

Direct Legislation

SECOND ARTICLE

An Answer to the chief objections raised against the Initiative and Referendum

By FREDERICK J. DIXON, M.P.P.

"Freak legislation" is another bugaboo raised by the opponents of Direct Legislation, who seem to imagine that the intelligence of the average elector is lower than their own. If you ask them if they personally would vote for freak legislation they will answer "No." By what process of logic they arrive at the conclusion that the majority of the electors are bigger fools than they are themselves I cannot determine.

Results Obtained

The publication of all the measures passed by Direct Legislation would surely prove whether it was conducive to freak legislation. But this method of proof its opponents continually avoid. By Direct Legislation the Swiss have established government ownership of railways, a parcels post system, an act insuring workmen against sickness and unemployment, government control of water power, the abolition of child labor, a splendid pure food law and the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of absinthe.

At the elections held in the U.S.A., November, 1914, four states adopted prohibition, two adopted woman suffrage, California passed the celebrated Redlight Abatement bill and a bill to prohibit prize fighting. If this is freak legislation we could stand a little of it in Western Canada.

Majority Rule

It should be remembered that any measure submitted to a direct vote would have to be endorsed by a majority of those voting before it would become law. If we believe in majority rule we must endorse Direct Legislation, whatever our private opinion may be of some of the laws passed by the majority. The people may make mistakes, but, as has been wisely said, "the people have a right to make their own mistakes."

When the people have the arguments for and against the measures to be voted upon sent to them sixty days before the vote is taken, as provided for in the bill we propose for Manitoba, there is little danger of freak legislation being passed.

If mistakes were made they could be rectified. Under our present system legislators sometimes make mistakes and the people have to suffer without power to prevent the mistakes or to rectify them if they are made. There can be no doubt which is the better system.

Opponents who are temperamentally aristocrats use such expressions as, "The rabble cannot legislate," "Direct Legislation means mob rule," etc. These men are afraid to trust the people. History and experience teach us that the nearer the government is to the people, the better that government is. The greatest amount of popular liberty is to be found in what are called the self-governing countries. It is in countries like Russia and Turkey, where the common people are unenfranchised and government is in the hands of a privileged few that we find despotism in its worst form. It has been rightly said "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy." Shall the legislators rule the people or shall the people rule the legislators? That is the question. There can be but one answer. The people must be supreme.

The Statesman's Business

As Buckle, the great English historian says, "The proper business of the statesman is to contrive the means by which certain ends may be effected, leaving it to the general voice of the country to determine what those ends shall be, and shaping his own conduct, not according to his own principles, but according to the wishes of the people for whom he legislates and whom he is bound to obey."

It ill becomes elected representatives to speak of the electors as "a mob," or "a rabble." The average elector is quite capable of rendering an intelligent verdict upon any public question after the arguments on both sides have been fairly presented.

The "Rubber Stamp" Objection

"Representatives will become mere rubber stamps to register the will of the people," declare some who seem to think that it would be wrong for the will of the people to be registered. Personally, I always leaned to the idea that that was what representatives were for. This "rubber stamp" objection is intended to convey the idea that under Direct Legislation elected representatives would be mere figure-heads. It would have a very different effect. Men now preferred by party leaders are men with elastic consciences, men who will vote with their party every time irrespective of their own personal opinions. When the fate of a party is staked on a measure, party loyalty is often exalted at the expense of honest opinion. With Direct Legislation in force a popular verdict upon any measure could be obtained without the fate of any party being involved. This would leave legislators free to express their honest opinions and would put a premium upon intelligent independence.

Many good men now refrain from entering politics because they do not wish to sacrifice their independence upon the altar of partyism. Direct Legislation would open the way for representatives untrammelled by party ties who wished to make laws under the supervision of the people.

It is not intended that the people should vote on all laws. The great bulk of legislation would still be enacted by duly elected representatives and only on special occasions would the Initiative and Referendum be invoked when representatives failed to correctly interpret public opinion or attempted to pass unpopular legislation.

About Switzerland

It has been said by men who ought to be better informed, that "Direct Legislation might work all right in a small country like Switzerland, but it would not work in Manitoba." There are over 3,000,000 people in Switzerland and half a million in Manitoba. The following figures show that the Swiss population is very mixed in the matters of language and religion.

Switzerland

Population in 1900	3,315,443
Language—	
German	2,319,105
French	733,220
Italian	222,247
Romance	38,677
Religion—	
Protestants	1,916,157
Catholics	1,379,664
Jews	12,264

Unprejudiced men who have gone to Switzerland to investigate this question agree that Direct Legislation is a great blessing there. Surely, if it works all right in a nation of such a heterogeneous character, it should work all right in Manitoba with its half million people of a more homogenous character.

