

AN EASY APPROACH TO THE IDEAL

Few persons who have given serious thought to public affairs in Canada are satisfied with conditions as they exist. We have still true and honorable men in Canadian public life, men who hold conscience higher than income and who would resign their seat rather than betray the public trust for private gain. But it is true that we have politicians in power about whom this cannot be said; men who hold their seat year after year and term after term, in spite of the will of the people, and by their unscrupulous actions pollute public service for honorable men and enrich themselves at the public loss.

The will and desires of the people are ignored by their public servants, and their property and franchises given to favored individuals and monied corporations. Our elections have come to be little more than party wars, where the airs become filled with the odium of corruption, bribery, graft and slander till the self-respecting citizen fears to enter what ought to be the most dignified of all callings, the government of the nation.

A HOTBED OF GRAFT

Such Things Ought Not To Be.

A very little reflection will show the most conservative that there is something radically wrong. Now, what is that something? Is it not simply this that our system of representative government,—"the rule of the people for the people, by the people,"—has been silently slipping from our grasp, getting further and further away from us, until now we waken up to the fact that the corporation, the boss and the lobby, are enjoying the real benefits from our "perfect" system of representative government. In short, is it not that our representative government has become a mis-representative government, or as an American writer ably expresses the same idea concerning the republic. He says: "Today, after a lapse of a century and a quarter, combinations of power, of financial, industrial and even political power, have found entrenchments in our institutions in the face of which for multitudes of our population, life is precarious, liberty practically despaired of, and happiness except of a kind, enjoyed by the plantation slave, unknown." While this statement is too strong for Canada to-day, still we must remember that Canada is to-day where the United States were fifty years ago, and unless we profit by her experiences, we shall be in fifty years where she is to-day.

Now, what is to be done? We all agree that the right system is that which will do most for the majority of the people, when "honest" rights are concerned, the rights of the majority are the rights of all the people. We agree that the legislators should be true and honest; that the public rights should not be sold to private corporations; that the influence of the demagogue and the boss should be removed from the stage of public life. But how? We do not wish to tear down our present system of representative government; to destroy existing institutions and launch out on some untried scheme. Nor need we. Our present system of representative government is still quite sound in principle, but as the American writer styled it, "other interests foreign to the people's have found entrenchments." So that now the details of that system must be altered to suit existing conditions. Much of the trouble arises to-day in our legislators being entrusted with too much power. When the question is viewed in a fair, impartial way, we are inclined to compliment our representatives that they are as good as they are. We expect our legislators to face temptations in public life that are unknown in private life. We are told the main safeguard is to elect good men. We may devise a plan to do this, but how can we devise a plan to keep them good? There is the difficulty and the impossibility. To give a man power is to give him the command of wealth. Wealth is not far from the first desire of all human beings and forms

A Practical Plan of Direct Legislation whereby Under the Party System of Government, the People Will Rule in Every Sense of the Word.

Address by G. G. WHITE at the Brandon Convention.

one of the strongest human temptations. We are giving our legislators, public power which they are tempted to sell to unscrupulous bidders for private gain. In this fact, lies the key to every form of political dishonesty and corruption. Were it not for this fact, the lobby would not exist; the grafters would be unknown and the office seeker might better attend to his private business.

THE AIM OF DIRECT LEGISLATION

Now the primary aim of direct legislation is to withdraw this surplus power from the hands of the politicians and keep it within the control of the people where it rightly belongs. It will thus place our representatives in a more wholesome atmosphere where they can carry out their public duty without outside interference. There is no grafter who will want to purchase from a legislator a privilege that the people have the power to withdraw. It will give us the right, to direct our public servants in their actions to force them to do what we want and not to do what we don't want. This in short, is what we mean by direct legislation. It does not destroy existing institutions. It does not interfere with the principle of our system of government, but simply makes it more useful and obedient and makes a representative government more representative.

