

## **TO REVISE CONSTITUTION**

### **Connecticut Democrats Want to Revise Present Borough System.**

## **TOWNS NOW RULE THE CITIES**

### **A System that Works an Injustice to the Densely Populated Centres of the State.**

#### ***Special to the New York Times.***

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NEW HAVEN, Sept. 15 – Constitutional reform is to be the keynote of the campaign in this State this Fall. An organization, non-partisan in character, and made up of leading men of both parties in this State, has revived the movement towards this end, and the State Democratic Convention will place the question before the voters as the paramount issue of the State campaign. The question of the much-needed reforms is one that appeals to fair-minded members of both parties. The Constitution of Connecticut at the present time requires a wholly unequal representation of the population in both houses of the General Assembly, and provides that a majority instead of a plurality shall elect the State officers. These are the prime causes of discontent with the present Constitution, and it is amendments that will bring the law up to date so as to give fair and equal representation both to the whole population and the partisan voters that the agitators for a change are anxious to have incorporated in a new Constitution.

Adopted in 1818, the Constitution of Connecticut has stood, with but a few minor amendments, ever since. As it was written the document met the needs of the State in 1818. There were then 275,000 inhabitants, 90 per cent of whom lived in the country towns. There were then 122 towns in the State, of which nine only exceeded 4,000 in population, and the largest city in the State had but 8,300. The smallest town had 731 inhabitants, and eleven had less than 1,000 people. The provision that every town incorporated before 1785 should have two members in the House and every town thereafter incorporated one, had no inconsistencies in 1818, when all of such towns under the former head were about equal in population. In fact for thirty years, up to 1848, the plan seemed to call for no change, though there had been a growing feeling that the future would demand a revision of this plan of representation in the law-making bodies.

Just previous to 1840 the shifting of the population from town to town had become so apparent a factor in State representation that there was talk of a change. Ten years later another factor entered into the situation. In 1837 the Connecticut Assembly passed what was known as the Joint Stock act, framed by Theodore Hinsdale, a manufacturer of the time, and this act soon caused economic changes of great importance. The act was itself the beginning of what has since become such a power in commercial and business life, private corporations. The idea of the Connecticut act spread rapidly, and later became embodied in the statutes of other States, in

the National law, and even in the English limited liability law of 1855. As a result of this new factor in business life, a total rearrangement of the people came about. The exodus from the farm to the cities began and immigrants, coming to such centres of population as assured them of the most substantial return for their labor, added to the growth of the large manufacturing towns. From 9 per cent of the population living in the cities in 1800 the ratio grew to 20 per cent in 1850 and was in 1890 52 per cent. During all these years and side by side with the phenomenal increase in city population, the principle of representation – two members from each town, regardless of number of inhabitants – has not been changed, and Connecticut is today, in the 1900 stage of her history, governing herself by the methods of 1818.

The population of Connecticut has increased from 251,000 in 1800 to 746,000 in 1890 (The figures for the 1900 census are not yet published for this State.) In this period of nearly 100 years the cities have increased from an aggregate of 12,000 in 1800 to 394,000 in 1890. There has been an increase from 122 to 168 towns (including cities) in this period. Where there were two cities in 1820, there are now seventeen, and the towns are constantly decreasing in population, while the cities are increasing. In spite of this fact the method of representation has remained unchanged, with the result that the most remarkable inequalities now exist.

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### **Comprehension and Critical Thinking Questions:**

1. What were the main problems with Connecticut's Constitution in 1900?
2. How did more people moving from farms to cities create unfair voting rules?
3. How did the number of people living in cities compare to those in rural areas over time in Connecticut?
4. Why do you think the government didn't change its voting rules, even though the population was growing in cities?
5. Why might some people have wanted to keep the old voting system?
6. How could unfair representation in government affect laws and decisions?