

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 71.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## BERGER'S MISS NO. 26.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A** RED Letter Day in the annals of Representative Scott Ferris of Oklahoma was May 22d.

On that day the vibrant radicalism of the Oklahoman had full swing. Initiative, Referendum, even Recall—this was the trinity before which Mr. Ferris—like David of old, when the Ark was wheeled into the City of Zion—danced to the rhythm of a flow of eloquence plentiful and resistless. Particularly enthusiastic was the Representative over the Initiative and Referendum. With these once established in Nevada to begin with, “full power” was henceforth to be enjoyed by the citizen “to play his part in initiating legislation.”

However necessary representative government is when population becomes too numerous to meet in “Committee of the Whole” and itself attend directly to legislation, it does not follow that population has no choice, after it has become too numerous for direct legislation, but allows all its power to ooze out of itself and ooze into the officials whom it elects to represent it. So cardinal is this principle of democracy that—with the single exception of the United States Supreme Court Justices, with whom the old leaven is still maintained under a variety of pretexts—life terms are not recognized in this country. All officials are elected for a certain, usually a short term. This is a check upon official irresponsibility. Any additional check, such as the Initiative, the Referendum and also the Recall, cannot but be wholesome. It is in line with the limitation of officers' terms. Rationally applied, the one and the other are aidful to the maintenance of the people's sovereignty. So far as that goes, Initiative, Referendum and Recall deserve applause. For this very reason the posture of Representative Ferris calls for condemnation.

No greater injury can be done to a good measure than to exaggerate its efficacy. To expect from a measure, good and desirable in itself, an effectiveness that is not

in it, is to cover up, intentionally or unintentionally, and to protect the very evils that the new measure is falsely boosted to alleviate. The end of the story can only be to discredit the good measure itself. This is what Ferris-like orations are calculated to achieve.

Inherently, the Initiative, the Referendum, the Recall are nothing but differentiations of the Suffrage. The three measures partake of all the power, and also of all the weakness, of the Suffrage. What this weakness is the man and woman of average information knows in this year of grace.

Once upon a time it used to be believed that the Suffrage was a sort of miraculous weapon, instinct with the power to perform wonders. With this superstition as the impulse, the right of the Suffrage was striven for to the neglect of all other things. Once obtained, the right of the Suffrage revealed its weaknesses. It revealed itself as an alphabet, with which bad as well as good words can be spelled—according to the speller, or the wielder of the Suffrage. Fire will burn, whether in the hands of child or man. Otherwise with the Suffrage. Its effectiveness has been ascertained to be no more and no less than the knowledge of him who wields it. Thus in Republican and manhood-suffrage America, poverty has been seen to deepen and widen: tyranny, political and economic, to increase. Despite the recall-power of the masses at periodical elections to recall, by voting down, the political agencies of plutocratic and political tyranny, these have been duly reelected; despite the referendum-power to condemn the legislation that tyrannized and pauperized the workers, the same was endorsed and confirmed by the re-election of the evildoers; despite the initiative-power to introduce measures in the interest of the masses, these measures were either ignored or voted down. Obviously, to a perceptible extent, Initiative, Referendum and Recall are powers or rights that the people now have. Equally obvious is the fact that these powers have not been used, or, if used, remain ineffective for good.

Why?

Indiscriminate praise of the Initiative, Referendum and Recall drowns the answer.

The answer is that what our people have been exercising their suffrage on, initiating, referendoming and recalling, has been MEN, not PRINCIPLES. Deluded

with the idea that our Government was “the best possible,” our people have been pinning their faith on men—“good men”—“honest men”—only to find out that things remained as they were. Hence disheartenment. Once enlightened upon the facts; once realizing that our “best of all possible governments” has seen its day; once aware that the country has outgrown its old-time clothes and now needs a suit in keeping with its present ampler proportions; in short, once our people have become Socialists—from that moment on the Suffrage power they now hold would be ample for all practical purposes. Wild, lurid declamation for “the Initiative, Referendum, Recall—and Freedom,” is calculated to turn the people’s thoughts away from the essence to the shadow, from the goal to the means, and thus turn means into goal to the injury of the working class.

Representative Ferris spoke without interruption. Even the Republicans must have been gratified at the chloroform that he was plentifully dispensing for public consumption. Was Victor L. Berger also chloroformed? Did his pure and simple political Socialist physiology succumb to the Oklahoman’s narcotic? Or was he of the opinion that the false sociology dealt out by Representative Ferris did “not bear upon fundamental questions”? Whatever the reason, the “first Socialist in Congress” failed to puncture the Ferris bubble, and, by so failing, earned the reprobation of {the} Working Class and the Socialists.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded July 2012

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)