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WILLIAM J. BRYAN, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR

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The American Constitution

January 15, 1913.—Mr. Boris Shatzky, Pushinskaja No. 19, St. Petersburg, Russia. My Dear Sir: Your favor at hand. I regret exceedingly that I was not able to meet you while in this country, especially since I fear, from your letter, that you have returned to Russia with an erroneous opinion of our constitutional system, as compared with that of Great Britain.

It is true that the authors of the American constitution hedged about the exercise of popular authority with restrictions, some of which are now recognized as unnecessary, and we must admit, too, that written constitutions prolong the period required for the making of changes in laws and customs. But I believe that the greater deliberation compelled by a constitution is an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, and that arguments based upon such delays as the constitution invites are outweighed by other benefits.

Experience has justified the wisdom of the framers of our constitution in separating the executive, legislative and judicial departments of the government, and in establishing a system of checks and balances which compels co-operation between a large number of persons. Those who prepared the constitution, while zealous advocates of popular government, were anxious to protect the people against ambitious individuals. The danger from ambition still exists, but as there is now a larger confidence in the intelligence and capacity of the people, we are gradually changing such provisions of the constitution as unnecessarily restrain popular action.

For instance, there is before the states for ratification, a constitutional amendment, recently submitted, providing for the popular election of senators. This will doubtless become a part of the constitution as soon as the states can act upon it.

A movement is also on foot to make the constitution more easily amendable, and I have no doubt that this will succeed, although it may be several years before the reform is accomplished. At present, an amendment to the constitution must be submitted by a TWO-THIRDS vote of both houses, and then ratified by a THREE-FOURTHS of the states. There is no good reason why an amendment should not be submitted by a MAJORITY vote of both houses; neither is there any valid reason why more than a majority of the states—if they include a majority of the population—should be required for ratification.

The initiative and referendum, as you suggest, are being adopted in the states. The initiative and referendum furnish a better method of submitting questions to the judgment of the voters than the English method of dissolving parliament. When a vote is taken upon INDIVIDUALS, it is impossible to confine the election to any one issue, although some particular

questions may be the cause of the appeal to the people. Party ties have weight and personal popularity has its influence, so that the re-election of a member of parliament does not depend entirely upon his position upon the question of issue. When, however, a question is presented under the initiative and referendum the people vote upon the naked proposition and are not so much influenced by either party ties or personal friendship.

You will find also that the manner of nominating our candidates for congress, and, under the primary, our senators also, is much more democratic than the method employed in Great Britain. A member of congress must reside in the state from which he is chosen, and, in almost every instance, he resides in his congressional district. His nomination depends upon the voters of his party in his district, and not upon any national committee on outside organization. The short term of our congressmen also tends to keep them in close touch with the people.

Then, again, our system of paying a salary enlarges the class from which representatives may be chosen, whereas in Great Britain only a limited number are able to indulge the luxury of service in parliament, except in the comparatively few cases where labor or other organizations pay the salaries of members, and then the members are not as free as ours are to represent the whole constituency. Class consciousness is a factor that must be taken into account in representative government, as elsewhere, and we approach toward popular government in proportion as we permit freedom in the selection of those who are to speak for the people.

I do not mean to deny that England's system has some advantages, but I believe that our system has more and greater advantages and that the English people are much more likely to borrow from our system than we are to borrow from theirs. In fact, they have recently adopted our method of paying a salary to members of parliament.

There is no comparison between our senate and the house of lords. While our senate is not so immediately responsive to public sentiment as our house of representatives—it will become, as soon as popular election is secured, more responsive than it has been in the past—it is much more so than the British house of lords. The measure recently exacted, limiting the veto power of the house of lords, was a confession that the old system had outlived its usefulness.

I note what you say in regard to the influence exerted by Speaker Cannon and Senator Aldrich. Speaker Cannon's influence was due to the rules of the house, which enabled him to build up a machine through the appointment of committees, and, to a degree, determine the course of legislation. This evil has already been corrected in the house of representatives, the power of appointing having been taken from the speaker and lodged in the party caucus. This is a step toward more representative government.

The plan adopted in the last congress may be modified, as experience discloses its faults, but the modifications will be in the direction of rules more surely reflecting the will of the people. Senator Aldrich's influence was due partly to his ability, partly to length of service and partly to the rules of the senate which recognize the rule of seniority to an indefensible extent. It is probable that these rules will, in the near future, be so changed as to bring the senate organization more into harmony with popular government.

I can not leave this particular branch of the subject without adding that a part of Senator Aldrich's prestige was due to the influence which could be exerted over some of the senators by the large business interests that supported the policies favored by Senator Aldrich. The influence of these special interests is being re-

duced so that I think there will be less to object to in the future.

I have touched upon the subjects covered by your letter; if I have not made myself clear, I shall be pleased to elaborate any point about which you desire to make further inquiry. Being interested in our theory of government and believing, not that our government is perfect in every detail but that, in principle, it is the nearest approach to perfection in government that man has devised, I am glad to defend it where I believe it to be good, and as anxious to have its errors pointed out as I am to have its merits made known.

I have no doubt that we can borrow from other governments, and we should whenever we find any policy or method superior to our own. The fact that we are able to loan to other nations is due to a large extent to the fact that our forefathers borrowed liberally from the experience of Europe in framing our constitution, and we have gone on borrowing to the present day. We borrowed the Australian ballot from one of Great Britain's colonies, and are likely to borrow the postal rate from another. We are indebted to Switzerland for the initiative and referendum.

Replying to your request, I beg to say that you are at liberty to use this letter in making your report to the Imperial Russian society.

With assurances of respect, I am, very truly yours,
W. J. BRYAN.

WISE WORDS

Below will be found a *press report* quoting a recent declaration of Cardinal Farley of New York against church fairs where lotteries are employed to aid the church. His position is wisely taken. The lottery is wrong in principle and ought to be universally condemned. Especially is it objectionable when it has the sanction, real or seeming, of religious organizations. Cardinal Farley's stand will have great moral weight beyond his jurisdiction.

CARDINAL FARLEY'S WORDS

"A ban against church fairs is the latest crusade the Catholic church is conducting in the interest of a higher moral order of things. In the past church fairs have been sanctioned occasionally as extraordinary means for raising funds for the purpose of paying off mortgages or other church debts. The selling of chances or lotteries for charitable purposes at these fairs has brought about the movement.

"At the recent Diocesan Synod, held at St. Patrick's cathedral, Cardinal Farley read to the 800 priests of this diocese the rule of the church that governs the holding of fairs and pointed out in strong terms that it was not in keeping with the ideals of the church to sanction such events.

"The matter of a church holding a fair is strictly within the control of the authorities of the diocese. No pastor is supposed to use extraordinary means for raising funds without first obtaining the sanction of the church authorities. In place of fairs it is understood sacred concerts and bazars will be the approved mediums for raising funds."—New York World.

PROGRESSIVES TO ADVISE

Governor Wilson's address to the New Jersey electors was brief but it was to the point. He said that only PROGRESSIVES would be summoned by him as advisers because they only were in harmony with the cause to which he is committed. The president-elect is entirely right—he could not consistently say anything else. He has a right to assume that the reactionaries are HONEST and that an honest reactionary would conscientiously advise AGAINST progressive measures. Why should he ask advice which he must necessarily reject? Reactionary democrats who supported the ticket are eligible to other important positions but they are not available as advisors.

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