

## THE ELECTION OF ALDERMEN \*

IN New York, where the nominating power is so largely divorced from the mass of the voters of the same party, it is peculiarly necessary to have the machinery of elections easily understood by outsiders, and moreover, to enable the people who vote to pass as directly as possible upon the candidates proposed by the people who nominate. The present system is so complicated that nine-tenths of the voters do not understand it at all. Out of my six Republican colleagues among the New York assemblymen, three did not know anything about our aldermanic representation. I question if one in ten of my constituents is aware of the real working of so-called minority representation. This ignorance allows professional wire-pullers to virtually work their own sweet will in manipulating the ballots, both before and after they are cast. If any alderman has made himself peculiarly obnoxious to the people and peculiarly useful to the politicians, the latter can almost always force him upon the former. Each party can nominate but two candidates, while three must be elected, and in this way the politicians in this case nominate but one man, and he will be elected, even if half the voters of his own party repudiate him. The only way to defeat him is to go to the trouble and expense of nominating a fourth candidate. By the present system, to scratch both minority candidates has no effect at all. If they are

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both bad it is impossible to get at them, except again by nominating outside candidates. As a further peculiarity, the present system forces a candidate to make his whole canvass against his own nominal friends. No man need care in the slightest degree what vote his so-called opponents poll, provided only that he can poll a larger vote than the other man on his own ticket. As a matter of fact every underhanded expedient known to the lowest kind of trading politics is called into play, to cut down the vote of the nominal "colleague," and as a rule the man who stoops to the lowest trickery wins. Of course, it is impossible ever to stop trading entirely, but if one alderman came from each assembly district, there would at least be a chance of all the candidates of one party in that district winning, or at least such of them as the people wished to elect; but by the present system it is impossible for both of the minority candidates to win, while one of them must win. In consequence there is a premium on treachery.

The president of the board should be elected at large. He fills a very important office. He is a member of the board of estimate and apportionment, and it is right that the people should pass on him with direct regard to his fitness for that position. The only benefit of the present system is that it nominally secures representation for the minority, but it gives the minority the same representation no matter how large or how small it may be. My proposed bill giving one alderman to each assembly district would insure from five to seven Republican aldermen in the board, so that the party would not suffer appreciably, while the method in other respects would certainly be an improvement on the present system. We could hold each assembly district association directly responsible for its nomination, and

the people could pass upon the merits of that candidate as compared with his opponent, neither of which things is possible under the present curious system.

I would have preferred to have one alderman elected for each senatorial district, making the board consist of seven aldermen. I think this would give a board of higher character. The only reason I did not introduce the bill in this shape was because it could be opposed by the Republicans on the ground that the Republican minority of the city would run the risk of being entirely unrepresented on the board. I attach no weight whatever to this view myself, but I did not care to excite strong party feeling against any bill which would do away with the cumbersome and complicated machinery of the present system.