

Proportional Representation
(Thirteenth Article.)

It seemed to me that thoughtful observers of politics would find much of value in the actual political conditions which prevailed in a populous country like Belgium when a fair and proper system of representation was put in operation. That is why I devoted the space of the last two articles to it. And the elections of May, 1900, were dealt with, because, those being the first elections under proportional representation, the contrast between new and old conditions would stand out sharply. I now conclude the Belgian part of the subject by some reference to subsequent events.

In the spring of 1902, some political rioting took place in Belgium. I wrote to Count d'Alviella, asking the significance of these disturbances, and the following is an extract from his reply:

"The recent agitation was directed exclusively against the plurality of votes, viz.: the second and third votes attributed to the holders of certain qualifications based on marriage, property, the payment of taxes, instruction, etc., thus giving certain classes of voters two and three votes each.

"When, in 1894, the Catholic party, which had been in power for some years, introduced universal suffrage, thus increasing tenfold the number of electors (from 144,000 to about 1,500,000), the plurality of votes was added as a restraint. But the opposition parties (liberals and socialists) have gradually come to the conclusion that this system, as it is carried on, has for result not only to secure undue advantage to the rural class and therefore to clerical influences, but also to favor the fraudulent distribution, by the party in power, of the second and third votes.

"Hence an agitation for the abolition of the plural vote, in which the liberal party showed itself willing to co-operate with the socialists under these three conditions: (1) Inscription of the principle of la representation proportionnelle in the constitution; (2) No female suffrage (which the liberals, rightly or wrongly, believe to be a tool in the hands of the priests); (3) Recourse to legal and pacific means only.

"The socialists assented to the first two conditions, but not to the third, and soon began a revolutionary agitation which was easily suppressed by the government—the liberals keeping aloof. The general election followed, and, as might be expected under the circumstances, showed an increase of the Catholic votes, especially at the expense of the socialists. I belong myself to the liberal party, but I have tried to sum up the facts as impartially and intelligibly as I can."

The reader ought to be reminded that the plural voting referred to is no part of proportional representation and has no necessary connection with it. The beneficial results of proportional representation have been manifested in spite of the existence of the vicious method of plural voting.

This historical summary is continued to the autumn of 1903, by another letter from Count d'Alviella, who writes from Court Saint Etienne, Belgium, in September of that year. He says:

"The abnormal clerical majority reduced to twenty in 1900, has been slightly increased by the elections of 1902. I have given you the reasons in the letter where I explained to you the causes of the riots and their relation to our electoral system. The next general election (in half the country) will take place in the summer of 1904. I do not foresee a great change in the relative strength of our three parties.

"The intervening or by-elections were abolished in 1900. They were inconsistent with the principle of our proportional system. Under the new law the electors choose, at each general election and by the same ballot, a corresponding number of suppliants members, who, in the case of an elected member dying or giving his demission, simply walk into his seat, by the order of precedence. You have all these details in the law, whose text, I believe, is in your hands.

"While the house of representatives is entirely elected by proportional representation, as well as ninety-six members of the senate, out of one hundred and twelve, there are still twenty-six senators elected by the 'conseils provinciaux' according to the old propri vinclaux' according to the old majority system, and the 'conseils provinciaux' are themselves elected by the same system. By a strange irony of fate I am myself one of those senators; while my friend the burgo-master of Brussels, who is one of the last and staunchest liberal adversaries of la representation proportionnelle, has been elected only through the application of the proportional principle. At least, in this case, one can not say

that our convictions proceed from the way we got our seats!

"The 'Counseils Communaux' are elected according to a law voted in 1893, which was the first step—but a very insufficient one—towards proportional representation. (See pages 87 to 92 of my book.) That law provides that whenever there is an absolute majority all the seats shall be given to the most favored list, and that proportional representation will only be applied in case there should be no such majority. By enacting this provision, the clerical party wanted to prevent the introduction of liberal and socialistic elements in the numerous communes where that party hold the majority of votes. But, as a regular nemesis, its policy of selfishness has brought about this result; that in most of the towns, and even rural communes, where the clericals are in a minority, the opposition parties (liberals, socialists and christian democrats) join together to bring forward a coalition list, and thus wrench from the clericals their due part of proportional representation. By these tactics we hope to force the government into such an alteration of the law as will make la representation proportionnelle the absolute rule in communal (municipal) as well as in general elections."

