

Voters as Legislators

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On one day every other year the people of Oregon are their own legislators. On that day they can go to the polls and by their "Yes" or "No" enact or reject statute laws and constitutional amendments as they may see fit without any dependence upon political parties, politicians, or members of legislatures whatsoever.

This last was the fourth general election in which they have taken up the law making business on their own account and it proved to be the most severe test to which their legislative capacity has yet been put. Thirty-two measures were on the ballot to be disposed of. Some were proposed by the people themselves through "initiative" petitions. Some were referred by the legislative assembly. One was an enactment of the legislature which the people held up and decided through the "referendum."

The following data just received from the corrected report of the secretary of state will show what disposition the voters of Oregon made of the measures.

Six questions were referred to the people by the legislature. Of these, an act to build a branch insane asylum in eastern Oregon was approved—50,134 to 41,504; an act proposing a new constitutional convention was rejected—23,143 to 59,974; an act to provide separate districts for members of the legislature was defeated, 34,000 to 54,252; an amendment repealing the uniform rate taxation system was rejected—37,619 to 40,172; an amendment, urged by the business men, authorizing the state to own and build railroads was defeated—32,844 to 46,070; an amendment paving the way for the "classified property" tax system was defeated—31,629 to 41,692.

Of the initiative measures, the voters rejected state wide prohibition by a vote of 42,540 to 61,221 and a bill carrying the amendment into effect by 42,651 as against 63,564. They accepted the liquor men's pledge for strict regulation and adopted a municipal home rule bill—by a narrow margin—53,321 to 50,779. An amendment for county local option in matters of taxation was adopted—44,171 to 42,127. An employer's liability bill passed—56,258 to 33,943, and a bill to create an employer's liability commission "to investigate the question and report," was rejected—32,224 to 51,719, and a long contest ended. The struggle of the three state normal schools over appropriations, which has long disgraced the state and interfered with the work of every legislative session for a generation was settled by the people taxing themselves for the support of the best school and turning down the other two. Nine bills having to do with new county divisions were all rejected by the tremendous average majority of 43,357. The voters took the ground that local questions had no business in state elections. But the proposals would have not been made had the legislature properly attended to this business, as it should have done. Woman's suffrage was again rejected—35,270 to 59,065. A private fishing monopoly on Rogue river, a public water, was adopted—49,712 to 33,397. Good roads found favor; the vote was 51,275 to 32,906. A unique bill extending the primary system to delegates from the political parties to national presidential nominating conventions was enacted—43,353 to 41,624. Proportional representation was defeated—37,031 to 44,366. A proposal for a state official gazette, to be sent free to the voters bi-monthly, containing news and reports of what the state and county officials were doing, was rejected—29,955 to 52,538. An amendment providing that a three-fourths vote in a jury verdict on civil cases should obtain; that judges of the higher courts are not to reverse or send back for retrial cases when it shall be clear that substantial justice has been reached by the lower courts, was adopted by a vote of 44,538 as against 39,399. This important judicial reform is calculated to expedite justice, prevent jury tampering, and end the power of wealthy litigants to keep cases in courts till poorer opponents are worn out.

But one act of the legislature was held up by the referendum; a bill increasing the salary of a judge, which was rejected—13,161 to 71,503.

The total vote cast in the election for the office of governor was 117,690. Comparing this vote with those cast on the respective measures we find that a general average of 75 per cent

of the electors "legislated" on the proposed laws and constitutional amendments which were of a statewide nature. The average on the nine county division bills was 66 per cent. There is a great diversity in the per cent of votes cast on different problems. On the prohibition bill it stood at 90 per cent, which was the highest. On one it fell to 62, the lowest. This is about the average shown in previous elections. That is, seven or eight men out of every ten exercise their rights to determine the legislation which shall govern them. This disposes of the question everywhere raised in connection with the problem of direct legislation as to whether the masses of the people will interest themselves in legislation even if given a chance.

It is also noteworthy that no conflicting bills were enacted, although several proposals, in direct opposition, were presented. An interesting matter of study also is the range of majorities for or against the different propositions which indicates discrimination.

That the mass mind is conservative and will not blindly embrace every proposition advanced is shown by the enactment of only nine of the thirty-two measures. The voters will not approve of things they do not understand, however excellent they may be in themselves. Very generally the voters mark "No" against every measure they do not fully comprehend. A large number have told me that this was their practice. On the other hand, when the public mind has once formed on any issue, the needed legislation cannot be long delayed by any amount of obstruction from whatever source.

One need not dwell long in Oregon to discover that the rank and file of the citizenship keenly enjoy this direct exercise of their sovereignty. It has proven a great educator and infused them with a courage and interest in public affairs. They have power; they can get things done. Effort is worth while.

