

WEST MOST DEMOCRATIC OF GOVERNORS

(By Burton J. Hendrick in September McClure's.)

The new spirit that has come over the political life of Oregon in the last ten years has found its most appropriate personal expression in the present governor, Oswald West. Without the several "crank" ideas which have transformed Oregon into a young and militant democracy, a man of Mr. West's experience and standing could never have risen to the governorship. Like the Oregon democracy itself, Oswald West is young, courageous and energetic; he has just turned his 37th year, and has battled his way into the state capitol against the combined efforts of both of the old political machines. Fifteen years ago Governor West was driving a butcher wagon in Portland; ten years ago he was earning a modest living as paying teller in a Salem bank—only a stone's throw away from the building where he is now presiding as governor. In spite of his new dignity, Mr. West still looks this part. A tall, slender, boyish figure, dressed in a blue serge suit, with a sack suit, a straw hat, tan shoes and a red necktie, if Oswald West should suddenly leave the executive chamber and resume his old position in the brass cage of Ladd & Bush's bank, he would still seem to be perfectly in character.

"Os" West, Jeffersonian.

A product of the democratic movement, the governor has arranged all the details of his official life in accordance with the democratic spirit. Never, since Thomas Jefferson hitched his own horse before the capitol at Washington and Andrew Jackson permitted the rabble to ride roughshod over the White House grounds and to stand with hobbled shoes upon the delicate furniture of the blue room, has America produced so consummate a democrat. There are no flunkies, no gold-braided attendants, any where within hailing distance of the governor's room. Just before his inauguration last January the dashingly attired adjutant general, in accordance with custom, appeared before his excellency and announced that he was ready to escort him to the senate chamber. "Oh, go buy yourself a drink and come up," the youthful governor retorted, and went in, unaccompanied, to take his oath of office. In all his official relations, Governor West likewise makes a virtue of ignoring ceremony. He was the people's candidate, and he has become the people's governor. Reporters, farmers, workmen, walk into the presence unannounced, and sit down and discuss business

without even the formality of removing their hats. The governor walks through the streets of Salem with his hands in his pockets, nodding right and left to nearly everybody he meets. "Hello, Jim," "How are you, Billy?" "How's the good wife, Joe?"—he knows them all by their first name, and has an intimate acquaintance with their family history. Few people address Mr. West as "Governor"; everywhere they call him as "Os" or "Ossie." In his domestic life, also, Mr. West is one of the common people. He lives in a six room cottage, a neat, plainly furnished house such as any prosperous mechanic might have. Here there are no inauguration balls, no state dinners, only the every-day life of the modest citizen. The governor keeps no servants; his wife, an interesting and intelligent young woman, does "her own work."

It is the new political order in Oregon that is responsible for Oswald West. He is the outcome of the initiative, and referendum, the recall, the direct primary, the corrupt practices act, and the other popular measures. With a few other leaders, he represents the struggle that has been going on for eight years between the old political machines and the rank and file; and his election last fall signalled the culminating triumph of the popular cause. With his accession to the governorship the old political machine and the old political leaders passed into history.

When the initiative and referendum was adopted in 1902 the republican machine absolutely controlled the state. In 1901 it sent John H. Mitchell to the United States senate for the fourth time, and in 1903 it elected as Mitchell's colleague Charles W. Fulton, a man distinguished for nothing except expert political manipulation. It controlled the governorship, with all its attendant power, and the mayoralty of Portland. On every hand, indeed, the republican organization held Oregon in its grasp. The real capital of the state was the city of Portland. Here were located the public-utility and franchise corporations, the transcontinental railroads, the "first families," which for years had usurped the functions of the legislature. The kind of government with which the republican machine was identified was concretely illustrated in the municipal administration of Portland. Even on the Pacific coast, Portland enjoyed a peculiar fame as a wide open town. The machine, by a regular system of monthly fines, had practically licensed gambling and prosti-

tution, and under this system of official encouragement the city had become a popular headquarters for all the vicious characters in the Pacific northwest.

Elections of United States Senators—Great Sporting Events.

As is always the case, however, the keystone of republican politics was the United States senatorship. The reformers believed that if they could take away from the old corrupt leaders this, the richest prize of all, the way to a general political cleanup would be comparatively clear. For 40 years the fiercest political battles in Oregon had always raged over this commanding office. The actual scenes attending the elections had more in common with a horse race or a cock fight than a dignified legislative proceeding. The people of Oregon have always loved excitement and adventure. For years the choice of a United States senator had been the most popular sporting event in a great poker playing state. The richest and most powerful men in the state had always intrigued and plotted and sold themselves for this political prize. In "senatorial years" the legislature virtually abdicated its legislative functions. Those prolonged "hold-ups" which have recently so scandalized public opinion in New York, Illinois and other states were the regular program. The contest was always protracted through the 40 days' session; law-making practically ceased; and deals, bribery, broken pledges, debauchery and riot were the commonplaces of the occasion. Almost no election took place until the closing hours of the closing day of each session—the several factions tore at one another's throats until, at the last moment, some hastily patched up truce finally resulted in a choice. There was no mystery concerning the basis of these agreements. The office is put up at bargain and sale," said the Salem Capital Journal, "raffled off to the highest bidder, the greatest corruptionist. This has been the rule, not the exception. Nine times out of ten, money and patronage have carried the day."

