

### A Popular Plan

A reader of *The Commoner* writes: "Please give me some information concerning the history of the effort to bring about the popular election of senators; also some argument in support of the plan."

The house of representatives in both the Fifty-second and Fifty-third congresses adopted resolutions submitting the necessary constitutional amendment, but each time the senate defeated action. A similar resolution was passed by the house in the Fifty-sixth congress. In 1868 President Johnson first in a special and later in an annual message, urged the submission of an amendment placing the election of United States senators in the hands of the people at large, and from that day to this there has been a constant growth of sentiment in favor of this reform. Whenever the matter has been acted upon by the people an overwhelming majority has been recorded in favor of the proposition. The affirmative arguments may be summed up as follows:

First. The people have a right to speak through senators of their own selection.

Second. Corruption and corporate influence are bringing scandal and disgrace upon senatorial elections and impeaching the integrity of a legislative body which ought to stand above suspicion.

Third. Senatorial elections, as conducted at present, interfere with the legitimate work of state legislatures.

Whatever causes may have led to the adoption of the existing method of selecting senators, experience has not only shown that the people can be trusted with the direct choice of their public servants, but it has also demonstrated that the nearer the government is brought to the voter the better it is for both the government and the people. There is more virtue in the masses than ever finds expression through their representatives, because representatives are influenced, to a greater or less extent, by their personal interests.

It is true that even with popular elections the nominations would be made by conventions, but the fact that the voters would afterwards sit in judgment upon the work of the delegates would be a constant restraint.

The last few years have furnished so many instances of corporate influence or corruption operating in the election of senators that no elaboration of the second argument is necessary. It has become apparent to the most casual observer that candidates backed by railroads and other large corporations have an enormous advantage over men who must rely upon their personal popularity or worth.

While in some instances money has been used to purchase votes outright, the method more frequently employed is to place the legislators under obligation to a particular candidate by pecuniary aid furnished during the campaign. Organized capital is also able to bring pressure to bear upon legislators by the bestowal of favors.

But aside from the arguments which affect the character of the men selected, the best interests of the state require that the legislators shall be relieved of the duty of electing senators, because legislative candidates can not now be voted for according to their fitness for legislative work. As one-third of the United States senators are elected every two years, two legislative sessions (where they are biennial) out of every three are called upon to settle a senatorial controversy and this controversy as a rule, overshadows all other matters. When the contest is prolonged, the regular business is interrupted by daily balloting and attention is diverted from state affairs.

Some object to the proposed change on the ground that the constitution should not be disturbed, but this is always the argument of those

who are satisfied with things as they are. The best friends of the constitution are those who desire to strengthen it in the affections of the people by making it conform to the wishes of the people.

There is no force in the objection urged by some that a senator should be elected by a legislature because he represents the state. This draws a distinction between the state and the people of the state. Surely the choice of a majority of the people would be more truly a representative of the state than the choice of the minority.

It will be a great victory for popular government when the legislatures are given into the custody of the voters where it rightfully belongs.

### Self-Government

The Commoner has heretofore referred to an epigram coined by a clergyman in the course of a sermon, viz.: "Self-government is preferable to good government." The phrase was used in defending the wisdom of the plan whereby man was made a free moral agent and left to choose between good and evil, rather than created as a perfect being or placed in an environment which made sin impossible. There is no doubt that a Creator capable of making a world could have made man perfect and could have relieved him of all temptation, but instead of that He placed man in a world full of temptation and made him responsible for his conduct. Instead of being placed under the arbitrary power of some one who would care for and protect him, he was left to govern himself and made to suffer if he failed to govern himself well. We do not find fault with this arrangement of Providence nor do we question the wisdom of the plan.

