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INITIATIVE & REFERENDUM

A short explanation of an important Reform being Advocated in Oregon—Law-making By the People.

no. 1.

Published by request of the Joint Committee on Direct Legislation. W. S. O'Keefe, Sec'y. Milwaukie, Ore.

This is not in any sense a partisan question, nor the property of any party. It was proposed in Oregon and has been supported by a union of the State Farmers' Alliance, State Grange, Knights of Labor, Portland Federated Trades and Portland Central Labor Council. Money for the work has been supplied by these organizations and by republicans, democrats and people's party men individually.

In case of urgency, if enough petitioners can be obtained a special election may be held to enact or repeal a law, but there has never been good reason for this as to a law made by the people. In our own country the only excuse for special sessions has been to correct evil class legislation.

When all the citizens make the law, and the vote of one counts for as much as any other, class legislation must cease, because no class is strong enough to over rule all other classes at the ballot box. The mechanics and laborers on the farm, and in the city will have a power in law making that must be felt.

The tax payers instead of the tax-eaters will fix the amount of public expenses. Under the present system it is not so. When the appropriation bills come up all partisanship disappears. Republican and democrats are almost a unit for everything in sight, from pocket knives to branch asylums, and a populist draws mileage to go home via San Francisco. As tax-eaters they are against the tax payers. They have the power and we foot the bills.

Some men say that the people are too ignorant to vote wisely on the laws that may be submitted, but we have yet to hear any man speak of himself as one of that ignorant class.

The progress of the Swiss under the Initiative and Referendum is amazing. Their experience proves that "the wisdom of the whole people is greater than that of any part." Their greatest state, Zurich, has made all her laws and appropriations of public money since 1848, except that of a very small sum, by direct vote of all the people, and they boast that they have no beggars, no paupers, nor does any man own 1,000,000 worth of property in their state. The city of Zurich has a population of 92,000 and makes all its laws successfully by the Initiative and Referendum.

The magnificent highways are a example for the whole world, the postal facilities are unequalled and their freedom from financial panics and social disturbances is particularly noticeable. Tramps are unknown. Their president gets only \$2000 a year, very few other officials receive more than \$1200, while for local officers \$400 is a high salary. The low salaries and close watch over public expenditures destroys the great thirst for public office from which we suffer.

By the Referendum none of these bodies can make a law, raise their wages, or appropriate more than

very small sum for any purpose without an endorsement at the ballot box. We shall be saved from that minority rule of which the repeal of the Sherman silver law is an example. On the vote 193 congressmen voted for the repeal and 94 against it. Of the 12,000,000 votes cast when these men were elected the 193 received a trifle over 3,000,000, while the 9,000,000 were cast for the minority. This is what can be done under our present system.

The Initiative and Referendum is the only practical plan thus far made by which the majority does really govern. It is the only peaceable way to obtain an undisputable expression of the will of the people on any question.

This system is not wholly new in the United States as will be shown hereafter.

INITIATIVE & REFERENDUM

Showing that the System is in Vogue to a Limited extent in Nearly Ever State in the Union.

no 2

The Initiative, by which a small per cent of the voters are enabled to bring a proposed law to a vote of the people without the consent of the legislature, is not provided for by the laws of any state.

The Referendum, by which all laws proposed by the legislative body are approved or vetoed by the people at the ballot-box is applied to constitutional amendments in every state except Delaware.

Oregon's constitution provides that laws locating the state capital, county seats, and some other matters, may take effect or not upon the vote of the electors interested. The issuing of bonds by cities, counties and districts, locating the capitol and county seats, and other minor matters have been decided by the Referendum in Oregon. Its operation so far has been most satisfactory. But all the most important legislation, appropriations and salaries has been kept in the power of the legislative bodies or some special "commission."

The legislatures of many states have at times applied the Referendum or asked for an advisory vote on a proposition the politicians were afraid of. Such was the submission of the Chinese question to the voters of California in 1876. "Just to quiet the hoodlum element," but out of 160,000 votes only 800 favored the Chinese. Since then the only question on the coast has been as to the form of the law necessary to do the work. The last legislature of California referred nine different proposals to the people, and they were voted on at the last presidential election. Seven were approved and two were rejected, the vote ranging from 14 to 1 down to a majority of 5704. Over 200,000 votes were cast, and while 70,000 who voted for presidential electors did not vote on the laws, we must remember that no statement as to the effect of the law, and reasons for and against its enactment, was presented to enable the voters to make an intelligent decision upon their respective merits. Although the voice of the press was raised against some of the good laws and in favor of others that were questionable, the voters separated the good from the bad in a manner that should forever answer the silly objections we hear, "It's too complicated," "The masses are too ignorant," and "The people are not interested in such things."

TO BE CONTINUED.