

**Direct Legislation.**

Indirect legislation, or representative government, which obtains in this and most other civilized countries, has served its end in uplifting and enlightening the so-called middle classes, and is now a hindrance rather than an aid to further political and social progress. The ideal of government, which is that it should be of by and for the people cannot be realized under the present parliamentary system. That the latter allows the will of the majority to control legislation is incapable of proof. Supposing that the people of each electoral district decided by a majority vote who should be the party candidates at the next election as will henceforth be done in the State of Minnesota still the electors would have no guarantee that their representatives when elected would carry out the people's will. The electors would have been supreme on only the election days. Afterwards their so-called representatives may within very wide limits, do as they please until the end of their term.

Our smallest electoral department is the school district. In rural districts, three Trustees are elected, one each year, for a term of three years. When elected, trustees are under none but a moral obligation to manage school affairs to the satisfaction of the community. If they, or two of them, so desire, they can appoint and retain an incompetent and unpopular teacher, or dismiss a good instructor whose services the ratepayers desire to keep.

Municipal Councillors once chosen, have the power, too frequently exercised, to legislate contrary to the wishes of those to whom they owe their offices.

A Provincial Assembly may, without consulting the electors on new questions that have arisen since the last election, mortgage the public domain or increase the public debt in order to subsidize the private schemes of individuals or corporations who find it easier to bribe a few legislators than to buy up half the adult male population.

Similarly with the Dominion Parliament. The people vote, on election days, for certain men who are supposed to represent certain principles. The elected persons are then the people's masters, almost absolute, for the next five years. They owe the country nothing that they are compelled to pay. The laws they pass, whether good or bad, cannot be changed until a new House of Commons is chosen. The debts they incur must be paid by those who had no choice in contracting them. The only remedy known to representative government is to elect a new set of men for next Parliament. And what guarantee that the next set will be better than the men they displace? None whatever!

If elected school boards, city and county councils, provincial assemblies and Dominion Commons do not necessarily reflect public opinion, how much less do the appointed school boards of towns, the legislative Councils of Quebec and Nova Scotia, and the Canadian Senate truly represent their nominal masters!

The only effective remedy for these evils that are apparent to every one who thinks at all, is Direct Legislation through the Initiative and the Referendum. This method of government has been for years in successful operation

in the Swiss Republic, and has since the end of 1898 been adopted by the States of South Dakota, Oregon, and North Dakota, and, in an emasculated form by the State of Illinois. The germ of the institution has long been present in North America, and can be traced back to the beginnings of Greek English and Russian history. So true is it that "there is nothing new under the sun."

By the Referendum every act passed by a legislative body must be submitted to a direct vote of the people concerned, if such a demand is made within a certain time by the petition of a certain portion of the electorate. The result of the referendum vote immediately becomes law, not being subject to the chief magistrate's veto. Very few such votes are called for in Switzerland, because the legislature there knowing that any and all of its acts may be challenged by the public is therefore careful to pass only such laws as they believe will suit their constituencies.

By the Initiative, a certain part of the electorate who desire the passage of an act not provided by the legislature may prepare such an act for themselves, which act if supported by the required number of signatures must be submitted by the government to a popular vote. If carried by a majority, the act thus initiated by private citizens becomes the law of the land.

Under Direct Legislation, it is impossible for legislators to do otherwise than always please the majority of the electorate. Whether for good or ill, the majority would always rule. Bribery and intimidation would be reduced to a minimum; and for the first time in history, the people, who by their labor enrich the country, with their blood defend it, and out of their earnings pay its bills, would also make its laws.

Under Direct Legislation the city, the province and the Dominion would each be in a position to inaugurate, on short notice, any reform for which the people are ready. We could improve our laws and amend our constitution just as fast, but no faster as public sentiment should demand. And parliament would then truly reflect the will of those whose servant it is supposed to be.

Direct Legislation offers the only solution of the Prohibition question, which is now agitating all Canada. It is not wise for a provincial government to prepare a prohibition bill. Each province should at once adopt the principle of Direct Legislation. Then by the authority of the Initiative the temperance party could themselves frame the act they think best, and the government would refer it to the whole electorate. The true will of the people could be found by only such means. Those who advocate license, and those who prefer government ownership of the liquor traffic, would be equally privileged to have their views referred to the popular verdict. The latter would be satisfied; the government safe, and no injustice experienced by anyone.

This great and growing Canada of ours needs more efficient political machinery than it now possesses. As patriotic citizens it is our duty to make ourselves familiar with the most advanced political science and to fearlessly apply it to our beloved country.

HENRY HARVEY STUART  
Hopewell Hill, N. B. March 1st 1902.

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