

The Public

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EDITORIAL

The Chicago School Land Graft.

The "Big Business" school board of Chicago is in an uproar of indignation because they understand that teachers have exposed to parents through their pupils some startling facts about the Big Business efforts now before the legislature to rid the school system of its interest in the future values of what remains of its landed inheritance. This indignation takes the virtuous form of denouncing a "breach of discipline." One can hardly avoid the suspicion, however, that the "breach of discipline" concerns some of these gentlemen far less than its exposure and possible bafflement of some of the gum-shoe processes of Big Business graft.

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There is scant room for doubt that Big Business is laying legislative foundations, not only for new favors, but also for confirming those which the Tribune, the Daily News and other beneficiaries of previous school boards are fearful they are about to lose in the courts. In seeking power to make and confirm 99-year leases without periodical valuations to meet changes in value, the Big Business school board argues that this is a limitation upon and not an extension of power, since they may now lease for any length of time, even for hundreds of years, and have only refrained in a paroxysm of virtue from doing so; but in fact a recent decision of the Supreme Court, which this new legislation is evidently intended to nulli-

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fy, goes far to indicate that the school board cannot lawfully make long leases without revaluations. This Big Business board also argues that long flat-rent leases are desirable in order to promote building; but the Daily News has had a flat-rent 99-year lease for nearly fifteen years, and has done no building yet.

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Whatever criticism may fairly apply to the teachers on the question of discipline in warning the parents of their pupils of the Big Business graft that is now hatching with reference to these school lands, is more than offset by the commendable civic spirit that prompted the exposure. Teachers should observe rules of discipline, to be sure; but their exposure of school graft, the legislative basis for which the school authorities are promoting, and in the profits of which the local newspapers are sharing, is a much more insistent duty than strict observance of a point of discipline, when those two duties conflict. Whoever carefully reads the circular which the teachers are said to have distributed will justify their act, discipline or no discipline. Any such reader will also understand why the Big Business school trustees who have been lobbying for this Big Business legislation are so much disturbed at the exposure.

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Grabbing Water Course Power.

Another piece of Big Business legislation of the class-crooked kind will be found in the Downing bill (Senate bill No. 362), now pending in the Illinois legislature. One of the old laws of Illinois, enacted when every community was dependent upon its local grist mill and saw mill and there was no serious graft in the milling business, empowered the owners of mill sites or parts of mill sites to invoke the law of eminent domain for the construction or improvement of mill dams. That is to say, they could condemn private property to their own use for milling purposes. With the disappearance of local mills this law has become practically obsolete; but the Downing bill would revive it in the interest of the Commonwealth-Edison electric-power monopoly. It would do so by inserting in this antiquated law a provision adding the words, "or machinery for the creation and development of power or energy for public purposes." The effect of this amendment to that old law, would be to give the Commonwealth-Edison electric-energy trust, the legal authority to condemn to its own use all the water course power in the State of Illinois.

If the people of Illinois don't "get a move on," and that speedily, there will hardly be even a red-hot stove in the State which Big Business will not have got its grip upon. In the plunderous raids it is now making upon water courses, school lands, school books, coal supplies, lake shore lands, and other handy things for monopoly house-keeping, it is as rapacious as any of the old robber barons. Will this legislature stand for it all? There seems to be down at Springfield what one of the best capitol correspondents, Charles N. Wheeler, calls "an invisible force that has a long distance telephone connected with a relative or two in Chicago," which whispers that may be this legislature will stand for it all. You never can quite draw the line at what an Illinois legislature may not do when invisible Big Business forces make dancing floors of its moral sensibilities.

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Beef Trust Candor.

Candor is always refreshing and sometimes delightful; and here is a specimen that one feels to be both. It is from the resolutions of the Chicago Live Stock Exchange in opposition to free wool and free hides. With none of the usual hypocritical pretense of benefits to all by tariff taxation, the sponsors for these resolutions bluntly demand their share of the swag. Speaking for "live-stock feeders, producers, breeders, shippers, dealers and slaughterers"—to wit, the beef trust,—the resolutions declare that "free hides and a tariff of 15 per cent upon boots and shoes is an unjust discrimination against the producer of hides," who "is in truth as much a manufacturer as the maker of boots and shoes and is as much entitled to protection from competition as is the shoemaker." And so of the producer of wool. He "is as much a manufacturer as the maker of carpets and other woollen products," and to "cut down the tariff on wool and leave the tariff on blankets at 165 per cent is a rank and unjust discrimination against the producer of wool." These charmingly candid resolutions go on to protest:

A high tariff upon iron and steel products and little or no protection to the live stock producers of the nation is a serious menace to one of the industries which are the foundation of all industries and without which all others would perish. The live stock producers are entitled to and demand from our lawmakers the same consideration that is given to other classes. They are manufacturers and wealth producers as truly as are the iron and steel makers, the shoemakers, the sugar makers and all other producers that are classed as manufacturers, and considering this economic truth they are entitled to the same measure of protection.