The old political machines are in a very bad way. They can no longer deliver the goods and the old era of corruption in politics is fast passing away. All attempts on the part of the politicians to overthrow the initiative and referendum have failed. The people are satisfied with the system and are alert. The overwhelming rejection of the proposal for a new constitutional convention is direct evidence of this. It was openly charged by the people that the movement was a scheme on the part of the corporations and bosses to frame a new constitution, from which the initiative and all other advanced methods adopted by the people thereby, should be carefully "cut out." The charge was not successfully denied, nor could it well be since the promoters of the plan were noted "anti-referendum" men. And so we may take the majority of 36,831, against the proposition—a two and a half to one vote—as a test of what the people of Oregon think of the initiative and referendum after eight years of practical experience with its workings.

SHIP SUBSIDY IN THE SENATE

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No sooner had the result on the subsidy bill been announced than another sharp conflict was precipitated. Senators Nelson and Borah were both on their feet, but the former first obtained recognition. "I move that the senate take up the bill authorizing the leasing of coal lands in Alaska," he said.

"Is that motion subject to amendment?" asked Mr. Borah.

The result of the adoption of Mr. Nelson's motion would have been to give the Alaska bill the place of unfinished business on the calendar, which had been vacated by the subsidy bill, and Mr. Borah had counted on getting that point of vantage for the resolution providing for the election of senators by direct vote of the people. Evidently he was somewhat discomfited by Mr. Nelson's move.

"The motion is not amendable," ruled the chair.

This was an awkward predicament, and in an instant the senate was thrown into confusion. The situation was relieved by a motion to adjourn, offered by Senator Hale.

Mr. Borah was not disposed to quit and he and many of his followers voted against adjournment.

"The vote is thirty-seven to thirty-seven, a tie," again said the vice president, and for the third time within thirty minutes he cut the gordian knot by casting his vote in the affirmative.

As a result the senate adjourned after an exciting day and in the full consciousness that the conflict over the resolution for the direct election of senators had only been postponed.

Practical Tariff Talks

One of the familiar methods of juggling with the tariff schedules is to change the rates from one basis to another, to make them ad valorem where they have been specific and specific where they have been ad valorem, but the late congress improved upon that plan by jumbling them in some schedules, so that the new rates are both ad valorem and specific. This is useful in obscuring the vision of the investigator, who must be possessed of more than ordinary mathematical ability to determine whether the new rate is an increase or a decrease. This device was employed in the rearrangement of the tariff on cotton cloths, the change being excused on the ground that the appraisers had through various interpretations of the Dingley law, actually reduced many of the rates therein. The complaint was registered by the manufacturers, through Mr. Aldrich, and the senate, which is or was Mr. Aldrich, forthwith proceeded to fix the rates as they desired. Afterwards he insisted that it was a mere equalizing of the rates and that no raise was really made, all things considered. This is not true.

Cotton cloths have been in vogue for many years, but their popularity has been greatly enhanced through the necessity of the common people turning to this class of goods because the price of woolen cloths has been mounting upward. The new tariff represents the efforts of the cotton manufacturers to get in on the division of good things on a basis similar to those enjoyed by the woolen manufacturers. Here are some examples taken at random from the schedules, which shows what was accomplished in the interest of these men, the fact that a corresponding raise has not been made in prices being due to the fact that business conditions have not been as good as anticipated. The opportunity is there, and it is safe to say that it will be taken advantage of when possible.

Take the tariff on white goods, a staple which forms a large part of the purchases of women for personal wear. Under the Dingley tariff this bore a tax of 35 per cent upon value, the square yard being taken as the basis. The wholesale price of this at the time the law was enacted was 17.28 cents per square yard. The old tariff, therefore, was 6.05 cents per square yard. The new rate provides that on all cotton white goods above 16 cents and not exceeding 20 cents, 8 cents a square yard. If mercerized, which is often the case, another cent is added. This makes a total addition of nearly 3 cents a square yard, or a 48 per cent increase. Plain cotton cloths are increased, on the lower values, over 92 per cent, and on the higher priced goods, the increase is as high as 125 per cent. If mercerized an arbitrary figure of 1 cent a yard is imposed in addition, although Senator Dolliver and Senator LaFollette effectively proved that the actual and entire cost of mercerization ranges from one-eighth to one cent a square yard.

On the plainest sort of cotton cloth, the colored weaves worn by persons of the humblest means, the increase is 52 per cent. The tariff under the Dingley bill on the cheapest kind averaged 5.29 cents a square yard. The new rate is 7 cents a square yard, or if mercerized, 8 cents. Cotton cloth dyed in plain colors, carried an ad valorem rate of 40 per cent. Under the specific rate of the new law this rate is increased to 67 per cent of the value on the lower priced goods. Colored sateen, commonly used for women's skirts and waists and for linings, is increased, under the new arrangement of duties, to nearly 50 per cent. The beauty of the specific system, as viewed from the standpoint of the manufacturer is that the rate increases as the market price advances.

Reduced to the simplest terms, the change in cotton cloth schedules in the Payne-Aldrich tariff law, places in the hands of the manufacturers the power to charge from 3 to 5 cents a yard more for these products, and as the increase in rates was placed there for the specific purpose of making it possible for prices to be raised, the relation of cause to effect is remarkably clear.

C. Q. D.