

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 95.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

DISARMING THE PEOPLE—LICENSING SULLIVAN'S PLUG-UGLIES.

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CHAPTER 195 of the laws enacted by the State Legislature at the present session, entitled "An act to amend the penal law, in relation to the sale and carrying of dangerous weapons," and engineered through by the Tammanyite Sullivan, should have for its title, "An act to disarm the people in the interest of Sullivanic rioters."

Among the civic guarantees imbedded in the Constitution is that embodied in the command: "the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." The guarantee has somewhat been infringed by the police regulation requiring a license to bear "concealed weapons." There are times when wisdom might dictate to the citizen the advisability of being armed. The right and authority so to decide, should rest with the citizen, not with the police, itself an arm of the government, with power to grant or withhold the license. It should be a right of the citizen himself to elect whether to bear a pistol, a small arm that can be commodiously carried, or to burden himself with a shotgun. However this be, no serious objection has been raised to the police regulation. The people have acquiesced.

How dangerous the yielding of a seemingly slight point is, now appears in the provisions of Chapter 195 of the laws of this year. Through the narrow slit in the door, made by the police regulations, the Sullivanic law has now squeezed its way in.

"Blackjacks," "slingshots," "billies," "sandclubs," "sandbags," "metal knuckles," "bludgeons"—these are not "arms," they are burglars' and footpads' tools. Chapter 195 lumps these with pistols and revolvers, designated as firearms "of a size which may be concealed upon the person," and makes it a misdemeanor, not merely to bear them, but even to "possess" them. In other words, the right of the people "to keep arms" is now materially, ominously infringed.

The limitation of the prohibition to firearms “of a size which may be concealed upon a person,” in other words, the permission to keep, or “possess,” firearms of a size which is unconcealable, deceives nobody.

No citizen, with a sense of responsibility, keeps firearms in his house, or on his premises, in exposed places. Firearms are kept secluded, where children will not reach them, and where adults are not exposed to accidents. Firearms of a size which is unconcealable require extra precautions. In many, if not in most households of the land to-day firearms of unconcealable size are unavailable. The premises are too cramped. In such households the only available firearms are those “of a size which may be concealed upon the person.” To render the “possession” of such firearms a misdemeanor, unless with the consent of government, is practically to disarm the people. Furthermore, the distance is shorter between the prohibition to “possess” firearms of a size that is concealable, and the obviously next step of forbidding the “possession” of any firearms, concealable or not, than is the distance between forbidding the “carrying” of concealed weapons abroad, and the “possessing” of them, as now provided, even in one’s home or on any of his premises. Nor can the sneaking posture of Chapter 195, hence, the direction in which it tends, elude the observer:—the law, which specifies the “possessing” of firearms of concealable size as a criminal offense, is headed a law “to amend the penal law, in relation to the sale and CARRYING of dangerous weapons.”

The long and short of the story is this: The Sullivan law is a midnight burglari-ous attempt upon the freedom of the citizen and residents generally, their right “to KEEP and bear” arms;—it is a backstairs manoeuvre to place the State under martial law; it is a dark lantern move to place the citizens and residents at the mercy of Sullivanic rioters, who, filled to the muzzle with physical whiskey, or with the worse inebriant of politician-and-prelate preachments, may, with the consciousness of safety to their own hides, be used, at a desirable juncture, to mob any “undesirable” citizen or gathering of citizens, or institution.

Even if it were not unconstitutional, the Sullivan law should be opposed tooth and nail as a scheme of tyranny. Being transparently unconstitutional it must be spurned, exposed, pitchforked, and torn up by the roots.

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Uploaded August 2012

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