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EDITORIAL

THE DEADLY GRIP OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP.

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THE Federal House of Representatives passed on February 27 a joint resolution authorizing the President to do certain things concerning the match factories. The action of the House was prompted by information to the effect that the use of white phosphorus and other poisonous substances in the manufacture of matches caused necrosis of the jaw and other deadly diseases among the operatives, not a few of whom were women and children.

With such a Cause before it what does the House authorize the President to do? It authorizes him—

First, to ascertain the present conditions of manufacture as affecting the health of the employes.

What these conditions are is a matter that is pretty well ascertained. It would seem that to spend time in re-ascertaining is, in such a case, a criminal wastefulness of human life. Nevertheless, placing the best possible construction upon the first instruction, the House possibly means that the facts be given official form, a thing that could be done quickly.

Second, to find out what substitutes, if any, can be found by which the dangers can be minimized in the manufacture, distribution and use of matches.

This second instruction looks puzzling. Is the United States itself going into the business of match making? or is it any of the U.S.'s business to give business tips to manufacturers? The puzzle is solved by the next instruction.

Third, to ascertain whether these substitutes are free from patent control and secret formulas for manufacture, and unrestricted to general use.

The cat is out!

Thoroughly informed upon what these substitutes are, and upon the fact of

their present private ownership and control, the posture taken by the House is this:

“The present ingredients in the manufacture of matches are harmful, even deadly. There are substitutes free from such a bane. These substitutes should be employed. But they are sacrosanct private property. The present match manufacturers might themselves have invested in the substitutes, but the price demanded by the owners is too high: it would wipe out large areas of dividends. A compromise must be reached. U.S. shall act as go-between, inducing, if possible, the match manufacturers to raise the price they are willing to pay, and the owners of the substitutes to lower the price they are willing to accept. While the deal and the dicker and the chaffering goes on, let necrosis of the jaw and the other deadly diseases pasture on the match producing proletariat. Property is more valuable than Life.”

Twenty and odd years ago Edward Bellamy satirized capitalist society with the observation: “We go to war as an organization; we go to work as a mob.” An army does not discuss its safety. It acts. Whatever its safety requires it takes. The question of indemnity is attended to later. The grip of Private Property snaps before the demands for safety of the army’s organization. The army’s motto is “Life is more valuable than Property.” Such is the principle upon which a Nation goes to war.

Exactly the opposite is the principle upon which a capitalist Nation goes to work. It is a mob. As in mobs, the biggest rowdy rules. His might stamps Private Property “sacred,” and the grip of that is such that the motto is inverted. Property becomes more valuable than Life—as the near to 3,000 ill-starred proletarians in the match factories of the land are finding out, and the survivors will find out, before the match manufacturers and the manufacturers of substitutes will have come to an agreement, if they ever do.

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