

EDITORIAL

## JOKE, OR DEVILTRY?

By DANIEL DE LEON

**O**FTEN it is hard to tell a joke from a deviltry. How true this is the bill introduced in Congress by Representative Harry M. Cowdrey of Missouri illustrates.

The bill proposes to make a penal offence, a misdemeanor, the publishing of any advertisement that is untrue, or exaggerated, and it includes oral publication in the list.

This sounds like deviltry. If the bill is enacted hardly an advertisement will be left standing either in the capitalist and kindred privately owned papers, or in public conveyances, or on rocks and fences—or anywhere else; and many of those that are left standing will have to undergo some editing.

What would become of “Danderine,” or “Macerine,” or “Postum,” or “The Best Underwear in the World,” or “Force” with its Sunny Jim, or “The Widest Read Paper,” or “The Road of Anthracite” with its “Spotless White,” and so on down the list?

And what becomes of the “talent” that has been developed to catch the eye with glaring lies in verse and pictures?

And what would become of the *Appeal to Reason* with its fraudulent land advertisements, or the *Call* with its equally fraudulent get-rich-quick lures? And what, O, heavens! would become of the advertising agents of the *Volkszeitung*{,} those gentry of the shifty eyes and statistical tongues?

The mind reels at the thought of the hornets’ nest that such a bill, if serious, would raise; the heart bleeds at the thought of the suffering such a bill, if enacted, would entail. A Messina earthquake would not be a circumstance.

Representative Cowdrey must have meant a joke—and Congress must have taken it as such. But there are jokes that should not be indulged in. It is not right to

frighten rats with the threat of a cat. Even rats deserve some consideration. Kill them outright; but sport not with their anguish. To do that is deviltry.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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