

Proportional Representation

By Robert Tyson-Toronto Canada-10 Haabord St.

Last week I showed part of the crass folly of the system of electing representatives in single member districts. Here are more considerations of the same kind. And I may remark, in passing, that "block vote" in a multi-member district, is just as bad; I mean, giving each elector as many equal votes as there are members to be elected.

What is the backbone and main spring of the tremendous political power now wielded by the party "machine"? Mainly, the monopoly of nomination. No one has now a chance of election unless he is chosen by a regular party convention. There is usually one republican and one democrat put up in each constituency. Neither of them may be acceptable to a large proportion of the electors, but it is Hobson's choice—these electors must either vote for men they do not want or stay at home, and, too often, they do stay at home.

Under proportional representation there would be such freedom of nomination that any group of voters strong enough in numbers to entitle them to a representative would be able to get the very man they wanted, and to snap their fingers at the "machine." Besides, if this group of voters were to disagree among themselves as to the best man for their representative, they could nominate two men without fear of splitting their vote and thereby losing their representation. Study of the systems will show how this works.

Much more might be added to our indictment of the present electoral system, but I will content myself with the following summary:

The present system disfranchises nearly half the voters at every general election; it gives undue power to the party organizations, including a practical monopoly of nominations; it is so uncertain and erratic in its operations as to sometimes allow a minority of the voters to elect a majority of the representatives; it promotes bribery; it encourages gerrymandering; it makes crookedness too often a factor of success; it nourishes party hatred, and it is a system utterly unworthy of a progressive people in a scientific age.

The remedy for these evils is the adoption of a rational and reasonable system of voting, which must necessarily be based on the proportional principle. The keynote of proportional representation is the single vote in plural electoral districts. By that I mean that each elector casts only one vote, although in his voting district several members or representatives are elected. Unproportional representation is for each elector to cast as many votes as there are members to be elected in such a district, or to vote in a single-member district if he has but a single vote. This is a broad statement, and does not quite cover the ground; but it is sufficient generalization for my present purpose.

(Next week I shall present the proportional principle in some detail, so that the reader may apprehend clearly the foundation on which an honest electoral system must be based.

BREAKING RANKS

Democratic Suicide Committed with Ammunition Stolen from the Enemy

Editor Independent: Two vital forces, both "regularly" within the democratic party, are opposing forces. Two powers which have been in continual warfare since the dawn of civilization; a class against the populace, plutocracy versus democracy.

The democratic party is a house divided—regularly divided against itself. Mr. Bryan's role of "regularity" places him in an attitude of helpless tolerance of things utterly opposed to his expressed convictions and his conscience; for he is unquestionably an honest devoted democrat; the grandest figure in present democratic party politics.

The "regular democratic party" has recently administered a dose of compulsory "party regularity" that was too nauseous for even the strong American stomach to retain. And the public protest against that brand of "democracy" is too plain to be misunderstood; is overwhelming and "dee-lightful." Political chaos! Out from which springs new life and hope.

Side by side with unprecedented republican majorities for the presidential candidate, Folk in Missouri and Douglas in Massachusetts elected democratic governors. Adams also in Colorado. Garvin narrowly failed of election in Rhode Island, Baker for congress from Brooklyn against the onslaught of "regulars" of both parties, falling by only a handful of ballot, and all over the country similar novel and significant results.

This political situation indicates a break in old party lines and a protest against that political perfidy which has employed compulsory party regularity as its best asset. It notes a change in the purpose and conduct of American voters, from blindly following their leaders, to independent thinking and to a conscientious expression of their own will.

Neither republican nor democratic voters would obey the demand "duty to be regular" in violence of their honest convictions.

The election of 1904 was plainly a revolt against compulsory party regularity, and indicates the near-at-hand disintegration of the old parties.

The people are not satisfied with either the existing national conditions nor with that which either of the two old parties offer them as betterment. This condition of the popular mind is a fine and admirable Americanism; it gives hope to all who really desire government by the people instead of by class through "the parties." It revives a hope that the people expect and demand that they be first considered in government, and that those who buy special privileges with campaign funds and buy legislatures with

equally ill-gotten gains shall, if considered at all, be considered last. Good! This is charmingly hopeful.

This "breaking ranks,"—this disintegration, is attended with another significant symptom of political revolution, i. e., in the number of parties and candidates from which the voters had opportunity to select.

The present situation is that of history repeating itself. Out of similar conditions in 1857-61 sprang a new party—a party of democratic principles and purposes—a party of the people—whose first effective personal figure was Abraham Lincoln.

The democracy of Lincoln was the most advanced that the time made available, though perhaps not sufficient for the present demand—and the man was and will remain one of the grandest figures in history of the progress of the democratic principle in government.

The plutocratic power of the slavery oligarchy was the most potent asset of the democratic party of that time—its support was "regular."

Because of the unflinching victories of the democratic party with that slavery asset, the whig party, hopeless and weary of defeats, began a role such as has been attempted by the regular democrats in 1904; they began to "deal" with the enemy, granting concessions, making alliances, compromising.

They would concede the righteousness of slavery where a white majority approved. They would compromise upon certain lines of permitted extension of the institution of slavery. They would enter into an alliance for the capture and return of slaves escaped into free states. They would recognize the institution as established in a territory of the United States if a resident white majority favored it. All these and other abandonments of principle were made for expediency—political party expediency! It was suicide committed with ammunition stolen from the enemy. It spelled failure then as it has again in 1904, as it always has, always will and always should. Yet failure in the attempt to make Slamese twins of plutocracy and democracy was victory for the principle of democracy.

The people were offended; the old parties disintegrated, many candidates and policies (six I believe) were submitted to the public choice. The most democratic party of that time—the republican party—won the popular approval, and victory. Why? Because

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up from the roll stirred by the greedy chasers—after plutocratic power there arose to the surface some bubbles of the true democratic principle "equal rights and no privileges" under the law—these were perceived by the public, became popular and were approved.

The people were thoroughly aroused and earnest; they abandoned the old parties, and took a hand at government themselves; and to good purpose. Plutocracy was "downed," though it had dominated for more than half a century; dominated so long, that many had given up hope and some had said that it was divinely intended, as if it were possible for God to sanction injustice! The parties would have ruined the republic. The people saved it.

Does any honest, intelligent man deny that now the plutocratic powers in the United States, as they express themselves in the trusts and the money combinations, especially privileged by government authority, are today less threatening than was the slavery oligarchy that preceded the civil war?

STILLMAN DOUBLEDAY, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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