

HOW OREGON "STOOD PAT"

(Continued from Page 7.)

home-rule bill, by initiative, promising strict regulation. Prohibition was rejected by 17,681 and the home-rule bill carried by 2,542. This is taken as an order from the people to the liquor men to "clean house" or prohibition will be the next order of the day. Already the Portland city

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council has under consideration a most drastic regulatory ordinance. It is backed by the liquor men, who pledge assistance in enforcement.

Taxation reform is given much attention in Oregon. It has been so for some years. This election the legislature submitted two amendments paving the way for the "classified property" plan, and cutting the constitutional strings providing for the old "uniform rate" system. In addition, an initiative amendment was up providing for county local option in taxation methods. The latter carried, and the counties are left free to work out their own salvation. We may expect them to become experiment stations on this vexed question.

For many years the legislature has failed to provide a law giving adequate protection to men employed at hazardous occupations; the employers' lobby having successfully stopped any liability bill and refused any compromise. This year the working men took their cause to the people, and a bill was enacted.

Some Oregon counties are as large as eastern states. Men have to go 150 miles to reach the county seat. The legislature failed to provide a method by which the matter could be settled by the communities interested. At the election of 1908 Hood county was created by a vote of the people on initiative petition. This year a whole crop of hopefuls popped up, but the people resented this wholesale intrusion of local questions into a state election and turned down the whole group by a four to one vote. Normal school appropriations have long caused trouble in Oregon. There are three schools located in different sections of the state, and the partisans of each formed groups in the legislature and proceeded to "log-roll" with a vengeance. Important legislation would be held up pending the settlement of these appropriations. It grew to be a disgrace and a scandal. It consumed much of the time of every session. At the last session the legislature "side-stepped" responsibility and no appropriations were made. The schools appealed to the people, with the result that the people selected the best school, allowed the appropriation, and turned down the other two. The judgment has given satisfaction to all save the interested parties.

A distinct innovation is the presidential primary bill. Hereafter there will appear at the great national conventions delegates from Oregon chosen by the voters of the respective political parties, and bearing instructions as to whom the rank and file desire nominated for president of the United States. This measure was fathered by United States Senator Jonathan Bourne. It is ridiculed by the old politicians as foolishness; it is justified by its friends on the ground that no one can now go to these conventions but wealthy men, and under this plan the poorer people may be represented as the state pays the expense. And there you are.

Oregon needs railroads. A prominent banker told me how the development of the state had been retarded, and pointed out huge eastern sections on the map which the railroad magrates refused to enter until "more people move in there." At the instance of the business men, especially the Portland chamber of commerce, the legislature submitted an amendment, permitting the state to build and own, but not operate, railroads. Thereat the railroad kings had a sudden change of heart. New extensions were suddenly planned. Surveying parties appeared. High officials hastened to Oregon to give assurance that they meant business. They were taken at their word. The amendment was not passed, but al-

ready the railroads are busy on extensions long neglected.

The amendment providing for a three-fourths jury verdict in civil cases was aimed at the old evil of tampering with juries, one member of which if "reached" could prevent a verdict. Also the upper courts are not to send back cases for retrial on trivial technical errors when it shall appear that substantial justice has been reached in the lower courts. Transcripts of testimony, the judge's instructions to the jury, etc., may be passed up with the bill of exceptions on appeal. Much venerable red tape is no doubt endangered by these changes, but their object is to speed the wheels of justice, clear the dockets and deprive rich litigants of advantage over poorer ones, by forever staying off decisions on technicalities, and so wearing them out.

Good roads are favored, a new insane asylum ordered built, and a private fishing monopoly on a public stream is abolished.

Woman's suffrage is rejected, as is proportional representation and a proposition for a free state official gazette to be mailed bi-monthly to the voters.

However much individuals may differ as to the wisdom of these decisions, it is generally admitted that the people on the whole exhibited good judgment. "As well as any legislature would have done," is a frequent comment. In fact it is a curious thing to hear strong opponents of the initiative and referendum state that the "people don't do any worse than the legislature, anyhow." I have not found a single man but would admit this. In short, the mind of the state is represented in the verdict, which is I suppose what governments are intended to do in free America.

Will the people act rashly, be subject to waves of passion and pass anything proposed?

Twenty-three measures were rejected; nine were adopted. Curiously enough, the only "socialistic" measure on the ballot was the proposal of the business men for state railroads, which was defeated. The whole is a conservative showing. Will they take an interest and vote on the measures?

Comparing the vote cast on the measures with the total vote cast for candidates in the election, we note the fact that it varies from 62 to 90. General average, 71 per cent. Excluding the county division bills, which were local, the average on state-wide problems stands at 75 per cent, which is the general average on all measures decided since the introduction of the system in 1902. But what of the 25 per cent who do not vote on measures—who are they? They compose the ignorant, careless, illiterate class of voters who can be interested in persons but not in principles; unless, perchance, the principle involves beer, and 10 per cent will not vote on even beer. The conclusion is inevitable that it is the substantial citizenship which decides issues—the seven or eight men out of every ten who are most capable of deciding. The others disfranchise themselves by their own act.

Can the voters discriminate?

Three liquor measures were presented; two on labor; three on taxation, and in no instance were conflicting measures enacted. One was adopted, the others rejected. Conflicting bills have never been enacted in Oregon. Can this picking-out capacity be explained on the grounds of blind luck? I think not, especially when it is remembered that the measures were not grouped by subjects on the ballot, but were scattered in order of the filing with the state secretary. Then the majorities by which the measures were enacted or rejected vary—and greatly. Adopting majorities range from

1,729 to 18,369; rejecting, from 2,533 to 58,342. On twenty-three measures the deciding majority was above 10,000. It is difficult to harmonize these cold figures with the statements of certain critics, particularly corporation lawyers and politicians, that "not ten per cent of the people know what they are voting on."

It is the habit of the superior individual to distrust the wisdom of the common mind. Most of us are sure we know more about what should be done in matters of state than the other fellow. In so fundamental a shift of the center of political gravity as the initiative and referendum involves, opposition is bound to be strong, and criticism of its results equally emphatic. The opponent of the system will point to its failures, the friends will call attention to its successes. To regard the initiative and referendum as a sort of automatic machine which will present a perfectly governed state to an amazed world is futile. It is merely a method by means of which the voters of Oregon, or any state, may express whatever of wisdom, virtue and courage in them lies. It is a very human institution; and whether the average citizen can represent himself better than another can do it for him is a matter for each to decide for himself. The Oregon people have decided they can trust themselves. Associate Justice King, of the state supreme court, who has given deep study and observation to the new system says: "There is no objection which may be brought against the initiative and referendum to which the purely representative system is not open."

The truth is that the people of Oregon are at school, learning the lost art of self-government. They are becoming more familiar year by year with these democratic tools new to their hand; they are learning why politics are corrupt; new view-points

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