

TWO DEMOCRATS SPEAK OUT.

OHIO AND WEST VIRGINIA'S GOVERNORS ARE FOR BALLOT REFORM.

Gov. Campbell to the Ohio Legislature.

The system of ballot reform commonly called the "Australian system" has been successfully adopted in varying forms by 85,000,000 of people. It has been tried five years in Norway seven in England and Italy, twelve in Belgium fourteen in Canada, and thirty in Australia. It has been adopted, with sundry modifications, in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Indiana, Wisconsin, Mississippi, Tennessee, Missouri, Montana, Michigan, Connecticut, and part of Kentucky. One of the most thorough trials of the system was at the recent election in Massachusetts. The late Governor of that State testifies in print that "No one would seriously consider the repeal of this election law and consequent return to the old election methods. Men of all shades of political opinion agree that the measure has worked well, and that it is a permanent part of the statutes of Massachusetts. In its main principles it is beyond criticism." The United States Marshal, belonging to a political party in opposition to the Governor, has written the following: "Let me say that the system is most admirable in its workings. There is no more bulldozing by our manufacturers. They can not march their men to the polls under a foreman and vote them all for one ticket. It does away with everything that makes politics disreputable." Thus it will be seen that the great political parties, or at least such elements in them as look for purity and reform, are fully satisfied with elections under this plan.

The cardinal features of the system are: (1) All ballots must be printed and distributed at public expense; (2) the names of all candidates for the same office must be printed on the same ballot; (3) the ballot must be delivered to the voter within the polling place by sworn officers; (4) only ballots so delivered can be voted; (5) the voter is guaranteed absolute privacy in preparing his ballot, and (6) its secrecy is made compulsory. The foregoing requirements are modified and altered in detail to suit the views of the various States and nations which have adopted them, but the principles here laid down constitute the salient points of advantage over other forms of election. You are recommended to investigate this system, and to introduce it by proper legislation. The details are left to your judgment. The reasons for such action need not be enlarged upon here. It is patent to any one that when the voter must retire to absolute privacy in order to prepare his ballot there is no object in bribing him, because the bribery fails. Equally fruitless would be the attempted intimidation by employers or political bullies, or any of the craftier forms of coercion.

In answer to the principal objection made against the system that it might disfranchise illiterate voters, it may be said that provision can be made for such voters to select one of the ballot clerks to retire with him under severe penalties against divulging what may pass between them. The ballot clerks have no more temptation to act falsely than have the registrars and judges. Another means of accomplishing the same result is to permit the preparation beforehand by the voter, through some trusted friend, of a ballot imitating the official ballot except in color. The illiterate voter can take the prepared ballot into the booth and there copy its markings on the official ballot. This shields him from the discovery of his illiteracy, spares him humiliation, and prevents his possible disfranchisement. It has also been urged that it is too tedious for the elector to mark the name of each candidate for whom he desires to vote. To obviate this difficulty ballots are sometimes so printed that every regularly-nominated ticket stands by itself on the ballot, and can be voted as a whole by merely making one cross mark opposite the caption of said ticket. This does not encourage independence of voting, but disposes of the fallacious charge that voting under this system is too troublesome.

It may be added that there is yet one evil that remains uncorrected by this reform. It terminates direct bribery—that is, the purchase of persons who sell their votes or influence—but it does not check the practice of paying men for voting the ticket of that party to which they nominally belong. There are electors who would not vote against their supposed principles, yet seldom vote for them unless paid. They resort to some subterfuge, such as demanding payment for a day's work, or other equally bald pretext for obtaining money. Such voters can be trusted to retire in privacy and mark the names of the candidates for whom they are thus paid to vote. Consequently, this species of indirect bribery is not prevented by secret voting. It is difficult to know just how to reach it. Possibly, when public sentiment becomes sufficiently educated, a compulsory election law, with severe penalties, may be enforced. It is believed, however, that the attempt to enact such a law would now prove futile, owing to a want of preparation in the public mind, without which no effective legislation can be secured.

Gov. Wilson to the West Virginia Legislature.

"The public sentiment, awakened to the dangers of political corruption, is demanding with unanimous voice throughout the length and breadth of our country, a practical, thorough, and searching ballot reform. To prevent bribery and secure the complete independence of the voter must be the aim and desire of every good citizen. Bribery must be made odious if free institutions survive. Corruption and liberty can no more remain with the same people than can one serve God and mammon. Whatever may be our respective political convictions, certainly we can all unite upon a common ground for the purification of elections and the protection of the ballot.

"The States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Montana, have adopted, in various forms, what is known as the Australian system. Under these laws, elections have been held in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Montana, and they have been found far in advance of the old system. The crystallization of public opinion in favor of the Australian system, indicates that it will be generally adopted throughout the United States.

"Knowing by experience the difficulty of preparing a bill of considerable magnitude during the limited time of a legislative session as an aid to the Legislature, if it be concluded to adopt this system, I have drafted a bill in harmony with the constitutional organization of the State, which is attached hereto, and which I present as a part hereof. Having confidence that it will secure the absolute independence of the voter by enabling him to prepare and deposit his ballot without possible interference, and that it will secure fairer and purer elections in this State I recommend that it be adopted."

The bill which follows is made a part of the message. It is a document of marvelous completeness, guarding against every possible opening for corruption at the polls. To its construction Gov. Wilson devoted several weeks of intense labor, and the production may be considered as nearly perfect as such a measure can be brought. It secures an absolutely secret ballot, and thus prevents the briber from knowing that he has secured the goods that he has bought. The ballots are to be prepared by the State and ample precautions are provided against repeating, ballot box stuffing, or any of the numerous devices to which the unprincipled politicians resort. In the Governor's own language, it can be said "that only the purchase of every man connected with the election will open any door for corruption under this bill."