

Democracy in Action

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ing dice shaking and voted the alternative, "against the ordinance" in order to assist in preventing the very thing they actually helped by their ballots. The moral of this unfortunate miscarriage of public effort is to make the wording of the proposition submitted simple and direct so that no voter need make the mistake of voting against his convictions.

Direct Primary Law.

Probably the greatest achievement of the people through the Initiative was the adoption of the present direct primary law at an election held in the year 1908, after a machine-controlled council had refused to submit the amendments to the city charter providing for such direct primary law. This law is the most drastic and revolutionary enactment now in operation in any American Municipality and at the general city elections held in December 1909, the machine suffered total annihilation under its operation, losing every city office to the forces of good government. So much for the Initiative.

In 1907, the city council, having refused to pass an ordinance compelling the street railway companies to properly equip their cars with efficient fenders, although the mortality and accidents caused by the street cars of Los Angeles were far greater, proportionally, than any other city in the world. The people framed a fender ordinance, and went before the council with a petition sufficiently large to compel a special election. The council, seeing the people were determined to protect their lives and limbs, even if they had to go the expense of a special election to do so, grudgingly passed the desired ordinance and the cars were promptly equipped with fenders, and these fenders in the two years of their use have picked up two hundred people, practically unharmed who would have otherwise been maimed for life or killed outright. An average of two lives saved per week, seems quite worth while, but that worthy accomplishment was only secured, by reason of the fact, that the people themselves, irrespective of their so-called "representatives" possessed the power to enact the necessary legislation.

In 1908, the city council, in defiance of a decision of the Supreme Court of the State and against the advice of the city attorney, and over the protest of a great number of voters, sold for \$500 a street railway franchise worth several hundred thousand dollars. The people at once secured the necessary 7 per cent. Referendum petition to veto the action of the council and refer the matter to a decision of the voters at the next general elections, which was held in December 1909, and resulted in the overwhelming defeat of the proposed sale, the majority against it being more than 5,000 out of a total vote of 25,000. The cost of this action on the part of the people was exactly twenty dollars.

Brought Council to Time.

In 1908, the city council at the behest of the street railway corporations, granted a franchise to the agents of these companies which was known as the "River Bed Franchise." This franchise was exceedingly valuable, worth at granting at the least calculation a million dollars, as it controlled the only right of way for ingress or egress to the city for competing lines of railroad, thus assuring present corporations an absolute monopoly of transportation within the city for all time to come. The Franchise was granted without a debate and without notice to the public, in the hope of catching the people napping. Knowledge of its secret passage soon spread abroad and aroused the most intense excitement. Not only was a Referendum petition at once inaugurated, but the irate constituents of the recalcitrant council commenced the circulation of Recall petition for every member of that body. At once the council became alarmed and as swiftly as they had enacted the ordinance, they shamefacedly repealed it, and thus saved their political lives by the very narrowest of margins. Result, a saving to the city of at least a million dollars, and what was of vast more value and significance, was the lesson to the council that they were the servants and not the masters of the voters of the city.

In 1909, the city council passed an ordinance permitting the telephone companies to raise their rates to their patrons

in the city. At once the people invoked the Referendum, and at the general election in December, 1909, the ordinance was defeated by a large majority of the popular vote.

At the same general election in 1909, the people voted upon two Referendum propositions, involving the sale of certain city property, giving almost 10,000 majority in favor of the propositions submitted, on a total vote of about 28,000, but the propositions failed of carrying, because of a charter provision for a two-thirds majority to authorize the sale of real property owned by the city. This vote is of value, chiefly as showing the almost unanimous interests of the voters of the city in matters pertaining to the city's welfare. The highest vote cast at this election was for the Mayor, the total vote approximating 37,000, while the vote upon the Referendum matters totaled approximately 29,000.

In the month of September 1904, the people of Los Angeles exercised for the first time their right to recall one of their public servants. A deal was framed up on the city between five of the nine members of that body by which the city printing was awarded to a certain publication at a cost approximately \$25,000 greater than the lowest bid upon the contract; this was not only a direct violation of the city charter but the deal was palpably a bid for the political influence of the publication securing the contract, as two of the members of the council were then candidates for Mayor, one a candidate for district judge and the fourth a candidate for assemblyman. The award was therefore in the nature of a bribe and nothing less, though no doubt the participants simply considered it a "gentlemen's agreement," quite in accord with the previous spirit of that honorable body when disbursing the taxpayers' money, in consideration of future political rewards to be delivered under the old spoils system. The deal was too offensive, however, for the new spirit of civic decency upon which the council had not counted, and very promptly the people had decided to make an example of one or more of the recalcitrants.

The Recall Used.

Councilman Davenport of the Sixth Ward, who had voted for the offending grab, was selected as the most likely candidate for the Recall. Without difficulty the required signatures were secured to demand a special election. Davenport stood for re-election as a means of vindication; and as he had a perfect right to do under the Recall provision of the charter, but he went down to defeat by a majority of 2 to 1. Thus for the first time in the history of American municipal government, the people had exercised the right to discharge an unfaithful servant.

In January, 1909, it became noised about the city that the then city administration was in league with the institutions of vice and immorality, including the saloons, low-dives and immoral resorts. For a considerable length of time the city administration had been under suspicion of all right thinking citizens, but not only the bitterest opponents of the administration were prepared for the bomb which was unexpectedly exploded by a newspaper publication of the city in the early months of the year. After a painstaking and careful investigation, this paper openly charged that the city administration, under the leadership of Mayor Arthur C. Harper, was in secret league with the dens of vice, and it backed up its charge with indisputable evidence of the venality of the Mayor and several of his subordinates in the police department of the city. In addition to these evidences of graft upon the part of the administration, it had been increasingly evident for several months that the Mayor through his several appointments in the public service, notably on the Board of Public Works and on the Board of Aqueduct Commissioners was repaying political debts to the quasi-public corporations of the city.

Under these circumstances it was decided to invoke the Recall against the Mayor as the only means of saving the city's credit and redeeming the good name of the municipality. Within eight days after the first Recall petition was ready for circulation more than ten thousand voters had signed similar petitions. This was within a very few hundred votes

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