	No.	Yes.	No.
Ontario	154,000	115,275	38,224	...
Nova Scotia	34,616	5,402	29,214	...
New Brunswick	20,911	9,576	17,335	...
Prince Edward Island	9,461	1,146	8,315	...
Manitoba	12,419	2,978	9,441	...
British Columbia	5,721	4,737	984	...
North West Territories	6,288	2,824	3,464	...
Quebec	28,582	122,614	...	94,032
	278,477	264,552	107,917	94,032
Net prohibition majority			13,925.	

A Large Vote.

The vote in favor of prohibition is remarkably large. The whole vote polled amounted to forty-four per cent of the names on the Voters' Lists. This is a large percentage when compared with the percentage of votes usually polled on questions or by-laws submitted to the electors when no other election is being held. Under such circumstances the vote is generally much smaller than that polled in ordinary elections. There are many electors who will not take the trouble to vote in a contest from which the personal element is eliminated. Public interest is always stimulated by a struggle between persons or parties. In the Plebiscite there were no such inducements as the spoils of office or political patronage offer to successful parties and workers in a general election. There was not the force of partisan feeling, or party organization, to bring out the vote. Leading political workers of different parties gave practically no assistance to the temperance workers, whose work had therefore to be done almost entirely by persons unskilled and inexperienced in political methods. Under the circumstances, the magnitude of our vote is exceedingly encouraging.

A Pure Vote.

The vote for prohibition was a pure, voluntary, unselfish vote. No doubt many electors marked their ballots against prohibition, honestly believing that they were acting for the public good. On the anti side however, there were also arrayed, selfish interests, desire for opportunities of personal indulgence and personal gain. It is also true that in many places the vote against prohibition was swelled by personation and other improper practices.

A Good Majority.

The majority for prohibition is a substantial one. It is the majority that would support a Government that had a majority of forty-three in the House of Commons after an election in which the average majority secured at the polls by the elected members was 321.

An important feature of the victory is that a great majority of the constituencies have voted for prohibition. There are 213 members of Parliament, and if we classify these according to the votes of the constituencies, we find that 128 of them represent prohibition constituencies, and that 85 represent constituencies opposed to prohibition. There is thus a clear majority of 43 parliamentary seats favorable to prohibition. The average majority for prohibition in the prohibition constituencies is over one thousand.

An Analysis.

When comparisons are made between the votes polled in the Plebiscite and those polled in a parliamentary election it must be remembered that there are seven constituencies in Canada which elect two members of Parliament each. At a parliamentary election each elector in these constituencies has two votes. In the Plebiscite he had only one.

The following table gives some information concerning the vote:

Total names on voters' list	1,233,037
Total number of votes polled	543,029
Votes polled for prohibition	278,477
Votes polled against prohibition	264,552
Majority for prohibition	13,925
Percentage polled of names on list	44.
Percentage of list voting for prohibition	22.5
Percentage of list voting against prohibition	21.5
Percentage for prohibition, of votes polled	51.3
Percentage against prohibition, of votes polled	48.7

Outside Quebec.

The vote that went against prohibition was mainly a French vote. All the Quebec constituencies that voted against prohibition have a very great French-speaking population. Many of them are entirely French. Outside of Quebec a majority of the constituencies that voted against prohibition have large French or German elements.

Although some constituencies outside the province of Quebec went against prohibition because of their French element, the general opinion of Anglo-Saxon Canada may be learned from the vote of the six other provinces and the Northwest Territories. Taking these seven divisions together, we find the following result:—

Total names on voters' lists	898,992
Total number of votes polled	301,833
Votes polled for prohibition	219,895
Votes polled against prohibition	111,938
Majority for prohibition	107,957
Percentage polled of names on list	33.6
Percentage of list voting for prohibition	27.8
Percentage of list voting against prohibition	15.8
Percentage for prohibition, of votes polled	64
Percentage against prohibition, of votes polled	36
Number of Members of Parliament	148
Number whose constituencies voted for prohibition	120
Number whose constituencies voted against prohibition	28
Average majority for prohibition	1,042
Average majority against prohibition	611

The Quebec Vote.

The vote in the Province of Quebec is remarkable. Outside the few English-speaking counties it is practically all against prohibition. This fact must be considered along with the other fact so forcibly presented by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, that a large part of the Province of Quebec is practically under prohibition. Out of 933 rural municipalities there were licenses issued last year in only 330. It is manifest that the French electorate was actuated by some other motive than favor for the liquor traffic.

In many places the friends of the Liberal party were strongly urged to vote against prohibition on the ground that a favorable vote would embarrass the Liberal Government and party. Liquor-favoring Liberals made a vigorous canvass on this line. Their pleading cost the prohibition cause thousands of votes. In the Province of Quebec a number of Cabinet Ministers and many other leading Liberal politicians came out in opposition to the proposed reform. The French people, whose admiration and affection for Sir Wilfrid Laurier are great, were told that a majority for prohibition would injure his position and influence. It is certain that the Quebec vote was largely influenced by this political consideration.

The General Result.

Under all the circumstances there is reason for profound gratification in the result of the voting. The figures show clearly that a majority of the electors of Canada, including a vast majority of the English-speaking electors, are overwhelmingly in favor of prohibition. The vote was not asked for by prohibitionists. The contest was invited by Government and Parliament, who framed the question, specified the conditions, and chose the time. It cannot be admitted that this action was taken by Parliament merely to trifle with public opinion. The French and English representatives and senators asked the people as a whole to express their opinions. It was declared that the will of the people as expressed would be carried out by Parliament. The members of Parliament thus practically agreed to obey the mandate which they invited, and it is as unreasonable and unjust to assume that Parliament will ignore the result as it would be for Parliament to refuse to carry out the agreement implied in the action already taken.

The Deputation.

The facts just stated were laid before the Government on November 3rd, by a strong deputation, which was kindly and courteously received. The Premier, the Right Honorable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, agreed with the deputation that "the vote is under the