

## THE SHORT BALLOT \*

THE time has come when we can no longer tolerate slovenly inefficiency in our government. There has been altogether too much of such slovenly inefficiency in the past in the government of nation, State, and city; and we are becoming too big, our interests are too important, our business interests and our human interests too important longer to tolerate it. And in order to get rid of such inefficiency we need to choose the right men, to have those men given ample power, and then to hold them responsible for the way they handle that power. In other words, my plea is for a system under which you will know the men that you are electing to office; under which they will have full power in office; and, third, under which you will have full power over them.

Public servants must be given ample power to enable them to do their work. Remember that. If you tie the hands of a public servant so that he cannot do ill, you tie his hands so that he cannot do well. Don't try for a moment to restrain the public man in office by shackling him. Leave his hands free. Give him the chance to do the job, and turn him out if he does not do the job well. Just as it is in private life. If I want a man under me to do a job, I will give him the power to do it, and I will say: "I want you to do that piece of work." Now if he says: "How am I to do it?" I

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will say: "I will take another man. I will take some one else to do it." If I am trusted to do a job, I want the power given to me and then I will be held accountable for it. But give me the chance to make or mar that job myself.

You and I cannot exercise a wise choice if we are asked to vote on a multitude of names. I want each of you to think of your own experience. If you are given a ticket with thirty or forty names to vote for, how many of them will you know anything about? You cannot know anything about them. You may know about a few men, but the ordinary citizen cannot be expected to be able to fix in his mind the identity of obscure politicians. The public servants for whom you vote should be so few in number that the people may know whom it is they are choosing to administer any particular office. A long ballot, cumbered with many names, is of all possible devices the one best adapted to give professional politicians, bread-and-butter politicians, the utmost possible advantage over ordinary citizens in the choice of public officers. The professional bread-and-butter man, whose business it is, can and will take the time to know about every man on such a ballot. It is his business, but you and I will not normally take the time. I will put it stronger than that. You and I cannot normally take the time; we cannot remember and we cannot be expected to remember the identity of a great number of individuals, no one of whom has to do a very important piece of work.

We must make the names few in number, and the work to be done by each man so important that it will rivet the attention of the ordinary man. If the ordinary citizen is awake to his own interest, he will insist

upon having a ballot upon which only a few names appear, each candidate being a candidate for an office so important as to make it reasonably certain that those who vote for him vote with a full understanding both of the man and of the office. In other words, I believe that the short ballot gives the people real instead of nominal power, and gives the man in office the power to do efficient work if he is honest and capable, and at the same time places him in such a position that, if he fails, the people will be immediately able to place the failure, and to hold accountable the man responsible for it.

One of the chief difficulties in American life in the way of getting good public service is the fact that too often we Americans tend to keep only a debit account with our public servants. Now I ask for a balance-sheet. I am not speaking jocosely, I am telling you the truth. Too often the only acts of a public servant that are commented on by the public are those the public does not like. Now a forceful man is necessarily the only kind of man who can be the best public servant. You cannot get very much out of a weakling. You want a forceful man. A forceful man is sure to do a great many things, and some of those things will be things you don't like. He will make some mistakes. Now hold the mistakes against him. Keep your debit account, but keep your credit account also. It is because our people so often fail to do this that the habit has grown in nominating conventions to seek for a dark horse, to seek for some colorless creature who has done nothing wrong because he has never done anything at all. You all put him in office with a whoop, and then turn round and, instead of blaming yourselves, blame the wretched creature himself because he has been found out, when

really it is your own fault for having put him in. Keep track of your public men who go wrong; punish every man who goes wrong; and make the public man who does right feel and understand that he has done right. That is the way to get really efficient service. When you have public officials whom you believe to be honest and intelligent and headed the right way, give them as cordial support as possible while they are engaged in the extraordinarily difficult task of achieving genuine self-government for all of us. They need your support; they need your help. Criticise them when they go wrong; but stand by them when they do right.