

The Public

**A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making**

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EDITORIAL

Political Progress in California.

In one of the great States of the American Union a veritable revolution has occurred. Yet newspaper readers without reading glasses of high magnifying power would hardly know it but for private correspondents. You can tell from the Hearst papers that something important happened, and that Hearst did it; but if you want detail and color, you must turn to the murder reports. In other papers there were strong symptoms at first of highly sensational dispatches; but as soon as it appeared that woman suffrage had not been defeated but had won, those symptoms rapidly receded. Had California voted down woman suffrage, the Recall, and the Initiative and Referendum, it may be inferred from past experience that headlines would have screamed. But in a victory for all three there is "no news." It is common to attribute this kind of newspaper reticence to Big Business control. That is probably a mistake in this instance. At any rate the control is probably not direct. A more likely explanation is the incompetency of news gatherers and news editors. Trained more or less consciously to regard certain business interests as the classes to be served by news reports, they have formed the habit of magnifying and coloring what they think those interests would like exploited and of minimizing what such interests do not like, until incompetency for distinguishing the wants of business interests from news service has atrophied.

CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL:	
Political Progress in California.....	1065
The Judicial Recall.....	1066
Democracy in Massachusetts.....	1066
Indecent Mail Matter.....	1067
Death of Judge Harlan.....	1067
Dangers From Economic Malpractice.....	1068
Singletax in Canada.....	1068
Farmers and the Singletax.....	1068
Death of Dr. Anna M. Lund.....	1068
A Significant Parallel (R. W. Barkley).....	1069
EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE:	
The Massachusetts Campaign (E. N. Vallandigham).....	1070
Democracy in California (W. G. Eggleston).....	1071
Margaret Haley in the California Campaign.....	1072
INCIDENTAL SUGGESTIONS:	
How to Pull the Supreme Court's Teeth (A. H. Walker, F. C. Leubuscher, J. M. O'Brien).....	1073
Popular vs. Delegated Government in Maine (C. M. Gallup).....	1074
The Glorious October (C. H. S.).....	1075
NEWS NARRATIVE:	
Revolution in China.....	1075
Woman Suffrage in California.....	1076
Direct Legislation and the Recall in California.....	1076
Trial of the McNamaras.....	1076
The Railroad Shopmen's Strike.....	1077
Lakes-to-Gulf Deep Waterway Convention.....	1077
Progressive Republicans for La Follette.....	1077
Italy Intends to Annex Tripoli.....	1078
News Notes.....	1078
Press Opinions.....	1079
RELATED THINGS:	
The World's Witenagemote (R. W. Crosman).....	1080
Business Men and Land Value Taxation (Joseph Fels).....	1080
A Town Worth Living In.....	1082
Cause and Effect (A. Guiterman).....	1082
BOOKS:	
The Shame of Our City.....	1082
Guarding the Child's Health.....	1083
Books Received.....	1083
Pamphlets.....	1083
Periodicals.....	1083

However, news reports or none, good ones or poor ones, hereafter women in California are to have full suffrage, legislatures will pass laws subject to popular veto, they may be overridden by popular initiative when they refuse to pass laws the people want, and judges will go into partnership with corporations at the peril of their office. This is revolution. But it is a republican, democratic, beneficent and characteristically American type of revolution.

* *

The Judicial Recall.

California's adoption of the Recall, judges included, is an interesting commentary upon President Taft's recent veto of the judicial Recall in the Arizona Constitution. The Recall receives the largest vote and scores the largest majority of all the questions on which the people of the Golden State voted. If moral principle, or any large political or judicial principle, had been involved in Mr. Taft's Arizona veto, this rebuke from the people of California, whether right or not, could and should be regarded as an instance in which a President had courageously done what he believed to be the right thing regardless of public opinion. But Mr. Taft voiced nothing more at the very best than the prejudice of a profession which has never as a whole been distinguished for sympathy with popular government. Every political argument tells against him on this question. Every argument growing out of the necessities of the time and circumstances tells against him. Every argument for the right of a new State to come into the Union with its own fundamental law, if republican in form, tells against him. The only arguments in his favor are those that appeal most strongly to the plutocracy that elected him, that has promised to elect him again if he is "good," and that looks upon judges as its most useful class of upper-grade clerks. The people of California have spoken on this subject as doubtless the people of other States will speak when their time comes, and they have put Mr. Taft to the bad, where, from any but a plutocratic point of view he rightly belongs.

* *

Democracy in Massachusetts.

When hostile Boston newspapers announced George Fred Williams's return to active participation in politics, they possibly did not realize the pleasure they gave to genuine democrats of both parties, alike in Massachusetts and in many other States. But they gave it nevertheless. Were it not that Governor Foss is a pretty advanced Demo-

crat of the democratic kind, one might infer Williams's active participation merely from the Foss platform and without the help of Boston papers. It has the ring of Bryanism in it—of the Bryanism that rallied the Democratic party from its disaster of 1894 under Cleveland's leadership, to begin a warfare against plutocracy in 1896 which has got nearer its object with every campaign and every defeat. Plutocracy is now making a last stand—it looks like its last one—around Taft in the Republican party, and around Harmon in the Democratic party against the prospect of La Follette's defeating Taft for the Republican nomination.

*

That Massachusetts platform has in it such solid democratic planks as these:

Before our institutions lies a jungle of privilege, obstructing the highways of freedom. To clear away this jungle is the work of Democracy. A century of experience has proven that it is Privilege which, with its bosses, lobbies and corruption, has weakened our institutions. Legislatures, yielding to the demands of organized greed, have failed in their service to the people. As with their Constitution, so with their laws, the people now demand an account at the ballot box. Hence our party now again pledges itself to secure a Constitutional amendment for Direct Legislation, known as the Initiative and Referendum, giving to the people, on proper petition, power at the polls to veto objectionable legislation and to propose and enact measures which legislatures refuse.

We believe that the time has come for a full investigation of taxation by a board which cannot be influenced by those who pervert the present laws, and that cities and towns should be required for its information to tabulate separately the valuations of land, of improvements, of chattels, of intangible personalty, to the end that the people may intelligently review the existing system and consider its amendment or displacement.

We believe that the question of equal suffrage should be submitted to the vote of the people. We believe that cities are entitled to frame and amend their own charters, and that their administration should be free from State interference. We believe, however, that the State and cities and towns should co-operate in forming comprehensive, scientific plans for development and beautifications of our municipalities.

The spirit of the platform is summed up in this closing appeal to democrats of both parties to enlist for the struggle against Privilege:

We do not underestimate the power of this system when at bay; its treasury is unlimited, it distrusts the people and popular government; it purchases the highest talent, masters of eloquence defend it; ambition seeks its rewards, social, political and financial; its punishments are terrible, it controls industrial armies and the wealth of the Republic; its leaders possess fortunes unmatched in the his-