

EDUCATIONAL SERIES

The House Rules---"Cannonism"

Commoner readers will be particularly interested at this time in the methods whereby the house of representatives, under the system known as "Cannonism," is controlled by an oligarchy. The Success Magazine, a publication that practically supported the republican ticket in the last campaign, has been making, recently, a vigorous fight against "Cannonism" the evils aimed at by the "insurgent republicans." Evils which the democrats have consistently and persistently fought are described in the Success editorial as follows:

Among the problems which will come up for consideration in the Sixty-first congress are the following: The revision of the tariff; the development of national waterways; the conservation of forests and of our rapidly diminishing mineral wealth; the national defense; the proper regulation of interstate corporations; the shipping of liquors into prohibition states; child labor; postal savings banks; parcels post (with proper protection of the storekeeper); an adequate and efficient census; employers' liability.

All of these items of progressive and intelligent legislation have been, to date, consistently blocked by the five-man oligarchy which rules the national house of representatives. Some of the most important members of this oligarchy are the identical men who attempted to block pure food legislation and who have consistently opposed about all the really progressive measures that have been before the house.

This oligarchy is composed of Speaker Cannon and two other members of the committee on rules—Dalzell of Pennsylvania, and Sherman

of New York—together with Payne of New York, chairman of committee on ways and means, and Tawney of Minnesota, chairman of the committee on appropriations.

These five men arbitrarily dictate what legislation shall be considered by a body of 391 duly elected representatives of the people of the United States. The machinery of legislation is in their hands. They hold their amazing power by dispensing committee chairmanships and apportioning among the members the expenditures of public moneys, or "pork."

The demand of the "insurgents" may be briefly stated as follows:

1. That the committee on rules, now appointed by the speaker, which arbitrarily determines what legislation shall be considered by the house, be supplanted by a genuinely representative committee made up of members from geographical groups of states.

2. That this popularly elected committee on rules shall select the chairmen and members of the standing committees of the house, which frame legislation.

3. That on one day of each week open discussion of any important measures on the calendar may be obtained by right and not by favor of the speaker.

In short, these "insurgents" by striking directly at the oligarchical control of the house, and by attempting to put an end to the farce of debates and discussions under the sole direction of the speaker, appear to be voicing the widespread popular demand that the house of representatives be made really representative and responsive to the will of the people.

HOW THE SPEAKER CONTROLS THE HOUSE

In order to thoroughly understand the recent contest in the house of representatives the reader should understand the method whereby the speaker controls the house. On this point the following chapter, reprinted from the democratic text book for 1908 will be interesting:

It is because of the rules of the house and the autocratic disposition of the speaker that the will of the people is not carried out in legislation.

The speaker is permitted to name all the committees in the house. He designates as chairman of each committee a man who will follow his direction and control, as nearly as may be, the action of the committee in all matters submitted to it. The speaker expects the chairman to see to it that no bill is reported from the committee that does not meet the speaker's approval.

All bills are first referred to committees for investigation. After a bill has been considered and reported by a committee, it is placed on the calendar for consideration by the house. But no bill can be called up without first securing the recognition of the speaker. A member in the discharge of his duty may rise in his place and address the speaker, who asks, if he does not already know, "for what purpose does the gentleman rise?" Answer is made then, and if the speaker does not wish to recognize the member, he replies: "I can not recognize you for that purpose." The member has no recourse. His work is done.

Under the present rules, no bill can be considered in the house without the consent of the speaker, and the present speaker will not permit the consideration of any important bill he does not favor.

In addition to the power lodged in the speaker, under existing rules, he appoints a committee on rules, of which he is chairman, consisting of five persons. Whenever the rules of the house, obnoxious as they are, do not meet the exigencies of a particular case, a new rule is formulated which takes the place of all rules, and is presented by this committee. The present speaker regards it as the highest evidence of party treason if his party does not support the rule thus brought in, and the person offending may expect every punishment that can be inflicted for what is charged as his party perfidy.

As an example of the extent to which that committee has gone, attention is called to a rule that was presented and adopted wherein the anomalous position of counting a negative

vote for a proposition was provided. The rule was as follows:

"Resolved, That immediately upon the adoption of this rule, and at any time thereafter during the remainder of this session, it shall be in order to take from the speaker's table any general appropriation bill returned with senate amendments, and such amendments having been read, the question shall be at once taken without debate or intervening motion of the following question: 'Will the house disagree to said amendments en bloc and ask a conference with the senate?' And if this motion shall be decided in the affirmative, the speaker shall at once appoint the conferees without the intervention of any motion. If the house shall decide said motion in the negative, the effect of said vote shall be to agree to the said amendments."

