



NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

This department of The Guide is maintained especially for the purpose of providing a discussion ground for the readers where they may freely exchange views and derive from each other the benefits of experience and helpful suggestions. Each correspondent should remember that there are hundreds who wish to discuss a problem or offer suggestions. We cannot publish all the immense number of letters received, and ask that each correspondent will keep his letter as short as possible. Every letter must be signed by the name of the writer, though not necessarily for publication. The views of our correspondents are not of necessity those of The Guide. The aim is to make this department of great value to readers, and no letters not of public interest will be published.

DIRECT LEGISLATION

Open Letter to Premier Roblin from the President of the League

Hon. R. P. Roblin.

My Dear Mr. Roblin.—

At the recent banquet in the Royal Alexandra Hotel you are reported to have made a somewhat vicious attack on those who advocate the reform called Direct Legislation. An officer of the Direct Legislation League may I be permitted to say how much we appreciate the fact that you felt called upon to give our cause such public notice, for while we are fully aware that this great reform is making most rapid headway, we were not aware that its impact had already been so powerfully felt by the Honorable Premier of this province. Our only regret is that a man of your political acumen should have placed yourself so squarely in the path of progress, and denounced all those as "demagogues" and "conspirators" who "sometimes by open and heroic assaults, again by mining and sapping and subterranean methods attempt to create discontent and bring discredit upon law and institutions as we have them and thereby seek to undermine the British constitution and British liberty, and who for thirty pieces of silver would sell King, country and even themselves." That is rather a bold and serious charge to make against thousands of Canadian citizens in this province who heretofore and even now think they are perhaps as good British subjects as yourself, and who challenge you to produce one iota of evidence to support your undignified, and may I say, wholly unwarranted statements.

Our meetings have been openly advertised, discussion invited and every endeavor has been made to give this question of Direct Legislation the widest publicity. We have purposely courted publicity, for with a good cause that is our strongest weapon. Appeals have come from Grain Growers' associations, Farmers' picnics, church organizations and other bodies all over this province, for speakers on this subject, and the almost unanimous approval of Direct Legislation by voters of every political complexion is a most stimulating and cheering indication of the sanity and popularity of our cause.

When a delegation from our league waited on you officially a little over a year ago, you informed us that as far as you were concerned you had not studied the merits of Direct Legislation and were consequently unfamiliar with its principles except in a general way, but you advised us to go ahead and educate the public of this province, and if our cause was good it would win out in the end. In view of this advice it is somewhat amazing to find you now denouncing as agitators and demagogues seeking to undermine the British constitution and to destroy British liberty, those who followed faithfully your advice.

Let me point out that the Initiative and Referendum is already in operation in Australia, a British dominion; that it has been in operation in Switzerland, one of the best governed countries in the world, for over fifty years; that it is in constant operation to a limited extent in our municipal life, and is freely acknowledged to be the greatest safeguard we have against extravagant expenditure; that it is in opera-

tion in every banking, loan and other business corporation whose management is under a responsible and representative board of directors; that at least ten states of the American Union have put it into operation, while many others are in process of doing so. Not only that but in the last general election in Great Britain Mr. Balfour, the Unionist leader, pledged his party to the policy of submitting to a referendum the fiscal policy. A bill to provide for the introduction of the Referendum into the British system of government was introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Balfour of Burleigh and was very largely supported. Even our own Dominion premier, the Right Honorable R. L. Borden, proposed while in opposition, and since coming into power has promised a referendum on the naval policy of Canada. Very recently in the Ontario legislature the Hon. Adam Beck, also a staunch Conservative, introduced a bill to the effect that the granting of all public franchises should be contingent on the approval of the people by means of a referendum.

Even you, Mr. Roblin, made use of the Referendum only a few years ago to kill the temperance prohibition bill of the Honorable Hugh John Macdonald, while more recently when Sir Wilfrid Laurier was in power you proposed that the Boundary question should be submitted "directly to the people of this province for their consideration and decision on the principle of the Initiative and Referendum." Further, in this very province the local option law embodies the principles of the Initiative and Referendum.

To show further that the heaven is working it may be mentioned that our league has been requested to organize a campaign of education in the province of Saskatchewan, while the Alberta legislature has taken the lead of all the provinces by unanimously passing a resolution at the last session favoring the introduction of the Initiative and Referendum.

It may be interesting to you, Sir, to know that the Conservative organization of Alberta has, as one of its officials recently wrote us, accepted Direct Legislation, "lock, stock and barrel," as a plank in its platform. Thus this very sane and wholesome principle of allowing the people by direct vote to settle any or all questions of great importance when they desire so to do, is gaining momentum daily and your attempt to stay the waves of this great reform will be as futile as those of the ancient Saxon king who commanded the ocean waves to retire, but all in vain.

It is somewhat of an anomaly that we, a democratic people believing fully in the sovereignty of the people should elect our parliamentary representatives for four or five years without a single check over them during all that time. No man in Canada would be foolish enough to give such unlimited power to the manager of his business. While holding him responsible for the general management he would still reserve the right to veto any unwise act and the right to institute any reform he, the owner, might desire. Why should the people not have exactly the same control over the managers of our provincial business?

Because we have no check whatever over our legislature the most vicious

legislation has frequently become law. Corporations have secured valuable franchises which never should have been given, the most extravagant expenditures have been indulged in and the people's rights ignored.

It is proposed by Direct Legislation that this weakness in our constitution shall be repaired. By the Referendum it is proposed that when a substantial percentage of the electors by petition request the government to refer any proposed law to a popular vote, they shall be compelled to do so. By the Initiative it is proposed that when a substantial percentage of the electors by petition ask for specific legislation the legislature shall either pass such legislation or declining the responsibility themselves shall submit it to a vote of the electors, and on their approval it shall become law.