It was the purpose of the new direct primary law to end abuses of this kind. That law abolished the old political conventions—indeed, made these gatherings absolutely illegal. It also took the election of United States senators out of the hands of the legislature and placed it in the hands of the people. The voters were to have precisely the same direct power over the choice of United States senators that they have always had over the election of



Oswald West

governors and congressmen. They were to do it in essentially the same way. Each political party was to nominate, at its party primary, its candidate for the United States. At the general election these nominations were to go upon the regular ballot, and from them the voters were to make their choice.

Evidently the self-appointed assembly (held in 1910) regarded itself as the republican party. But there were forces at work which it little comprehended. The assembly adjourned joyously, organized itself into a parade, and moved with red fire and brass bands noisily down the main streets of Portland. One of the most interested spectators was a tall, boyish figure, leaning in the darkness against a telegraph pole. This was Oswald West. Mr. West had had some experience in public life. He had been brought up in Salem, the

state capital, and, as already noted, had for several years acted as a teller in the leading Salem bank. Here Mr. West had had unusual opportunities for the study of practical politics. Many times as an official duty he had had to pay out large rolls in greenbacks to men whom he recognized as legislative lobbyists. Afterward members of the legislature would come into his bank and deposit to their credit these same greenbacks. Often these same legislators would not hesitate to tell the paying teller how they had obtained them. West had afterward moved to Astoria, taken a part in politics, and attracted the favorable attention of Governor Chamberlain, who selected him to clean up the state land office, which for many years had been a scandal. West did the work so expeditiously and acceptably that Chamberlain promoted him to a railroad

commissionership. A remarkable improvement in the transportation facilities of Oregon followed; new tracks were laid, new stations built, and important readjustments in rates were made. By the fall of 1910, therefore, Oswald West was generally looked upon as a young man with an important political future. He himself thought that perhaps some time, many years hence, he might aspire to the governorship; that an opportunity might be immediately forthcoming, however, had hardly occurred to him.

And yet, as he watched this noisy crowd of old political ringsters marching triumphantly through the streets of Portland, already well launched in their attempts to regain their old power and undo the work of eight years, the idea occurred to West. Why not now? Probably no similarly favorable opportunity would ever again present itself. All that night West could not sleep, for he was busy formulating his plans. The next morning he walked up to the secretary of state clerk's office in Salem, and filed his intention of becoming a candidate for the democratic nomination.

Here certainly was a phenomenon peculiar to Oregon. A young man under forty, without money or influential friends, with no political machine, a democrat in an overwhelmingly republican state, was quietly determining to win for himself the office of governor.

The fact that West was widely known in the rural sections helped him greatly. For many years he had been a sheepherder and a cattle driver, and had penetrated every section of the state. As a land agent and railroad commissioner he had likewise traveled all over Oregon, everywhere making friends.

A Hand-Shaking Campaign

West had little difficulty in winning at the primaries, for no candidate of the slightest strength opposed him. At the republican primaries, Bowerman, the assembly's "recommendation," was also successful. The issues were now sharply drawn. West adopted as his platform the "Oregon system," while Bowerman was clearly in the field to destroy all the reform measures. Both candidates made an energetic personal canvass, though their methods differed considerably.

When the time came for balloting, nearly every voter in Oregon had at least a hand-shaking acquaintance with "Os" West. But there was far more to the campaign than this. The state was aroused as it never had

been before. In the minds of the Oregon farmer and workingman, the political salvation of Oregon depended on the result of this election. In order to save the initiative and referendum, the direct primary, the recall, the corrupt practices act and "Statement No. 1," the republican voters, under the leadership of Jonathan Bourne, who came out strongly for the democratic candidate, broke over all party lines, sent back once more into retirement all the old bosses, big and little, and elected Oswald West governor. A few weeks before the election was held Harvey W. Scott died, and with his death the old regime in Oregon came to an end.

These several instances show how the Oregon democracy, working under the direct primary, now selects its candidates for public office. It chooses all its elective officials in this way—not only its United States senators and its governor, but its congressmen, its legislators, its judges, its mayors, and its officials of local administration. One result is sufficiently clear: the people have absolutely destroyed the old political machine. To what extent, however, has the popular method improved the character and efficiency of Oregon's public men? On this point there is no occasion for unbounded enthusiasm. Political conditions in Oregon are still far from ideal. The great disappointment of the Oregon experiment has been its failure to develop any real, aggressive, disinterested political leadership. Any one who believes that the direct primary, in itself, will bring out the best men as candidates for public office, will experience a rude shock when he studies the situation in Oregon. Oregon's two congressmen are certainly unworthy representatives of this energetic and intelligent state. The men elected to the legislature last fall, all candidates under the direct primary, are likewise a rather inferior lot. Oswald West, as governor, has so far made a good record, but several of his appointments show that he is by no means averse to using the public offices to reward those who have assisted in his election. Whatever faults we may find in Oregon's public men, however, the fact remains that, for the most part, they are of a higher caliber than any the state has ever had before. Ignorant, undisciplined and narrow-minded as in many instances they may be, they are still, with perhaps a very few exceptions, honest men. In many ways, indeed, Oregon is still politically in

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