Sooner Books and Authors

The Non-Partisan Ballot


This is a study of the actual working of a particular sort of ballot—one on which political reformers staked great hopes. In 1913 cities of the third class in Pennsylvania adopted a non-partisan ballot for use in their city elections; in 1919 this ballot was abolished, and the partisan one was re-adopted. The question as to why the cities returned to the partisan ballot inevitably arises. Was it done away with by a reactionary and machine controlled legislature, or was it tried and found wanting?

The author has gone to the politicians and newspaper files for the facts. He has interviewed hundreds of city officials and other interested observers of city politics, and has received more than a thousand letters from those that held office during the six year period when the non-partisan ballot was used, and the following six year period when party ballots were used, that men elected in the former period had more wealth and ability and a better education than those of the latter period. He also found, after statistical examination of the votes cast, that the number of citizens interested under the non-partisan system was as great as under the partisan system. His conclusion, on the whole, is that the non-partisan ballot is of special value in a state like Pennsylvania where party lines are sharply drawn, in that it prevents the party name from being used as a smoke screen to hide inferior candidates. His findings also show that the ballot was abandoned, not by the will of the cities using it, but by the will of the party machine working in the state legislature.

This book would be valuable for students of municipal government and political parties, to people interested in clearly seeing how nominations are made in a city election, and what makes for success at the polls. The study is on the border line between political science and sociology. James W. Enant.

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Draws Dreiser Pictures