By these means the electors would have a constant check over the government, thus insuring against unwise or vicious legislation and also insuring to the people whatever legislation they might desire but which they are now powerless to secure. Under this system our legislators would be still responsible for the great mass of ordinary legislation, while the final power would rest with the people to be used whenever they so desire.

Under Direct Legislation many questions of great moment and pressing for solution, such for instance as compulsory education, would be settled, which now remain unsettled owing to the fact that governments will not, owing to certain influence assume the responsibility. Corporations would not be able to secure legislation against the interests of the people. Legislatures and legislators could not be influenced or purchased to enact vicious legislation as they would be powerless to "deliver the goods."

Governments would be much more responsive to the people's wishes. Members of parliament who might be dishonest could not indulge their inclinations while honest members would be fortified and temptation largely removed.

Best of all, great questions would be settled on their merits, aside from the baneful influence of partyism, as each voter would vote, not as now for the man, but for men and measures, independently, just as is done at present in our municipal elections. Thus an elector could indulge his party feelings to the fullest extent by voting for his party candidate, and at the same time give his best judgment on each question that might be submitted for his approval. How much more intelligent this would be than as things are now. Nor would it, as some fear, become a weapon frequently used. Legislation would provide that a Referendum could only be taken say once in two years, except at a general election, while the very fact of the people having this power would be the strongest factor against its frequent use.

In conclusion, Mr. Roblin, this very healthy legislation is coming, and I believe at no distant date, and without disrupting the British Empire or destroying the British constitution, but by a process of constitutional evolution in strict harmony with British principles. While I admire the British constitution perhaps as fully as you, yet I think no one would claim it to be perfect, and this is attested by the many changes frequently made in it by the Mother of Parliaments, many of them, such as that of last year when the House of Lords was shorn of great power, being very radical in their nature. It is becoming more and more evident to advanced statesmen and to the people at large that our elected representatives have failed too often to represent those by whom they were elected, and that therefore this principle of Direct Legislation is an imperative necessity in order that the people may rule and secure to themselves the greatest measure of British liberty.

I have the honor to be,

Yours very truly,

J. N. HUTCHISON, M.D.,
President, Direct Legislation League.
Winnipeg, April 24, 1912.

WESTERN SECESSION

Editor, Guide:—There is room for honest difference of opinion as to whether it is better to ignore or to

openly deal with the threat of secession frequently heard through Western Canada. While admitting this, I believe the safer way is to meet it openly. There are to my mind many reasons for opposing the secession movement, but I only propose to deal with a few of these reasons.

First.—The proposal to secede is not practical. The right of dissatisfied members of such a Confederation as the Dominion of Canada to secede is not admitted nor is it likely to be admitted. The failure of the Southern States of the American Union nearly half a century ago pretty well settled that question. There has at times been a strong feeling in some of the Maritime provinces in favor of secession, when no doubt large majorities of the people were favorable to secession, but the movement always came to nothing. We, in the West, claim to be a practical people and if we wish relief from our present difficulties, we should seek it in a practical way.

Second.—The protected and financial interests of Canada, in effect, declared war on us during the last Dominion election campaign and undoubtedly drew first blood. By adopting secession tactics we admit ourselves not merely temporarily but permanently defeated, and I for one am not prepared to admit anything of the kind. I find among the leaders of the farmers' movement in the West many of the pioneers of this country, who in the early days overcame so many obstacles to their progress that I cannot believe they will admit permanent defeat by even those mighty interests, with their methods and their millions. Then, even if we did succeed in forming a separate province or confederation of provinces, the contest between organized wealth on the one hand and labor, whether in the workshop or on the farm, on the other hand, would still be with us. That contest must be fought out by every civilized community in some shape. We need not hope to avoid it by secession or by any other mode of running away from it. Protection in all its shapes and forms is a political religion with those interests. It was because they want protection from outside competition that those interests headed the opposition to reciprocity. The desire for protection is merely an outcropping of cowardice. The arguments in favor of protection are addressed to the spirit of cowardice in us. There would not be a protective system in any country but for the inherent cowardice in the human heart.

Protection undermines the courage and self-reliance of the protected. We have no reason to look for any great degree of courage in those interests. As protection is their religion, money is their God and their most vulnerable point is their pocketbook. If we make a combined and continuous attack on that point we are sure of victory. The tremendous increase in the wealth and numbers of those connected with the big interests has been to a large extent brought about by their extensive and profitable trade with us. Their future success depends very largely on the amount of our future dealings with them. It is for us to say whether or not we shall continue to deal with those who have done all they can to injure us and to injure our wives and families to serve their own selfish purposes.

Personally, I have heretofore, in purchasing manufactured goods for my farm and elsewhere given a preference to Canadian goods, but I see no reason why I should continue such a policy when the profits made by trade with me are liable to be used to the detriment of myself and those depending on me. The Western farmers have already shown that they can do great things by means of co-operation and concerted action and greater things can be done in the future. We are only just beginning to recognize our strength. By co-operation in buying manufactured articles we can not only procure these things more cheaply, but we can compel Canadian manufacturers to consider our rights, and when we bring the big interests to their senses, the politicians who obey their behests will follow.

I throw out these suggestions because I believe that the secession murmurings we hear are not caused by disloyalty or any dislike to the Canadian Confederation, but by hatred of the brutality of the big interests, and I believe there are much more effective ways of dealing