

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 95.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1909.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

THE NEW REFERENDUM.

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THE final report of the referendum taken this summer in the State of New Jersey on amending the constitution establishes what was surmised immediately after the voting—barely 15 per cent. of the registered voters expressed their views and the amendments were defeated.

The fact seems to have startled not a few. They consider it an evidence of “apathy,” of “civic lukewarmness”; and they groan proportionally.

The New Jersey experience is substantially the experience made in every state. The gathered experience from all these quarters goes to prove that the referendum, to-day, is essentially monkey-shines. It also goes to indicate more.

The referendum is a denial of representative government. If legislation could be carried on by referendums, parliaments would be unnecessary. Valuable though written controversy, or discussion, is in clarifying thought, the debate by word of mouth is essential in legislation. The referendum is an attempt at legislation by a body of legislators located over an area too large for them to hear and see one another. Accordingly the referendum is the application of a theory under physical conditions that exclude the theory. No wonder every time it is readily applied it turns into a New Jersey fiasco.

The referendum affects to be the quintessence of democracy. In fact, it is a sop to democratic aspirations, a toy, a rattle.

A truly democratic commonwealth is that in which the problem of the people’s living without arduous toil, consequently, without being hounded by Want or the Fear of Want, has been solved. In such a commonwealth the political State has no place, consequently, the Parliament neither. In such a commonwealth the Central Directing Authority consists only of the representatives of the organized useful occupations of the people. Legislation is not wanted there. Legislation is needed

only where interests conflict. In a truly free or democratic commonwealth interests are one. The “legislation” requisite is not that of laws upon which expertest authorities are bound to differ, seeing they have opposing interests. The “legislation” of a free, because industrial, democracy will be mainly like time-tables—the ascertained declarations of “so much wealth needed,” “so much wealth producible,” “so many hours of work,” and the corresponding value of hour for hour in the various occupations. In a true democracy what is there to be referendumed?

A people’s will upon a certain concrete proposition—Shall there be War? for instance,—that a democratic commonwealth will insist upon being ascertained. To-day, however, no such concrete proposition is ever submitted, what is submittable can not be handled.

The referendum is a concession to heels-over-head Anarchy. As a consequence, the referendum is used as a sugar-coating to cause the pill of the capitalist State, with its political parliaments, and the legislations that these exhale to be gulped down by visionaries.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded December 2010

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