

The Forum

Conducted by HOWARD S. ROSS, K.C.

"Don't let us complain of things or persons, or of the nineteenth century, or of the difference of the country . . . but simply say to ourselves: These are the things and persons through which and with which we have to work, and by influencing them or managing them or forcing them, the end must be attained or not at all.—Benjamin Jowett.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

Those opposed to proportional representation in Great Britain have induced the House of Commons to reject the proposal to make a trial in one hundred parliamentary constituencies to be selected by a commission. The government favored the reform and many of the leading and forward looking statesmen in both Houses vigorously advocated it. It was also unanimously recommended in the report of the Speaker's Committee.

Fundamental political reforms are not brought about in a day or in a year.

MONTREAL COMMISSION GOVERNMENT.

It was the evident intention that the aldermen would have little if any power. It is necessary to muster a two-thirds vote to block a decision of the appointed Commission. But as often happens, the unexpected has happened, and two-thirds of the Council apparently are working together and when they choose can block the Commission.

As the recent city elections showed clearly the strong opposition of the majority of the voters to the attempt to take practically all powers away from the elected representatives of the voters it is quite within the possibilities that within a few years Montreal's charter will be amended again. Let us hope the Quebec legislature will decide that if there is to be a division of power it should be divided between an elected commission of say twenty-four and the voters. The fatal mistake we now make is that on election day we foolishly give away our power. Until the voters actually and continuously control their representatives by direct legislation and the recall governing bodies will not give good results.

It is only doing justice to the present commissioners and the Quebec government who appointed them to say that they would likely give as good service as such a body could give if they had full power to carry on the city government. But such a system is not democratic and the voters will not be satisfied with anything less than a really democratic charter giving as large home rule powers as possible to the city. Under such a charter the voters would take the blame for unwise enactments but now the Quebec government (the real city rulers) must take that responsibility. If the voters had full power they would quickly correct and avoid the passing of undesirable measures.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE "REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT, 1918.

The Electoral Reform Bill was voted favorably upon in the British House of Commons on February 6.

As passed, it applied proportional representation to elections for University constituencies returning two or more members. All other provisions for proportional representation had been eliminated. The bill also provided for the alternative vote (West Australian system of preferential majority voting) in single-member constituencies.

When the bill came up for consideration in the House of Lords, the Earl of Selbourne offered an amendment to reinsert the clause providing that in constituencies returning three or more members elections should be by proportional representation. The amendment was supported by Viscount Bryce, Viscount Chaplin, Lord Courtney of Penwith, the Marquess of Lansdowne, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and others, and on January 22 was adopted by a vote of 131 to 42. Later by amendments to the schedule the Lords divided all Great Britain into multi-member constituencies. This meant that proportional representation would apply throughout the entire country to the election of nearly all the members from Great Britain. On the same day the section of the bill providing for the alternative vote was stricken out by a vote of 57 to 9.

On January 29 the bill was passed by the House of Lords and on the 30th the amendments of the Lords were

considered by the Commons. An extended debate upon proportional representation ensued in which Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Chancellor, Colonel Sanders, Sir Charles Bathurst, Lord Robert Cecil, Viscount Wolmer and Mr. Balfour, and others supported the amendment of the House of Lords. At the conclusion of this debate the Commons rejected the Lords' amendment for proportional representation by a vote of 223 to 113. The Lords thereupon proposed that the original recommendations of the Speaker's Conference as to proportional representation should be reinserted, but the Commons rejected this amendment also. Finally, acting upon a suggestion of Lord Curzon, the Lords proposed that provision be made for the appointment of a Royal Commission to prepare a scheme under which one hundred members should be elected by proportional representation from constituencies in Great Britain returning not less than three nor more than seven members. The scheme so prepared was to be laid before both Houses of Parliament and if agreed to by both Houses was to take effect as if it were enacted in the Act. In order to bring the two Houses together, this amendment was taken up by the Government and was adopted by the House of Commons by a vote of 224 to 114. The Commons had previously accepted the Lord's amendment striking out the alternative vote. In this form the bill was passed and received the King's assent on February 6.

The Act will be a landmark in English history. Besides introducing proportional representation for the election of nine or more University Members and probably for one hundred additional members, it greatly broadens the franchise, giving the vote to nearly every man over the age of twenty-one and to several million women over thirty years of age.

COMMUNITY EFFORT.

The New York Board of Estimates has voted \$50,000 to enable the Commissioner of Public Markets to buy and sell food products with a view to relieving consumers from the exorbitant profits of middlemen and trusts.

The planting of community forests by villages and towns in New York is urged by the State Conservation Department. Cheap and unprofitable land, it is claimed, might be set out to trees. For this purpose the Department will furnish the trees for 50 cents a thousand.

REFORM OF HOUSE OF LORDS.

The report of Lord Bruce's committee on reforming the House of Lords recommends that the House consist of two sections, one of 246 members selected by panels of members of the House of Commons distributed in geographical groups, and the other to consist of persons chosen by a joint standing committee of both Houses of Parliament. The term of the members is to be for twelve years, one-third retiring every four years, and their places being filled by election. The salaries are to be the same as those of members of the House of Commons. The second chamber will not have the power to amend or reject a financial bill passed by the House of Commons. The membership of the second section of the second chamber is fixed at 81, all being chosen in the first instance from the Peerage, but subsequently the number of Peers in this section shall be gradually reduced to thirty, and the remaining fifty-one seats thrown open to non-Peers. Clergymen of the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Scotland, and the Protestant Episcopal Church of Ireland are eligible, but the number of seats will be determined after the settlement of the Irish representation in the House of Commons. The committee agreed that the second chamber would not have equal powers with the House of Commons. It would have nothing to do with the making and unmaking of ministries. One of the chief purposes of the new plan is to prevent one set of opinions from having overwhelming predominance.

ALBERTA SCHOOL AGE.

The school age in Alberta has been raised from fourteen to fifteen years, in order to make it conform to the factory act, which does not permit a boy or girl to be employed under fifteen.