

**THE OREGON SYSTEM,
THE STORY OF DIRECT
LEGISLATION IN OREGON**

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The Oregon System, the Story of Direct Legislation in Oregon by Allen H. Eaton

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THE STORY OF DIRECT LEGISLA- TION IN OREGON

*A Presentation of the Methods and Results of the Initiative
and Referendum, and Recall; in Oregon, with Studies
of the Measures Accepted or Rejected, and Special
Chapters on the Direct Primary, Popular Elec-
tion of Senators, Advantages, Defects and
Dangers of the System.*

BY

ALLEN H. EATON



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1912

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

HOW would you like to live in a state where the people can and do enact laws for the common good which their Legislature has failed to enact for them, where they can nullify any obnoxious measure passed by the Legislature, where they can nominate and elect, or defeat for public office, any man regardless of his party strength, and can recall any public officer, Supreme Judge included, whose acts they do not approve; a state where the party boss has been put out of business; a state in short where the people rule and of which Senator Jonathan Bourne says, "It is the best system of popular government in the world today"? Such a state is Oregon.

How would you like to live in a state where the people can and do amend their constitution in the most radical fashion by a minority vote, where one-third of the voters decides the fate of laws affecting the other two-thirds, where one-twentieth of the voters can and do cripple the state educational institutions by holding up their funds; where special interests hire citizens to circulate petitions asking

for the recall of judges who have found them guilty; where men representing themselves as for the people, buy signatures with drinks, forge dead men's names, practice blackmail by buying and selling, for so much per name, signatures for petitions needed to refer certain measures to the people; a state where the demagogue thrives and the energetic crank with money through the Initiative and the Referendum, can legislate to his heart's content; a state of whose system of government Mr. Frederick V. Holeman, a prominent lawyer and writer says: "It is hoped that the time is not far distant when the legal voters of the state will invoke the Initiative to abolish it"? Oregon is such a state.

I have friends who have come to Oregon because the people rule; I have friends who have moved out of Oregon for the same reason. Both Mr. Bourne and Mr. Holeman express the sentiments of two distinct and extreme classes of Oregon citizens. Both these opinions are interesting, and both are sustained by good arguments; but they are misleading, and neither is of much assistance to the less capable though equally affected citizen who must live and work under such a political system. To the man who really wants to know the truth of Oregon's experiment with direct legislation, these opposing opinions lose much of their possible value for the simple reason that they never appear together; that is, one magazine will give space to one side and

another magazine will give space to the other side. Therefore it requires extraordinary effort on the part of the reader to get even the prejudiced statement of both sides.

But all the people of Oregon are not represented by these extremes. There is a rapidly growing class of citizens which realizes that the way out of the woods is neither through the leadership of those who refuse to recognize the evils which grow out of a system of direct legislation, nor through the leadership of those who close their eyes to its benefits and who would, if they had the power, sweep it away. This large class of citizens is watching intelligently the Oregon experiment, hoping to eliminate the evil which grows out of the system; determined to preserve the good. It is for such as these that this book has been written. Therefore its value will not consist in an expression of opinions, but in an unprejudiced examination of the work which the people of Oregon have done since the adoption of the Initiative and the Referendum in 1902.

If the story of the experiment of Oregon with direct legislation is to be of any value to the citizens of our state or to those of other states who are watching us, its narration must be undertaken with the purpose of giving information. The task of presenting the facts as they are is a worthy undertaking, particularly since I do not know of any one

else who has tried to give the history from this unprejudiced standpoint.

It is hoped not only that the book will contain certain facts of value to the student of political science, but that its popular style will recommend it to any inquiring reader whether he has previously studied the question of direct legislation or not; and especially has it been designed to be of use to the many young people in the schools and colleges, and to the older ones in debating societies, who are discussing the subject of direct legislation. Radical changes in human nature will not be brought about by voting in or out any particular political theory. If this is kept in mind, it may not add anything to the pleasure, but it will add much to the profit of the student in his investigation of such an important and far-reaching question as that of Legislation by the People.

A. H. E.

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