

EDITORIAL

“SIMPLIFYING THE WORDING.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

A WEEK or so ago *The People* commented, in an article entitled, “The Deadly Grip of Private Ownership,”¹ upon a joint resolution passed in the House of Representatives last February 27 on the matter of the match factories. It will be remembered that, being a matter of common notoriety that white sulphur was used in those factories, and that the use of that chemical gave the employes, many of whom were women, necrosis of the jaw, the joint resolution of the House empowered the President to ascertain the conditions of manufacture as affecting the health of employes in match factories; to find out what substitutes could be found by which the dangers could be minimized in the manufacture of that article; and, third, to ascertain whether such substitutes were free from patent control and secret formulas for manufacture.

In commenting upon that resolution *The People* showed it to be a ghastly illustration of the deadly grip of private ownership. Instead of the danger to life and limb, involved in the preset method of manufacturing matches, being promptly grappled with, the more than 3,000 ill-starred proletarians in the match factories were left to rot and die while the match manufacturers and the owners of desirable substitutes for white sulphur were leisurely chaffering over the price of the substitutes. The resolution, as it left the House, seemed iniquitous enough. It now turns out that the resolution was still more iniquitous than appeared on its face.

Arrived in the Senate, the joint resolution was referred to the Financial Committee, whence, on March 3, it was reported by Senator Lodge in the following amended form:

“Resolved, etc., That the President is hereby authorized and requested

¹ [[Daily People, March 1, 1911—R.B.](#)]

to designate and employ a competent person to visit the match factories of the United States, examine the conditions under which the business is carried on, and report to Congress in December, 1911, as follows:

“Whether under present conditions of manufacture white phosphorus matches are a fit subject of interstate commerce.

“Sec. 2. That the sum of \$5,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated out of any moneys in the Treasury of the United States not otherwise appropriated, for the purpose of this inquiry and investigation.”

In other words—

Even the weak resolution passed by the House was scuttled. The investigation is not to be on the ingredients used in the manufacture of matches; it is not to be on any desirable substitutes for the deadly white sulphur; it is not to be on any subject that affects the health of the employes. It is to be exclusively on the legal question whether the “white sulphur matches are a fit subject of interstate commerce,” an issue that can be decided without visiting the match factories. The only clause left unamended in the House resolution was the \$5,000 appropriation for the investigator.

When questioned upon the subject in the Senate, Senator Lodge said: “The Finance Committee have merely simplified the wording; that is all.”

From which it follows that the purpose of the House resolution was only to give a \$5,000 job to someone, and that the House stated its purpose in language so involved that the Senate “simplified the wording” lest the object start the notion in some people’s heads that Congress was becoming paternalistic enough to “interfere with private business.”

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