

The Hartford Times

Friday, July 2, 1965

“On the Outside”

There was a brisk and independent breeze and the flags flashed in it.

Most of the available public attention was not concerned with flags, however. It was fixed on the hoisting across the street where white masonry window frames were being slung into place with infinite skill on the rising Hartford National Bank building.

Apart from that attraction the approaching citizen could note how, for this constitutional occasion, the lawn of the Old State House at last had been tidied up and the grass cut. It had received attention denied the clock in the cupola which still ran five minutes slow, proclaiming the unhurried majesty of events taking place below, where the Constitution was under repair.

FROM THE OPEN windows of the Old State House came a faint drone of voices; governmental incantations and mysteries were signified within, while without, stony-faced old Thomas Hooker posed impassively atop his pedestal.

Then, quickly, the Governor and his escort emerged, cheerily shaking hands, and evidently the thing was done. This convention was under way amidst historic pressure.

In an age more apprehensive, unsettled and touchy about revising a definition of its rights, there might have been a parade — some monumental exuberance along with the serious business of the Constitution — with a drunk or two to be hustled away from the sober scores of watchful onlookers.

Not here.

It had to be concluded that nowadays democracy has been so correctly and conventionally refined that very few have to concern themselves about it.

BUT THEN one saw the poster.

It stirred a sudden thought that, after all, a lot of people really ought to have been here.

For the poster asserted: “One Man-One Vote Reapportionment Will Bring About a Dictatorship in Disguise.”

So here it was, propped right up in front of the faces of the constitutional convention delegates: If you act to let everybody have an equal vote, you are going to ruin the state!

A quick look around confirmed that this was 1965, and not the Convention of 1818, about which time it was the rage to believe that lopsided voting was to be preferred and that not all votes and not all men should count the same.

WHY, ONE ASKED, would an equally weighted vote for everyone bring about a dictatorship — in disguise moreover?

Well, it was explained, the bosses (apparently the CITY bosses) would get the whip hand.

There should be an offset, like the power of the purer conscience of the towns, some sort of a check, you know, on the threat of an overbearing popular government.

Clearly, the poster's sponsors discountenanced the existence of any small-town bosses or dictatorships in disguise.

And clearly they must run into frustrations.

For although it is estimated that within a few years 80 per cent of all our people will be urban residents, this poster argued that for their own good such a majority of people should be denied their right to an equal vote and accept as their legislative conservators the acres, cows and corporate structures of the environs and — resultantly — the will of the minority of the people.

The poster was an antique, a genuine old idea.

Comprehension and Critical Thinking Questions:

1. What was the main event taking place in the article?
2. How does the author describe the atmosphere outside the Old State House?
3. What does the poster in the article argue about "one man-one vote" (referred to today as "one person, one vote") reapportionment?
4. Why do you think the author mentions the Convention of 1818?
5. What does the author suggest about democracy in 1965 compared to earlier times?
6. According to the article, why might some people have opposed equal voting rights?
7. How does the author use tone and sarcasm to critique the argument against "one person, one vote"?
8. What does the article imply about the shift in population from rural areas to cities? How does that relate to voting power?