

Judson Harmon Thinks the People are Not Capable of Self-Government

The following are extracts from the news columns of the Columbus (Ohio) Citizen, issue of February 8:

Preaching conservatism, attacking the initiative and referendum as a dangerous experiment, and approving things as they are with the exception of a plea for liquor license, Governor Harmon addressed the constitutional delegates at 11.30 Thursday morning, speaking for half an hour.

His attack on the initiative and referendum was received in dead silence and only the most perfunctory applause greeted the close of his speech, most progressive delegates, sitting in perfect silence.

At its conclusion the governor was surrounded by a small group of ultra-reactionary delegates, who shook his hand. The body of delegates remained in their seats and indulged in moody or angry comments to each other.

The governor was introduced by President Herbert Bigelow immediately following a vote for the noon recess of the convention. The introduction was brief and formal, and the governor immediately launched into the reading of his manuscript. The galleries and outer area of the convention hall were filled with a curious crowd of onlookers, chiefly politicians, who had heard that the governor would declare himself in a way to influence his political future profoundly.

The only applause greeted his reference to the need of good roads and to the need for a strong and independent judiciary. In both cases the applause was light, in the latter case coming largely from lawyers and ex-judges, who looked upon the allusion as a blow at the judicial recall.

On the question of the initiative and referendum, the full text of the governor's remarks were as follows:

"I am not convinced that the initiative and referendum, applied generally to subjects of legislation, would be an improvement on our system of government by representatives, which, while it has short-comings like all human institutions, I do not believe has proved a failure.

"These shortcomings are doubtless the chief cause of the continued advocacy of direct legislation, and if it could be confined to their correction or prevention there would be less ground for doubt about the desirability of it. But it seems to be conceded that such limitation is not practicable.

"The measure is confessedly an experiment and as several states have recently undertaken it, my attitude is that of 'the man from Missouri.' I have always found it wiser to profit by the experience of others, in matters of doubt, when I could, rather than by my own.

"And no one can yet claim that this new departure in government has yet passed the experimental stage in other states, while, even if it had, none of them have so large or so diversified a population as Ohio, or such a great variety of interests.

"A somewhat wide experience, as well as observation, has taught me that government, in all its branches, is a complicated and difficult business which requires careful study and close attention, besides the consideration of many things in the doing of each one. And my doubt is whether these essentials can or would be supplied by a large, busy and widely separated body of electors acting directly in matters of general legislation.

"It is a safe rule to judge others by one's self, and I gravely question whether, as a private citizen immersed in business and personal affairs, I should be able, however willing, to devote to a proposed measure, unless it were a very simple one involving no details, the study of its own provisions and of their effect on other laws or subjects, which is required to qualify one to take part in the important work of legislating for a great commonwealth. My action would lack the sanction of an oath to perform my duty to the best of my ability. I am certain I would not and could not give it the care and attention I now give to my part in the making of our laws. And I do not see how merely multiplying the number of private citizens in the like

situation, without opportunity for conference or discussion with each other, could better the result.

"I believe the work of legislation can be properly done only by bodies small enough for each member to get the advantage of conference, debate and deliberation, with the concurrence of both required and absolute rules to prevent hasty action by either, as well as final approval by another and independent actor in the proceedings. This is one of the main features which made our government 'a broad and liberal democracy,' but 'compatible with ingrained respect for parliamentary methods and constitutional checks,' as has been well described:

"Of course, if these agencies all prove incapable or corrupt, if for any reason they betray the confidence reposed in them by the people and fall under the control of special interests which seek advantages contrary to common right and injurious to the public, then the plan will miscarry. And this seems to have happened with alarming frequency in some of the states. But whatever the case may be or may have been elsewhere, Ohio has furnished no such example, even before the executive was given a voice in the making of her laws.

"I do not mean that we have had no bad legislation and no unworthy representatives; but these have been too rare to discredit the magnificent history of more than a hundred years. Our citizens have never enforced higher standards in the public service than they are doing now. So some other reason must be found to justify a change in our system which would throw off the checks and precautions against hasty and unwise legislation, which have been so carefully provided and make the stump the seat of government.

"However, I believe that, in actual practice, this change would not fully justify either the fears of its opponents or the hopes of its advocates. If it will work well anywhere it ought to do so in our municipalities. So, to add to discussion of it, the argument of a test by our own citizens, I approved a bill at the last session to authorize it to them, though I am told it has not been resorted to anywhere.

"For myself, I think we should await the result of a fair trial in our cities and villages before making statewide the operation of so radical a change in our methods. But if the convention should decide to submit the question to the people, as I understand many members wish to do, it should be done separately. The provision should be guarded so as to prevent its being lightly invoked. The very heavy expense of special elections should be avoided, except in cases of unusually widespread and general demand. And, in view of its experimental character, resubmission to the people should be provided for at the end of a reasonable period, without the formalities and delay generally required for amendments of the constitution."