In speaking on the adoption of the rules at the beginning of the present congress, Mr. Williams, of Mississippi, amongst other things, said:

"We are of the opinion, and have been for a long time, that entirely too much power is concentrated in the hands of the speaker of the house, and without any party spirit at all, speaking only what I think is best for the country at large, believing if my party were in the majority I should still take the same view, I want to protest against the adoption of the rules in their present drastic form, without any opportunity to the members of the house to propose amendments and without any opportunity for the house itself to pass upon proposed amendments."

Following Mr. Williams, Mr. Cooper, of Wisconsin, a republican, made this observation:

"I agree with the gentleman from Mississippi, that there is altogether too much power concentrated in the speaker of the house of representatives. It is more power, gentlemen, than ought to be given any man in any government that pretends to be republican in form and democratic in spirit."

On the 20th of May, near the close of the recent session of congress, Mr. De Armond, of Missouri, said: "As our constituents are equals under the law, so we, their representatives, come to this house equal under the constitution in our rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities. That representative equality, the speaker of this house has denied, ignored, and, for the time being, destroyed. In this work of usurpation, tyranny and spoliation he has assumed the role of the boss and acted the part. The speaker determines whether a measure shall be voted upon in the house—yea, more, he deter-

mines whether it shall be considered at all by the body over which he is elected to preside, but of which he has wantonly made himself the master. Recognition is accorded to a member as a matter of grace, not of right, or it is arbitrarily denied. Those measures which the speaker wishes to have passed by the gracious permission of the speaker are brought before the house for passage; those which the speaker does not wish to have passed have no chance to pass, for the speaker will not permit a consideration of them. And while the speaker acts the boss his peers meekly submit to the degradation and tamely endure the humiliation of being bossed. Indignation at the outrages perpetrated by the speaker melts into pity for the abject mien of subdued members, and both indignation and pity give way to an abiding feeling of contempt for all thus involved. Not all the members meekly bend low for the master's yoke or wear it in patient submissiveness; but too many take to the yoke as if they never were free men, and wear it as a decoration. In some minds familiarity with tyranny breeds a contempt for liberty. Let us particularize a little. As a rule, no member can get recognition to call up a measure for consideration unless the speaker wishes to have it considered. Generally the member must appeal privately to the speaker for permission to exercise a clear constitutional right, and if the speaker deny the boon of recognition, the unfortunate, if he would follow the precedents, must submit to a wrong which also is a humiliation. Individuals, organizations, and the country may in vain demand or petition for rights which it may please the autocrat in the speaker's chair to deny."

These several quotations express, in a very forceful way, the condition as it presents itself in the lower house of congress. It is indeed a humiliating spectacle to observe the representative of a sovereign people without voice in the congress to which he is elected, unless it be the will of the speaker that he shall be recognized. It is a travesty on our republican form of government that rules shall be so framed that legislation shall be controlled by a single person, whose will becomes in effect, the expressed will of the American people.

The rules of the house must be made simpler. Power must be taken from the speaker, so that the individual representative may have proper recognition, and to this end the democratic party in its platform, has pledged itself.

THE BARNACLES ON THE SHIP OF STATE

A. E. Thomas in the March number of Success Magazine:

Thousands and thousands of persons have done a good deal of wondering of late—they have wondered, among other things, why it is that it has been so utterly impossible to get the house of representatives to pass certain legislation clearly desired by the country at large—why it has even been impossible to get the house to bring this legislation to a vote. Such legislation, for example, is the bill for a White Mountain and Southern Appalachian forest reserve. This bill, with others equally popular, has been chloroformed sweetly in one of Uncle Joe's committees. Not only does it slumber but Uncle Joe has even forgotten to leave a call.

This and similar measures that the public approve have not been passed or even considered on the floor of the house for the simple reason that Uncle Joe and company do not want them considered. But if you are interested in one of these slumbering bills and you appeal to Uncle Joe for help you are likely to come from his presence, in the celebrated Red Room where he reigns, convinced that the speaker is, as he will tell you, only one among 391 members of the house, whereas, as a matter of fact, the rest of the house are only 391 members among one Uncle Joe.

"It is a matter of much regret to me," the speaker will mournfully say, "that I can not be of any assistance to you. I am personally in favor of the measure we have been discussing, and I assure you that if it ever comes to a vote it shall have my vote, if it needs it. But it is the majority of the house that rules, you see."

Uncle Joe is clearly much oppressed over his down-trodden condition beneath the heels of a despotic house, and it is very likely indeed that you will go hastily from his presence in order to cut short the painful spectacle of his embarrassment at not being able to serve so worthy a cause as yours. That is, you will unless you happen to know the truth. And the truth is that, while the house is constituted, organized,

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