

Patching Our Constitution

By JAY LOVESTONE

By a vote of 63-5 the Senate adopted the Norris resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution advancing the date of the presidential inauguration and the assembling of the new Congress.

Should this amendment become a law the newly elected Congress hereafter will meet on the first Monday in the January following, and not, as now, in the second December following, or thirteen months after election. The President will then be inaugurated on the third Monday in January instead of the fourth of March.

What the Amendment Means

It was the last election and Harding's fight for the Ship Subsidy Bill that brought this proposal into life. Last November many Senators and Congressmen were defeated. Yet, they were continuing to enact legislation involving the lives and fortunes of the country.

This proved very irritable to the Republican insurgents who were anxious to garner the fruits of their victory with the minimum delay.

Also, Harding's aggravated insistence to rush thru the repudiated House the bonus to the Shipping Trust concentrated popular attention on the highly unrepresentative character of the American Congress. In the November elections scores of legislators met defeat because of their attitude on the Ship Subsidy Bill. The new Congress is decisively opposed to the President's shipping legislation and Harding is attempting to jam the bill thru despite the overwhelming popular sentiment against it.

The Norris amendment aims at cutting shorter the life of the lame ducks by eleven months. Under its provisions defeated legislators would be able to pass laws for the two months following election instead of thirteen months as at present. This bill was born and raised in the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry and not in the Committee on the Judiciary. It is largely a response to the farmers' psychology and dissatisfaction. The reasoning of the farmer has thus been well summed up by a careful Washington observer:

"If I discharge one hired man and take on another, I ought not to be compelled to wait a year and a month for the new man to take hold." To the discontented farmer and to sundry progressives the system of electing a Congress in November to function thirteen months later is ridiculous and antiquated.

The amendment is now in the hands of the House Committee on the Election of President, Vice-President and Representatives in Congress. Of this Committee of 13, six are lame ducks. Granting that this committee should make a favorable report there is little chance of the bill receiving the necessary two-thirds' majority for its enactment. There are only 15 legislative days left and there is a giant army of lame ducks at whom this very bill is aimed, to contend with. What is more, the sentiment even among the other Congressmen is not overwhelmingly favorable. Typical of the sentiment amongst the latter is the following expression of Representative McKensie: "I think the old Fathers thought these matters over pretty carefully when they wrote the Constitution. It is a matter the people are not concerned about."

And in the cloak rooms of the House the talk is that the Senate adopted the measure to get rid of it, fearing that it was part of the filibustering tactics of Norris and his bloc and knowing that the House would sentence it to a peaceful death in the pigeon-holes of the special committee. Representative Mondell, majority floor-leader, frankly admitted as much.

An Empty Victory

Many liberals, progressives, independents, insurgents, and Gompers' non-partisan friends of labor hail this amendment as a great victory for the people—a monumental achievement in the radicalization of the American government. For the sake of argument, let us grant that the Norris proposal will receive the necessary two-thirds' majority vote in the House and the approval of the legislatures or conventions of three-fourths of the States for its becoming law as an amendment to the Constitution. Then, how would such a law alter the employing class character of the government?

Such an amendment would, at best, remove only one of the secondary blurs on the American Constitution. It would not fundamentally alter, by an iota, the capitalist nature of the government and would not make the government an organ of working-class liberation. This amendment leaves untouched all the important barriers set up by the Fathers of the Constitution against the government serving as an organ for the expression of the will of the masses. The Fathers consciously and deliberately built the American government as an agency of the property-owning class—in the parlance of the class struggle of today, as a capitalist class dictatorship.

Our Constitution is replete with the most cleverly devised and effective means for baffling the will of the masses. The insignificant advance of the Norris proposal toward making the government more responsive to the masses does not even scratch the surface of the class nature of American democracy. There is not a single constitution of any government on earth that is as difficult of alteration as ours is. Merely to amend the Constitution requires a two-thirds' vote in both Houses and the approval of the legislatures or conventions of three-fourths of the states. Thirteen of the smallest states, containing the lowest number of workers, can thus

block the will of the mass of workers. The whole system of checks and balances, as showing the division of power among the House, the Senate and the President, the unlimited powers of the courts, the great power of the committee system in Congress, and the irresponsible Cabinet are amongst the fundamental barriers buttressing the very structure of our government—barriers which have not even been touched by the Norris amendment. The Senate, for instance, has been well called the most extraordinary example of the rotten-rotten system. Two-thirds of the Senators are hold-overs after each election, and the 600,000 people of Arizona, Nevada and Wyoming, whose majority of the population is non-industrial, can balance the States of Illinois, Pennsylvania and New York, the vast majority of whose 25,000,000 people are industrial workers.

There is nothing radical about this Norris proposal. No one can or will accuse the British government of being radical or especially built to serve as a government of the working class. Yet, the new House of Commons went into session within five days after its election. Furthermore, no one can or will accuse Moses, a Textile Trust Senator, Warren of the Wool Trust and often called the greatest shepherd since Abraham Phipps of Colorado and Steel Trust fame, and Lodge, Lenroot, Spencer McCormick, Colt, McLean, and Frelinghuysen radicals or progressives of the palest sort. But these were amongst the Senators voting for the Norris bill.

This proposed amendment does not modify in any important way the American government. The Norris Bill merely brings into bold relief the inherent class character of the American government. The Borah, LaFollette, group of Gompers hail even the possibility of this bill becoming a law further exposes the organic unfitness of our present system of government serving as an agency for the liberation of the great masses of workers. All the noise about this empty victory only tears the mask off the fraudulent American democracy—the dictatorship of the employing class over and against the working class.

February "You Worker" Out.

The February issue of the YOUNG WORKER, official organ of the Y. W. L. of America, is now on sale, and may be obtained at any branch meeting or from 257 Fullerton Ave., Chicago, Ill. It contains an excellent array of articles on the Congress of the Young Communist International, experiences in Germany, on literature, and the Workers' Party convention.

The more popular tone of the magazine is certain to make a large number of new readers for this fine paper. It sells for ten cents.

Russian Film in Successful Showings

More than 2,000 persons saw the showing of the seven-reel film, "Russia Thru the Shadows," in New Haven, Conn.

