

The Forum

Edited by HOWARD S. ROSS, K.C.

Man is the only animal which has to struggle in the midst of plenty in order to keep from starving to death.—Cleveland Citizen.

To yoke up learning with life must be the great educational work of the future.—Bruce Calvert.

THE SCOTTISH EDUCATION BILL.

The Scottish Education Bill which provide for the election of Scottish school boards by the Hare system, had already passed through the Grand Committee when we received information about it at the end of August. At that time it was expected to become law on the re-assembly of Parliament. When this bill is enacted, P.R. elections for school boards will be held from one end of Scotland to the other—From American P.R. Review.

The Hare system of proportional representation has been prescribed by Act of Parliament for the City of Sligo. The first election is to take place in January, 1919. The finances of the City of Sligo had fallen into an unsatisfactory condition, and it was necessary to obtain Parliamentary authority to extend the City's powers of taxation. Under these circumstances some of the taxpayers insisted, before assenting to the extension, that the principle of proportional representation should be adopted for the election of the Council.—From American P. R. Review.

The following article by Charles A. Beard, Director, New York Bureau of Municipal Research, and formerly professor at Columbia University, New York, and who apparently was considered rather too radical by the University authorities, appeared in the October number of the American P. R. Review. In view of the importance of the subject this article is, we think, well entitled to the space now given it. Professor Beard is doing splendid constructive work for the new democracy. The article follows:—

P. R.—The Basis of Co-Operative Democracy.

Proportional representation is associated in the popular mind with commission government, the recall, and the initiative and referendum as one of the "frills" attached to the broad garment of the new democracy. This view is both incorrect and unfortunate. It is incorrect because proportional representation has no intimate or necessary relation to any of the devices of direct government. It is unfortunate because it checks the interest of large portions of the country in the advancement of the new plan for drawing all of the diverse and rich elements of our social life into the work and processes of government.

Proportional representation is not a mere mechanical device for counting heads on matters of public policy. It is a system of representative democracy which seeks to bring to the high purposes of modern government the use of all the different kinds of heads in the solution of our perplexing problems, problems affecting not merely numbers of people but groups of varying occupations, enterprises, opinions, and interests. This should be firmly fixed in mind. Proportional representation is not merely a scheme for counting heads (though it makes provision for that). It is primarily a plan for inviting the use of all the different kinds of heads to be found in a complex industrial society.

It is said above that it is a new plan. This statement is hardly correct. The idea is of course an old one. It was thoroughly discussed by some of the best thinkers of the French Revolution (to go no further back in history than that period). It was weighed and found acceptable by many of the wisest and most sincere friends of democracy in the nineteenth century. It has, moreover a growing record of practical achievement which removes it from the class of political experiments.

That is not all. In the long history of representative government the present practice of merely counting heads

is comparatively new. Representative government in its national origins (most of which belong to the twelfth and thirteenth century in Spain, England, and France) was not a scheme for the mathematical or quantitative reckoning of heads, but a plan for securing the matured opinion of all sorts and conditions of men in the realm. The complete English parliament of the fourteenth century included the lords spiritual and temporal, the representatives of the knights of the shire, and the burgesses of the towns. The old Swedish parliament consisted of representatives of the clergy, nobility, burghers, and peasants. The states general of France embraced the clergy, nobility and third estate. This old idea of estate or group representation is not unknown to American history. For example the legislature of the state of New York under the constitution of 1777 was founded on that principle; the senate represented the large landed interest of the state, while the assembly represented the other elements of the population possessing the requisite voting qualifications.

It was the radical ideas of abstract and absolute equality of all men (not women) loosened upon the world by the American and, more particularly, the French revolution that finally undermined and destroyed almost everywhere the system of representation by estates. Rousseau was the great preacher of the new gospel. He held that the state was created by the voluntary association of free and equal men; that the sovereign power is in the collectivity of the men thus associated; that each individual possesses an equal share of sovereignty—that is, if there are ten thousand men in the state, that each man has one ten thousandth part of the sovereignty; and finally that the numerical majority expresses the sovereign will of the state, the minority being always in the wrong.

It was on the basis of this philosophy that men came to hold that representative government is one in which representatives are apportioned among the people on a mathematical basis, namely one representative for each of the equal quotas into which the entire population is divided; and in which also each representative is elected by a majority or plurality of the voters in each quota.

That this notion of abstract equality and perfect likeness of all men and all groups of men has rendered a powerful and useful service in breaking down class privileges and in democratizing the world there can be no doubt. But that representative government founded upon it has not met the expectations of its sponsors is likewise undeniable. Everywhere in the western world before the outbreak of the Great War there was dissatisfaction with the parliaments and popular assemblies as constituted on the Rousseau doctrine. The masses were discontented and demanded the establishment of "direct government." Conservatives were coming to regard parliaments as unreliable and shifty organizations of elusive politicians. Labor was turning from "political" action to direct or industrial action. Demagoguery and corruption were all too frequently found in the assemblies of the people.

The fault was not with the politicians or the people, but with the system. In each constituency the candidate for the representative assembly has to be a very nimble citizen, with an elastic neck which enables him to turn his face now vigorously in the direction of the chamber of commerce, now in the direction of the central federated labor union, now towards the Irish vote, now towards the Jewish voters—back and forth with an astounding speed which leads even the unsophisticated to suspect that he is more supple than honest. In other words, it makes representatives mere brokers of public opinion, to use President Lowell's ingenious phrase, that is, guessers about the market currents of public opinion. The system proved to be the rich soil in which secret subservience to capitalists could be readily combined with demagoguery in the labor world. Representatives, in their frantic effort to represent everybody and every interest, really represented no one and no thing. Discontent with the system led to the spread of direct government in this country and in France to the advocacy of a return to the old system of representation of groups and interests.