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Majority or Minority

A reader of The Commoner asks that an answer be made to an editorial entitled "Functions of a Representative," which appeared recently in the Indianapolis News. The News quotes Mr. Bryan as saying:

"There are two schools of thought in regard to the duty of an official; the aristocratic theory is that the people elect representatives to think for them; the democratic theory is, on the contrary, that the people think for themselves and elect representatives to give legal expression to their thoughts and to voice their sentiments."

The News insists that there is one other alternative, namely, "that the people may elect representatives who will think for themselves." That is an evasion of the issue. The representative acts in a representative capacity; he exercises authority not in his own name, but in the name of those who elect him, and when he assumes to "think for himself," he thinks for his representatives also, and his thoughts must either be their thoughts or thoughts different from theirs. The News contends that "when a man goes to congress he does not cease to be a sovereign, does not cease to be responsible to his own mind and conscience." Here again the News dodges. Doubtless questions may arise after the election upon which the representative will have to act without knowing the will and wishes of his constituents. Here his judgment and conscience must be trusted, to hold him to the spirit of his platform, but these are not the cases that give the trouble. Platforms are adopted covering the important questions, and these platforms announce the party's position and the position of the candidate. When a representative is elected upon a platform, it is fair to assume that the platform not only represents his views, but the views of those who elected him, and is in the nature of a contract between him and his constituents. They can not withdraw from the contract because they have already acted and vested their authority in him; that he has no right to change the contract would seem like a self-evident truth. But what do we find? Representatives, yielding to influences adverse to the interests of their people, set up their "right of independence of judgment and conscience" as an excuse for not carrying out their contract with their constituents. This is misrepresentation—it is more, it is embezzlement of power.

The News says "this whole attempt to convert the government into a machine managed by automata pulled by strings from their districts is bound to fail—as it ought to fail." The

difficulty is not that the representatives are "pulled by strings from their districts"—the trouble is that they are pulled by other strings, sometimes they allow interests entirely outside their district to pull them away from their duty to their districts—sometimes they allow a few favored interests in their districts to pull them away from their duty to the rest of the people in their districts.

The News then proceeds to discuss the duty of a representative to his district in matters of tariff legislation and says:

"In many districts the democrats are strong for protection—where their local industries are concerned—as are the republicans. Suppose, then, democrats and republicans alike should demand that their representatives vote for high protection on local products. Should the representative do their bidding? Is it his duty to think for his people, or to adopt their views which are the result of their thinking for themselves?"

This question is settled by the platform, or ought to be. If a man's platform demands a protective tariff, he ought to vote for a protective tariff. If his platform demands a reduction of the tariff, he ought to vote for a reduction. If his platform demands a "revision" of the tariff and he, in his speeches before his constituents, construed revision to mean reduction, he has a right to assume that his people want reduction. A man will have no difficulty in applying the democratic theory if he is at heart a democrat. If he is at heart an aristocrat and denies that he is under any obligation to give voice to the wishes of his people, he ought to say so during the campaign so that he can be left at home, for the voters are not likely to elect a man who announces that he will not consider their wishes when he is called upon to act for them. As a matter of fact, the aristocratic view is not, as a rule, adopted because the representative believes in aristocracy, but because he is in search of an excuse for refusing to perform what he knows to be his duty to his constituents.

But the Indianapolis News quotes the following with approval from the Charleston (N. C.) News and Courier:

"Mr. Bryan's theory is that a public official should be the people's puppet, that when he accepts office he effaces himself as a free agent and that he reserves to himself only the function of what he conceives to be the people's will."

The Indianapolis editor ought to know that the Charleston News and Courier is not an exponent of democratic ideas. It calls itself democratic without being democratic, just as some legislators call themselves representatives when they are misrepresentatives. The democratic idea of representative government does not mean that the representative shall efface himself; it means that he shall keep faith with those from whom he derives power; but if the representative has to choose between effacing himself and effacing his constituents, he had better efface himself, for it is more important that his constituents shall have proper representation than that he shall gratify himself by doing for them what they do not want done, or by doing in their name that against which they protest. While he acts for himself he can act as he pleases, but when he becomes a representative he acts not as an individual, but as a spokesman for a large number of individuals, each one as important as himself and each one having a conscience, an opinion and rights that must be respected.