Direct legislation embodies two main ideas, namely, the initiative and the referendum. With these two is usually

THE REFERENDUM

The referendum is simply the referring of issues to the people for their sanction or veto. It is the means of checking faulty legislation. No act passed by the legislature except urgency measures, shall become law until after thirty to ninety days according to the constitution. If during that time, a petition signed by five per cent. of the voters be filed with the secretary of state, it cannot become law until submitted to the people. Urgency measures are those which are necessary for the peace, health or safety of the community and must be declared such by two-thirds or three-quarters of the legislature. The referendum may be either optional or obligatory. In the first case, acts of the legislature become law at the expiration of the required time, unless some petition has been filed. In the obligatory system, the legislature is obliged to submit all measures except urgency measures for the public approval. Usually the optional form is the one in use although the obligatory method has many advantages.

THE RECALL

The recall is the power of the people to recall from office any member of the legislature or public official who has proven himself unworthy of the trust. On a petition signed by a certain number of voters, he must resign his seat but he may, if he wishes, stand another election.

that would be, yet those are exactly the terms on which our legislators are employed to handle the affairs, not of one individual, but of a whole province or nation. Plainly such a system could work only where we had ideal public-spirited legislators. This we have not and never can have. A great fact that the electors must ever keep in mind is that their representatives are and always will be only an average of the people. Therefore as long as humanity has a flaw, we must allow for it in our system of government.

Where direct legislation has been established you could no more withdraw it to-day than you could withdraw from Saxon people the powers of the Habeas Corpus or Bill of Rights. It is in operation in Oregon, Montana, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Missouri and Maine, and to some degree in Nevada and Utah. Municipalities in Oregon, California and other states have it in varying degrees as well as many cities and towns throughout the union. It is also rapidly gaining ground in Canada and in England. But if we wish to see direct legislation in full flower, we must turn to Switzerland where it has been in use for nearly fifty years. During this time she has completely rid herself of the regime of exploration and corruption which were rampant. Jas. Bryce declared "that Switzerland was the most successful democracy the world has ever seen." President Lowell stated that "The Swiss Confederacy is the most successful democracy in the world. The people are contented. The government is patriotic, far-sighted, efficient and economical, steady



The Springbrook, Manitoba, Grain Growers, with their wives and daughters, taken at their annual picnic

included the recall. Now, let us see what these terms mean. First, the initiative.

THE INITIATIVE

The initiative simply means the initiating or the starting of any legislative movement by the people. It is the power of making a motion extended to the people. For example, when a law is drawn up by one man or a number of men, that is making a motion. When it is signed, that is seconding it. The initiative usually requires eight to ten per cent. of the voters to sign the petition to secure its submission to the people. This petition is first filed with the secretary of the state or province, who presents the measure to the legislature. It is there discussed in the usual manner and either passed, rejected or amended. If passed, it becomes law after a certain time, but before that time is subject to the referendum of the people. If they reject it they must refer it to a vote of the people. If they amend it, the law as first submitted and all amendments thereto must be returned to the people, for them to decide upon. The voice of the people is the final judgment, and settles the issue.

In short the initiative is simply a means of correcting the sins of omission; the referendum, the sins of commission and the recall, is a last resort to remove the man when the other two powers have failed.

Now does this not appear a most reasonable change. It does not destroy existing institutions but simply improves them so that they can more perfectly fulfil the purpose for which they were instituted. It strikes at the very heart of the evil which has crept into our present system and places our public business subject to the same sound law and reason as our private affairs. Who of you would think of entrusting a man with your business for four or five years on these terms; namely, that he is to have full control of your interests; he may raise his salary; sell your property; make changes or do anything else he may desire regardless of your will? You are to say nothing to him during his four or five years employment. Your only power is to put someone else in his place at the end of his time to manage your property providing there happens to be any left. Rather, a one-sided bargain

dy in its policy, not changing its course with party fluctuations. Corruption in public life is practically unknown."

HOW IT OPERATES

When we examine the workings of the system, the reason of its success becomes at once apparent. In the first place it is opening the door to all other reforms. The opponents of reform have not been the people but the "vested interests acting through their influence on the people's representatives." Take the surplus power out of the representatives hands and this influence is dead. As Professor Bryce says: "The legislators can be 'got at' but the people cannot." Give the people a voice and no power can stand in the way of necessary reform. Besides, it is not by the rulers that reforms are initiated but by the people. Every great reform has been originated by some bold and able thinker among the plain people. Wendell Philip states, "No reform, moral or intellectual ever came from the upper classes of society. All came from the protests of the victims. The emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working people themselves."

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