Finally, the matter is brought down to last year by a brief letter of Count d'Alviella, dated July, 1904, which will fittingly conclude this article:

"We have had this year a new general election, and you will be glad to hear that it has been again a perfect success from a proportional point of view. Even the beaten ones loyally abstain from imputing to la representation proportionnelle the responsibility of the ill which has befallen the country by their failure!

"I send you two pamphlets which will tell you more than I could put in a letter. One is written by myself in the liberal interest; the other by Mr. Bertrand, member of parliament, from the socialist point of view. As to the Catholic party, its newspapers declare themselves perfectly satisfied with the results."

ROBERT TYSON.

Toronto, Canada.

Socialism's Expected "Take-over"

Editor Independent: According to socialistic authorities should that so-called reform prevail in any given locality everything there in the nature of business for profit must be stopped—as all industries would be conducted by and under strict socialistic management. Therefore every shop, factory, plant or other concern where work is done by hired men, women or boys, as now, and paid for by individuals or firms, would be "taken-over" and stowed away in the warm, safe, quiet bosom of socialism. The "take-over" would also include farmers and horticulturists. No matter what protests there might be, or who should make them, the transfer must be made. Thenceforth whenever an individual citizen does, or makes, anything for someone else, he must receive no profit therefor. To do so would be a violation of the rules and aims of the socialistic ukase, and therefore make the offender liable to expulsion, or something worse.

How would such an economic restricting machine work? Let us suppose it should break out in California, for example. We will suppose that in the next general election the state socialists should carry this state, by an unchallenged majority. Would not the minority still possess a few natural rights that the majority would be bound to respect? They surely would.

But now comes in the "take-over" scheme, of which so much is said and written. How would it operate? The state of California now contains numerous mills, factories, ironworks, etc., of various kinds, and also agricultural and horticultural outfits, of great value. The entire wealth of all those costly equipments is enormous. Perhaps the total value of all such outfits for the production of more wealth would reach a billion dollars. To establish them all and put them in running order has been the work of many years.

Is it presumable that the owners of all these industrial outfits would, without meeting stubborn resistance, permit socialism to "take-over" those possessions and fall into line? Hardly. No such injustice could be pushed through without a war. It would mean cruel, relentless warfare. As to the final outcome, no mortal man can foretell what it would be.

The real fact is—a fact generally overlooked by dreamers and superficial enthusiasts—that any man, anywhere, has a natural, an inalienable, right to employ some other man to work for him, for such compensation and under such conditions as the two men can

agree upon. That being the case it follows that any greater number of men have the same natural right to employ a greater number of men to work for them—even though the employers are organized as a corporation. Present corporations in this country are largely corrupt and oppressive, it is true; but that is because they are upheld by public officials of immense wealth and influence. Against all such political infamy I am as strongly opposed as any other man can be. But I predict that socialism will not prevail in any state of this union during the ensuing five hundred years—and probably never. I have not one word to offer in extenuation of our present trio of highway robbers flourishing under the guise of philanthropists and statesmen. Their names are really monopoly and greed. It is monopoly and greed, and not competition and industry, that create pandemonium. There is, however, a sure way open for crushing out this prevailing system of plunder. The people can throw off the yoke if they will. It can be done with the ballot, backed by moral courage.

But the man who thinks he sees socialism "taking over" the private property of even one state in this nation must possess supernatural mental vision. If his physical sight is equal to his mental outlook he must be able to see through a stone wall ten feet thick.

RALPH HOYT.

Los Angeles, Calif.

The maximum freight rate law in Kansas has already been heard from. Under its terms the Webster Refinery company shipped from Humboldt its first car load of oil on Monday. It paid, under the new enactment, \$27 a car as against \$78 a car under the former scheme of extortion—a trifling difference of \$51 a car. That's all.—Kansas City Star. (In Nebraska, a republican legislature has killed all freight rate bills.)

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