

The Washington Blanket Primary*

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The Washington blanket primary law is an extension into the primaries of the right of independent voting which the electorate of the State has long practiced in the November elections. If independents and those only mildly partisan pick and choose among the candidates of the two parties in the general elections, why should they not have the same privilege in the primaries? If they vote for the man and not for the party in November, why should they not vote for the nomination of the best man, regardless of party, in September? The Washington State Grange said there was no argument against taking this step and it presented us with the blanket primary. To be sure, the law was enacted by the Legislature, but there is no doubt that the Grange initiative brought this action from the Legislature.

Let no one doubt that the voters have used the blanket primary as its promoters hoped they would. In 1936, Republicans by tens of thousands came into the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Democratic candidates for governor received 402,699 votes, while Republican candidates received only 100,498 votes. Do Democrats outnumber Republicans in this State by the ratio of 4 to 1? The votes for aspirants for nomination to other offices give a negative answer. The Democratic primary

vote for offices other than that of governor was not quite twice the Republican vote. Again, votes in the general election show that the 4 to 1 proportion is wrong. Martin won the governorship over Hartley in proportion of 2½ to 1, and the other Democrats won by smaller proportions. It is therefore perfectly clear that Republicans, in wholesale lots, supported Democratic candidates for governor in the primaries, and it is a matter of common knowledge in this State that these Republicans supported Martin.

The results in 1936 were satisfactory to conservatives of the State, and one has heard very little complaint about the blanket primary since the autumn of that year. But suppose some "radical" Republicans, Democrats, and others should combine and nominate a candidate as Martin was nominated in 1936. My guess is that the blanket primary would lose many of its friends and would be quite likely to lose its life. We should bear in mind, however, that the blanket primary is in its infancy and draw no conclusions, except purely tentative ones, at this time.

*Abstract of paper read before the Social Science Section of the Northwest Scientific Association, December 27, at 2:00 p. m.