



The Road to Mass Democracy: Original Intent and the Seventeenth Amendment

C. H. Hoebeke

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Before the Seventeenth Amendment, US senators were elected by state legislatures. To end the supposed corruption of state "machines" and make the Senate more responsive to the legislative needs of the industrial era, the Senate was made a popularly elected body in 1913. Meanwhile, the spread of information and communications technology, it was argued, had rendered indirect representation through state legislators unnecessary. However, C. H. Hoebeker contends, none of these reasons accorded with the original intent of the Constitution's framers.

To the founders, democracy simply meant the absolute rule of the majority. They proposed instead a "mixed" Constitution, an ancient ideal under which democracy was only one element in a balanced republic. Hoebeker demonstrates that the states, which were to provide the aristocratic Senate and the monarchical president, never resisted egalitarian encroachments, and settled for popular expedients when electing both presidents and senators long before the formal cry for amendment.

The Road to Mass Democracy addresses the corruption, character and conduct of senate candidates and other issues relating to the triumph of "plebiscitary government" over "representative checks and balances." This work offers a provocative, readable, and often satiric reexamination of America's attempt to solve the problems of democracy with more democracy.

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