There are but two kinds of government, government by the majority and government by the minority. Millions of lives have been expended in the purchase of popular government and they have been expended in vain if those elected by the people can disregard the wishes of those who elected them.

ORGANIZE FOR THE INCOME TAX

Unquestionably a majority of the democratic and republican parties favor the income tax. If proof on this point were necessary it is found in the fact that a republican congress

has been forced by public sentiment to submit an income tax amendment. It is no secret, however, that the republican leaders who reluctantly yielded to this necessity expect that the proposed amendment will fail by reason of not having a sufficient number of states.

The clause in the federal constitution providing for the method of amendment is as follows:

"The congress, whenever two-thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this constitution or, on the application of the legislatures of two-thirds of the several states, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states, or by conventions of three-fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the congress; provided, that no amendment which may be made prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article; and that no state, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the senate."

The Washington correspondent for the Chicago Record-Herald recently said:

"Senators and other students of politics and economics at the national capital have been giving attention to the field of campaign that soon will be opened and it must be confessed that the most enthusiastic advocates of an income tax are not intoxicated by hope. Getting down to cold figures they can not at this time see a safe majority for the adoption of the amendment that only awaits formal action by the house of representatives to come before the state legislatures. To secure ratification the amendment must carry thirty-five states. Twelve states rejecting it will kill it. By not acting either affirmatively or negatively a few states may prevent the necessary three-fourths majority."

It will be seen, therefore, that the fight for the income tax has only begun. The subject should, therefore, be studied by every citizen. It would be well if, in every precinct in the United States, men and women should congregate for the purpose of informing themselves upon this important topic.

The Springfield (Mass.) Republican gives a timely hint when it says:

"In providing that the sixteenth amendment to the federal constitution shall be submitted to the legislatures of the states, rather than to state conventions receiving their mandate directly from the people, the senate resolution makes it possible not merely for twelve legislatures to defeat the amendment; but for the halves of twelve legislatures to defeat it. This is a point that has not been sufficiently emphasized. Every American legislature has two branches, co-ordinate in action and equal in power. Each branch may exercise a veto upon the other. To defeat the income tax amendment consequently in any state it will be necessary only to defeat it in the upper chamber, which is usually the more conservative body and the more responsive to the desires and interests of wealth.

"This consideration gives fresh precision to the problem of securing ratification by the necessary number of states. It is manifest that a bicameral legislature, in which a small minority of the total membership of both branches could prevent affirmative action simply by controlling a small-sized senate, presents difficulties that would wholly disappear if the question were submitted to a state convention. Connecticut has a small senate—thirty-five members; Rhode Island's senate has thirty-eight members; New Hampshire's has but twenty-four. Thirteen men in New Hampshire can defeat the income tax amendment, twenty in Rhode Island and eighteen in Connecticut. And by what influences have these bodies usually been dominated in the past? It is not difficult to count up nine other legislatures whose senates might easily decline to take affirmative action."

CONTENTS

MAJORITY OR MINORITY
ORGANIZE FOR THE INCOME TAX
EDUCATIONAL SERIES — THE INCOME TAX
DEMOCRATIC PATRIOTISM
MR. TAFT AND ELECTION OF SENATORS
MR. BRYAN'S OFFER TO MR. TAFT
"EVERYBODY WORKS POOR FATHER"
THE TARIFF BEFORE CONGRESS
WILL THE VOTERS FORGET?
THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT
SEATTLE EXPOSITION
MR. TAFT AND THE TARIFF
WHY NOT TRY THE RIGHT WAY?
LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE
HOME DEPARTMENT
WHETHER COMMON OR NOT
NEWS OF THE WEEK