Another very trivial objection ad-

vanced is that "Direct Legislation has been before the people of the United States for fifty years and no move has been made to incorporate it into national affairs." This statement is not true, and if it were it would not be important. It is not true because repeated attempts have been made to incorporate Direct Legislation into the federal constitution. At the present time there is an organization called "The National Popular Government League," which is working for a Gateway Amendment, which provides for the incorporation of the Initiative and Referendum into the federal constitution. This, however, has no direct bearing upon our case. At present we are urging the adoption of Direct Legislation for provincial matters which correspond to state affairs on the other side of the line.

All the states, except Delaware, provide for the amendment of their constitutions by Direct Legislation. In many states all legislation is subject to the Initiative and Referendum. Its rapid adoption in state affairs is a good indication of its popularity. It was adopted by:

South Dakota in	1898
Utah in	1900
Oregon in	1902
Nevada in	1905
Montana in	1906
Oklahoma in	1907
Maine in	1908
Missouri in	1908
Arkansas in	1910
New Mexico in	1911
California in	1911
Arizona in	1911
Nebraska in	1912
Washington in	1912

Volumes could not say more than this table. If our opponents contend that the non-adoption of Direct Legislation for federal affairs is an argument against it, surely we, with a greater show of reason, may argue that its rapid adoption for state affairs is an argument in favor of its adoption for provincial purposes.

The "Un-British" Argument

"Direct Legislation is un-British" say some persons who have either a slight knowledge of British history or a constitutional blindness to facts. This cry "It is un-British" is one of the weakest objections which can be raised against any reform and yet it is raised against all reforms. If it were true it would have little weight with thinking men. Many good and useful things have originated outside of the British Isles, and the reason Great Britain is a pattern of good government to the world is because she has never hesitated to make improvements, irrespective of their origin, when it has been clearly shown that these improvements would advance the safety, honor and welfare of the British people. Adaptability to the present needs of the people irrespective of ancient history, is the fundamental principle of British government. In spite of this well known fact there are certain individuals who apparently imagine that the bare assertion that a desirable reform is "un-British" is sufficient to condemn it.

It requires no great exercise of the imagination to picture one of these misguided individuals solemnly adjuring the voters of Manitoba to gaze no more on Grecian sculpture, to heed no more the Roman law, to have done with the algebra of Babylon, to shun Euclid like a plague, to be blind to the paintings of Raphael and Angelo, deaf to the music of Mozart and Wagner, to scorn the philosophy of Socrates and Plato, to read not the poetry of Homer and Virgil, and to treat with contempt such Yankee notions as the steamship and telephone, for, be it known, to all concerned, these things are very "un-British."

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How Has Your Association Helped Your Community?

CASH \$22.00 CASH
For The Best Answers

Many farmers do not realize what valuable work the local Grain Growers' Associations, or the local unions of the United Farmers of Alberta can do for their community. In order to show what has been done, we are making a competition open to everybody on the question "How has your Association helped your community?" This competition is not necessarily confined to local secretaries, but any man or woman in the community who knows what work the Association has done can write the article for us and enter the competition.

For the best article received we will pay	\$8.00
For the second best article received we will pay	\$6.00
For the third best article received we will pay	\$5.00
For the fourth best article received we will pay	\$3.00

In this article it will be necessary to tell the membership of your Association and how many farmers in the district who are not members. We want to know how your meetings are conducted, and whether the women and the young people take an interest in the meetings. We want to know how frequently you meet in the winter and in the summer. Has your Association helped to develop its members as public speakers? Has it helped to educate the farmers to better business methods, and has it encouraged more community spirit and has it assisted in developing higher ideals? We also want to know what your Association has done in the way of co-operative buying and how much it has saved the farmers. If you have established an Association library, let us know if it is a success and how well it is patronized. What do you find is the best method of getting outsiders into your Association? Do the women members meet with the men or have they a separate Association? Do you hold picnics in the summertime? What has your Association done towards improving rural schools in the way of better school buildings, school gardens or any other way. Has your Association secured a good loading platform, scales or any other improvement. Any other good work for the community that your Association has done should also be dealt with in these articles.

These articles must not be over 1,500 words in length and must be written on one side of the paper only. The prizes will not necessarily go to the Association with the largest membership, nor those that have done the most co-operative buying, but rather to those Associations that have given the most all round value to the farmers in their community. These articles must be received in The Guide office not later than April 24. Do not put anything else in the envelope except the article and address your letter:

Association Competition

The Grain Growers' Guide

Winnipeg, Man.