OHIO DEMOCRATS INDIGNANT

From Columbus (Ohio) Citizen: Scathing criticism by members of the constitutional convention, was hurled at Governor Harmon Thursday after he had appeared before the convention and had taken a position against a state-wide initiative and referendum.

Delegates declared that the governor, in opposing the initiative and referendum, had shown himself in his true colors.

"He is an ultra reactionary," "he is making a bid for Wall street support," "he is out of touch with the needs and demands of the people," are some of the comments made by members at the conclusion of his address.

To a big majority of the delegates, the governor's opposition to the initiative and referendum came like a bolt out of a clear sky, largely because he was elected in 1910 on a platform that said: "We favor the principle of the initiative and referendum."

DELEGATES PLEDGED

A majority of the convention that Thursday listened to Governor Harmon voice his opposition to the I. and R. are pledged in writing to put an I. and R. plank in the new constitution that will be workable. Fully 25 other delegates are I. and R. advocates and were elected as such. Hardly one-fourth of the convention were in agreement with the governor

in his views and they were those who were elected as out and out reactionaries.

DISAGREE WITH HARMON

Here are some of the comments made by members of the convention on Governor Harmon's attack on the initiative and referendum:

Delegate Robert Crosser, democrat, Cuyahoga, chairman committee on initiative and referendum: "Governor Harmon's attitude on the initiative and referendum is no surprise to me. His attitude shows Governor Harmon to be a reactionary of the extreme type. He is so far out of sympathy with the common people that I sincerely believe it would be a great public calamity to elect him president of the United States."

President Herbert S. Bigelow, democrat, Hamilton county: "I am, of course, aware of the indignant protests that have been provoked by Governor Harmon's address. But none has charged him with insincerity, and I, for one, admire his courage in expressing views which he must know are considered ultra reactionary and even defiant of the progressive spirit of the times."

Delegate J. W. Harbarger, republican, Franklin county: "I've always felt that Harmon never had the interests of the masses at heart. He's always been a corporation man and a reactionary. His opposition to the I. and R., in my mind, totally unfits him for the presidency. It will be a dark day for this republic if he's elected president, because then plutocracy, in its worst form, would continue to rule this country."

Delegate E. A. Peters, democrat, Franklin: "I differ with the governor both in his views on the I. and R. and on the liquor question. I will not attempt to criticize him, for he is entitled to his own opinion."

Delegate G. W. Knight, republican, Franklin county: "I admire the governor's courage in attacking the I. and R., but I differ with him materially. He seems to consider it as a substitution for representative government, rather than a corrective of it."

Delegate J. C. Solether, republican, Wood county: "Governor Harmon does not reflect the sentiment of the voters of my county. He is clearly a reactionary."

David Pearce, democrat, Butler county: "It's no more than I expected. I have always felt that the governor was not closely identified with the people."

Delegate Alexander Dunn, republican, Clermont: "In trying to deny the people the initiative and referendum and in upholding the most harmful of all the trusts, and in advocating licensing one of the greatest curses of the human race, Governor Harmon proves himself an enemy of the common people."

Delegate Otto M. Harter, democrat, Huron county: "I can not regard Harmon as a progressive, and I will not vote for him for president if he is nominated."

Delegate Percy Tetlow, republican, Columbiana county: "Governor Harmon's attack on the initiative and referendum is extremely reactionary and places him in opposition to progress as advocated by the masses of the people."

Delegate Illion E. Moore, socialist, Muskingum county: "I've always considered Harmon as an ultra reactionary and his speech against the initiative and referendum here today only strengthens that belief."

Delegate Stanley Shaffer, democrat, Butler county: "Governor Harmon has made it plain that he is not in sympathy with popular government. Apparently, he does not even understand the theory of it."

Delegate Harry Thomas, socialist, Cuyahoga county: "The speech shows that Governor Harmon is living in the dark ages. The I. and R. is no experiment, but the tried and proven safeguard of the people against tyranny."

Delegate John Ulmer, republican, Lucas county: "Governor Harmon's opposition to the I. and R. looks like a bid to Wall street to get behind his presidential candidacy."

Delegate Harvey Watson, democrat, Guernsey county: "Governor Harmon, as all are aware, is but giving tongue to the vested interests that are diametrically opposed to the right of the people to rule. He is wholly out of touch with the heart throbs of humanity. He knows no God but ambition, no creator but J. Pierpont Morgan."

Delegate Frank G. Hursh, democrat, Hardin county: "The time has come when the people, at every opportunity presented, are declaring themselves for the I. and R. and the attitude of Governor Harmon, in placing himself in opposition to this popular measure, seems to confirm the charge that he is reactionary in principle."

Delegate John D. Fackler, republican, Cuya-