

REJECT INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM.

ADOPTION of initiative and referendum in the State of Washington would be an act of unspeakable folly on the part of the people. Any citizen who thinks otherwise, would do well to examine into the provisions of House Bill No. 153, which provides:

"The legislative authority of the State of Washington shall be vested in the Legislature * * * but the people reserve to themselves the power to propose bills or laws, and to enact or reject the same at the polls, independent of the Legislature, and also reserve power, at their own option, to approve or reject at the polls any act, item, section or part of any bill, act or law passed by the Legislature."

The proposed amendment makes it easy for the man or set of men who would dabble in law-making independently of the Legislature. It provides:

"Ten per centum, but in no case more than 50,000, of the legal voters, shall be required to propose any measure by such petition. * * *

"Such initiative measures shall take precedence over all other measures in the Legislature except appropriation bills and shall be either enacted or rejected without change or amendment. * * *

"If any such initiative measure shall be enacted by the Legislature it shall be subject to the referendum petition, or it may be enacted and referred by the Legislature to the people for approval or rejection at the next regular election. * * *

"The referendum * * * may be ordered on any act, bill, law, or any part thereof passed by the Legislature, except such laws as may be necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health or safety. * * *

"Six per centum, but in no case more than 10,000, of the legal voters shall be required to sign and make a valid referendum petition. * * *

"The veto power of the Governor shall not extend to measures initiated by or referred to the people. * * *

"Any measure * * * shall become the law if it is approved by a majority of the votes cast thereon, provided that the vote * * * shall equal one-third of total votes cast at said election."

If there be not enough potential mischief outlined in the parts of the law just quoted, a careful reading of the entire amendment will reveal other sources of annoyance and disaster.

The present situation is bad enough, when the Legislature meets every two years, and turns the laws of the State topsy-turvy.

But here is a plan for practically continuous performance in law-making and law-tinkering.

The worst phase is the power vested in the minority. It is a monstrous thing to suggest that 10 per cent of the voters can "initiate" legislation. It is equally monstrous that 6 per cent of the voters can "refer" a measure, thereby forcing the people to go to the polls after the legislators have considered and acted upon any given subject.

It is practically unthinkable that so mean and obscure a minority and a "majority" of "one-third of total votes cast" on any such measure shall cause it to prevail.

"One-third of total votes" is 33 1-3 per cent of such total; a majority of such 33 1-3 per cent is a bare majority 50 per cent of "total votes cast."

Now, assuming that only a small fraction of the people vote, it can easily be seen how an active and persistent minority could keep the entire State in turmoil all the time.

Vote down the "initiative and referendum." Their adoption would mean calamity for the entire State.