There is a very evident apology between the self-government of the individual and the doctrine of self-government in nations. As the individual has a right to make mistakes, the penalty being suffering, so people who govern themselves have a right to make mistakes, paying the penalty for lack of wisdom. In no other way can people be taught to take an active and intelligent interest in public affairs, and only by taking an interest in public affairs can they perfect themselves in the art of self-government. The people of the United States govern themselves and yet it is evident that they make frequent mistakes. The republicans asserted in 1896 that the people would make a mistake if they elected the ticket nominated by the Chicago convention, and they further insisted that a terrible punishment would follow the mistake. The democrats, on the other hand, asserted that the people would make a mistake if they elected the republican ticket. They assert now that the people are suffering from the mistake. The reign of trusts is a direct consequence of the republican victory of 1896 and so is the imperialistic policy which has plunged this nation into enormous expenditure and led it to appropriate forty times as much for the army and navy as it expends on the department of agriculture.

The republicans are constantly asserting that the election of a democratic president in 1892 brought hard times and filled the country with soup houses. A majority of democrats are willing to admit that the election resulted in mistakes but they insist that the mistakes of the democrats were made in the adoption of republican policies rather than in the carrying out of democratic theories of government. But these instances are cited only to show that we recognize the liability of people to make mistakes, even when so far advanced in civilization as the American people are. Who would be willing to accept foreign domination even if assured that such alien government would be absolutely free from error?

Why not apply to the Filipinos the same logic that we apply to ourselves? Why not recognize

that they have a right to self-government even if they are liable to make mistakes? Why not recognize that the punishment which comes from those mistakes is in itself an educating influence? Why not recognize that self-government with all its imperfections will be better for the Filipinos than any outside government which could be forced upon them against their will?

Not only is "self-government preferable to good government," but among mortals with their selfishness and short-sightedness, self-government is likely to be better than any irresponsible government, for no nation can be selfish enough to desire colonies and yet unselfish enough to govern them wisely.

### Lafayette's Epitaph

Nearly sixty years ago, S. S. Prentiss, the famous southern orator, delivered an address on Lafayette. After pointing out the great service which Lafayette had rendered to the American colonies, Mr. Prentiss said: "The lisping infant will learn to speak his venerated name; the youth of every country will be taught to look upon his career and to follow in his footsteps. When hereafter a gallant people are fighting for freedom against the oppressor, and their cause begins to wane before the mercenary bands of tyranny, then will the name of Lafayette become the watchword that will strike terror on the tyrant's ear, and nerve with redoubled vigor the freeman's arm. At that name many a heart, before unmoved, will wake in the glorious cause, and many a sword rusting ingloriously in its scabbard will leap forth to battle. Lafayette needs no mausoleum. His fame is mingled with the nation's history; his epitaph is engraved upon the hearts of men."

Is there not some reason for fear that Lafayette's epitaph has become erased from the hearts of men in this country? When we are repudiating the principles which Lafayette helped our forefathers to establish when we withheld from Kruger's men that sympathy which our forefathers so gladly accepted from Frenchmen, when we have come to sneer at the declaration of independence as a bit of "rhetorical generalization," is there any wonder that Lafayette's epitaph as described by Prentiss, has become somewhat dim? It is true, however, as it was true when Prentiss said it, that the name of Lafayette as well as the name of Washington and of others of his time serves as an inspiration to people fighting for freedom against the oppressor. It can not be doubted that the names and the deeds of these men served as an inspiration to the South Africans as well as to other people fighting for liberty in other climes. Is it not somewhat humiliating to be brought to a realization of the fact that while the deeds of our forefathers serve as an inspiration to men who aspire to liberty, our own actions not only fail to give any encouragement to these people but on the contrary, have been a hindrance to those who are entitled to our sympathy?

### In Jackson's Time

If one would refresh himself as to the incidents of Jackson's service in the white house, he would be reminded that while there may be difference in degree between the wicked schemes of the present time and Jackson's day, there is marked similarity in the methods employed in both instances in the effort to fasten the shackles upon the people.

In his address to the cabinet, September 18, 1833, Jackson described some of the methods adopted by the representatives of the bank in order to bring public sentiment to its side or at least to control the majority of votes in the elec-