

GOVERNOR HUGHES, THE LEGISLATURE, AND PRI- MARY REFORM

I believe that Governor Hughes has been supported by the bulk of the wisest and most disinterested public opinion as regards most of his measures and positions, and I think that this has been markedly the case as regards direct primary nominations. I know that many honest and sincere men are on principle opposed to Governor Hughes on this point, and I know also that the proposed reform will very possibly accomplish less than its extreme advocates expect: while I am well aware, as of course all thinking men must be, that the worth of any such measure in the last resort depends upon the character of the voters, and that no patent device will ever secure good government unless the people themselves devote sufficient energy, time, and judgment to make the device work. Finally, I freely admit that here and there, where the principle of direct nominations has been applied in too crude shape or wrongheadedly, it has, while abolishing certain evils, produced or accentuated others—in certain cases, for instance,

putting a premium upon the lavish expenditure of money.

But while I freely admit all this, I nevertheless feel, in the first place, that on the fundamental issue of direct primary nominations the Governor is right, and, in the second place, that, as the measure finally came up for action in the State Legislature, it was well-nigh free from all objections save those of the men who object to it because they are fundamentally opposed to any change whatever in the desired direction. The bill provided only for direct popular action in the primaries in relatively small geographical and political communities, thereby making the experiment first where there was least liability to serious objection, and avoiding or deferring the task of dealing with those big communities where the difficulties and dangers to be overcome would be greatest. Moreover, while guaranteeing full liberty of individual action, it also provided for the easy maintenance of party organization, and thereby avoided some very real dangers—among them that of encouraging the use of masses of the minority party in any given district to dictate the actions of the majority party. In other words, the proposed bill, while it marked a very real step in advance, was tentatively and cautiously framed, and provided all possible safeguards against abuses. If in practice it had failed to work in any particular, there would have been no possible difficulty in making whatever amendments or changes were necessary.

The Republican party was in the majority in both houses of the Legislature which refused to carry out the Republican Governor's recommendations: and although it was only a minority of the Republican members which brought about this refusal, the party cannot escape a measure of responsibility for the failure; but it is only just to remember that a clear majority of the Republican members of each house supported the bill, whereas three-fourths or over of the Democrats opposed it. This is one of the cases where it is easier to apportion individual than party responsibility.

Those who believe that by their action they have definitely checked the movement

for direct popular primaries are, in my judgment, mistaken. In its essence, this is a movement to make the Government more democratic, more responsive to the wishes and needs of the people as a whole. With our political machinery it is essential to have an efficient party, but the machinery ought to be suited to democratic and not oligarchic customs and habits. The question whether in a self-governing republic we shall have self-governing parties is larger than the particular bill. We hold that the right of popular self-government is incomplete unless it includes the right of the voters not merely to choose between candidates when they have been nominated, but also the right to determine who these candidates shall be. Under our system of party government, therefore, the voters should be guaranteed the right to determine within the ranks of their respective organizations who the candidates of the parties will be, no less than the right to choose between the candidates when the candidates are presented them. There is no desire to break down the responsibility of party organization under duly constituted party leadership, but there is a desire to make this responsibility real and to give the members of the party the right to say whom they desire to execute this leadership. In New York State no small part of the strength of the movement has come from the popular conviction that many of the men most prominent in party leadership tend at times to forget that in a democracy the function of a political leader must normally be to lead, not to drive. We, the men who compose the great bulk of the community, wish to govern ourselves. We welcome leadership, but we wish our leaders to understand that they derive their strength from us, and that, although we look to them for guidance, we expect this guidance to be in accordance with our interests and our ideals.

I believe that the people of New York State will in the end insist on taking a more direct part in the nomination of candidates, because I believe that they will grow more and more to insist on just the kind of guidance and leadership that I have mentioned.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.