

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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DIRECT LEGISLATION.

For over two years by petition, by deputation, by public meetings, and by resolutions the people of this Dominion have striven to impress upon the Government their earnest desire for some restriction of the liquor traffic. This period of strenuous work has caused all thoughtful women to ponder well the question how they can not only impress the will of the electors upon Cabinet, but how they can compel an obstinate Government to give effect to the will of the people. Many have turned their thoughts to and have made enquiries about the Initiative and the Referendum. For many years the W.C.T.U. Convention passed resolutions in favour of the Initiative and Referendum, but this last year or two this resolution has been overlooked. Now, however, the absolute refusal of the Cabinet to give effect to the will of the people has brought before us the necessity for direct legislation. Surely if ever a people were in earnest, the people are in earnest for 6 o'clock closing. Petitions, resolutions, and appeals have poured in to Cabinet from all quarters; business men, as well as temperance reformers, have pressed for it. Mothers have laboured and prayed; have stood at street corners; have canvassed diligently for signatures to petitions, pleading that temptation be removed from their sons. Government set up a Board of business men to take evidence on all points connected with national efficiency, and these men, after hearing evidence from both sides, and weighing this evidence

most carefully, decided that the cancer of intemperance had eaten so deeply into our national vitals that only the most drastic application of the surgeon's knife could effect a cure, and so they recommended National Prohibition. These men were not nominees of the Temperance party; they were independent men, appointed by the Government because of their business ability. But the Government not only refuses to give effect to the recommendations of the National Efficiency Board, but it openly flouts the will of the people so strongly and emphatically expressed, and refuses to give even 6 o'clock closing. Their Bill, we understand, provides for 8 o'clock closing. Again, in regard to the matter of suburban trains, the Minister of Railways treats Chambers of Commerce, City Councils, and the general public as a pack of naughty children, who must be given, not what they want, but what the all-wise Minister thinks they ought to want. The Minister stated in the House that the Railway Department, having conveyed folk to and from their work, had fulfilled its obligation to suburbanites. Granting this position, what about Friday nights? Can the Department claim to have fulfilled even this limited obligation until it provides a train to bring workers home on the late night, Friday. This the Minister obstinately refuses to do, while it provides two trains to bring home pleasure-seekers on Saturday night. Now, the Initiative and Referendum lessen the power of Parliament, and give more power to the voters. Had these measures been in force here a far smaller

petition than the one submitted to Parliament would have compelled the Government to take a vote upon six o'clock closing, and who doubts what the result of such a vote would be?

In at least two of the United States, where the liquor and gambling interests brought so much pressure to bear upon the Legislature that they refused to submit the amendment in favour of woman's suffrage, the women got up an initiative petition, and had the amendment submitted without the consent of the Legislature, and it was carried, sweeping every county. Canada's eight-hour law for women was also secured by an initiative petition.

There has been strong opposition to several enactments of the National Government. For instance, the war bonus to highly salaried Government officials. Under direct legislation, the people could have sent up a petition calling for a Referendum, and the question must then be submitted to the voters, and if they express disapproval, the Act of the Government becomes null and void. The Initiative and Referendum have been adopted in twenty of the United States, with the very best results. Switzerland has it in 21 out of its 22 cantons; they have had it from 30 to 50 years, and it works thoroughly well. The only canton which has it not is given over to bribery and corruption, and has the heaviest per capita cantonal debt in Switzerland. Readers of Arthur Mee's books, "Defeat" and "The Fiddlers," know well the havoc the infamous trade is making in Great Britain. And here it is no less destructive. We are short of shipping