

# “Supreme Directional Control” in Operation

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The two divergent views that are now held by the Saints regarding the important question of church government are in documentary form and both have been presented through the columns of the HERALD.

The “Open letter” was signed and set forth by a group of general church officials in defense of the law and practice that has obtained throughout the history of the Reorganization. The document on “supreme directional control” was signed by another group which now seeks to enter new and untried fields and by means of centralizing supreme power in the hands of the President, hopes to build an efficient church machine like unto the army of Moses.

## *General Conference Must Decide*

Everyone has recognized the vital importance of these questions, and it is clear to all that much depends upon the answer. Only the sovereign body of the church, assembled in General Conference, is empowered to make decision in so great a matter, and it was hoped that no attempt would be made to circumvent this. In fact, both sides to the controversy have urged that the matter be decided at the General Conference. The “Open letter” states:

We believe that the coming General Conference, in full possession of the facts, should speak and settle this controversy, in a definite, constructive manner. Only in such conference settlement can our people be reunited and confidence be restored and the cause of the Master advanced.

President Smith in his document says:

That since it seems the matters in controversy are to be brought before General Conference, it will be well for the Saints and delegates to study further the law and weigh matters presented for their consideration, *reserving final judgment until the conference meets to hear the cause. And most assuredly none will finally reach conclusions from the basis of unanswered reasoning or statements, publicly or privately made.*"

We believe that the questions involved in this document and the "Open letter" should be discussed by the Saints at home and abroad in an attempt to discover the truth and with the purpose of reaching final agreement. Discussions should be free and open. Both sides should receive respectful hearing. Hasty decisions should not be formed. Conclusions should not be based on ex-parte testimony, one-sided arguments or statements, or unverified and untested alleged spiritual manifestations.

We are unalterably opposed to anything which suggests machine politics, or an attempt to railroad measures, or to prevent free and untrammelled discussion. We believe it a mistake even to attempt to put something over on the people or to intimidate or coerce anyone. To pass any measure without free and full discussion, and then to select delegates without giving full opportunity for general nomination from the floor, and then binding the delegates

thus selected to support conclusions thus arrived at, is, to say the least, questionable.

### *Strange Procedure in California*

Quite recently the Northern California District held a reunion and district conference at Irvington, California. President F. M. Smith was in attendance and presided over the conference. Here is what took place, according to letters received from four different sources:

The first move was to do away with the spring conference and hold two-day meetings in their stead. This was a very unusual proceeding but quite significant in the light of what followed. This paved the way for the immediate selection of delegates to the General Conference. This would close discussion so far as Northern California was concerned—a significant move.

A motion was then presented and carried to change the method of electing delegates to the General Conference in 1925 from nominating from the floor to the electing of a nominating committee. A motion was then made and carried to allow the chairman, F. M. Smith, to appoint the nominating committee.

A motion was then made to indorse the "Church government" document as published in the HERALD of July 9, 1924, page 651, and that the delegates elected to represent this district at General Conference stand by this church document article. Before general discussion had taken place the previous question was moved and carried, and the matter went

to vote and was carried. Some voted "No," and many did not vote at all.

Please note that President Smith was present at this conference and presided over the same. He appointed the committee which named the delegates to the General Conference. After this procedure, President Smith spoke and indicated that he was pleased with the action of the conference, that the conference did well to indorse what the late council had indorsed, and also that the proper course had been followed when the resolution binding the delegates to vote for it was passed.

### *Action Versus Advice*

What then becomes of the advice given by President Smith over his own signature on July 9 which states:

It will be well for the Saints and delegates to study further the law and weigh matters presented for their consideration, *reserving final judgment until the conference meets to hear the cause.*

Will such procedure as has obtained in Northern California tend to solve our differences and bring peace and unity to the church? We do not question the right of the Northern California District to determine the time and place of conferences, or to pass resolutions, or to elect delegates, providing it is carried on under the law of common consent reaffirmed at our last General Conference and clearly outlined in the standard books of the church. What we do object to is the manner in which this was done.

The question that persists is, Were the deliberations of the Northern California conference calculated to afford every member of the conference an opportunity to express his sentiments? Did it give opportunity for all sides of the questions to be heard? Was the selection of delegates with a view to secure proportionate representation? Herein lies the crux of the whole question.

It is true that certain individuals may gain their ends by abolishing spring conferences in order to put through partisan legislation without discussion, and when the people of the district may not be apprised of what is being done, but it will never solve our problems. It will aggravate our difficulty and may stimulate open revolt on the part of the membership who have thus been denied expression and participation.

To indorse a document containing provisions of such far-reaching consequences as: "The government of the church is by divine authority through priesthood . . . among the people";—"supreme directional control resting in the Presidency";—"effective administration . . . maintained only by effective discipline," and this without full, free, and untrammelled discussion, or the people of the district generally knowing that this action was to be taken, is a dangerous innovation and should be protested.

### *Why Take Hasty Action?*

To do away with spring conference and then elect delegates nine months before the General Conference, and obligate them to vote for a given document which had not been generally discussed, and this

regardless of developments or conviction, thus precluding reason as well as revelation in the interim, is rather out of keeping with Latter Day Saint procedure. Justice and equity and fair play would suggest, inasmuch as the question had not been discussed and several months might easily be given to an examination of this matter, that the conference should have deferred action and given notice to all of the Saints that the question would come up at the spring conference. This would have been fair to everybody. We may rightly ask:

Were those who rushed this legislation through afraid of investigation? Why did the Northern California conference do away with the spring conference at this time? Some reasons may be given other than the real one, but, in the light of what occurred, there can be only one answer given. It was desirable to take this vote while the President was on the ground.

If we are going to resort to such methods, then the group which can play politics the best wins, regardless of the proposition. I am sure that God will not place his approval on work of this kind. I am inclined to believe that there will be a reckoning among the people of God.

### *God Will Vindicate His Truth*

I sincerely hope that those who stand for the organic law of the church and who believe in common consent as summarized in the "Open letter" will not so far forget themselves as to resort to such unusual and questionable methods to put over

our program. For, if we do, then indeed we deserve to lose. If we cannot win by making appeal to reason and right, then a thousand times better to fail. If we cannot win by allowing the widest and most far-reaching and untrammelled discussion, then God grant our defeat. If we cannot have that faith in the merits of our cause to leave decision to the common wisdom of the ex officio and delegate vote of the General Conference without adopting coercive resolutions, then may God intervene and save us from ourselves.

This is God's work. He watches over his own. If we can only trust him and live worthy of his spirit day by day, we have nothing to fear. He cannot fail. Let us possess our souls in patience. Let us be faithful and steadfast and move forward with confidence, for God will vindicate his truth.

T. W. WILLIAMS.

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