

EDITORIAL

OPEN LETTER TO THE RT. REV. ARTHUR FOLEY WINNINGTON INGRAM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

SIR—
In authoritative reports of the sermon you delivered at noon of last September 26 from the pulpit of the Trinity Church Corporation, the following passage occurs:

“I shall be as frank here as I am in London. No man who is really a Christian would soil his Christian hands with one dollar the possession of which he could not justify in the sight of Heaven.”

So far from this passage sounding “frank” it sounds disingenuous. It leaves beautifully undefined the method that “is justified in the sight of Heaven.” What “is justified in the sight of Heaven,” in other words, moral standards, have undergone, from time to time, serious changes, and even at any one time, they often have not been the same. For instance:

A time was, and that time is not yet past, when armies invaded neighboring territories; sacked towns; and led men, women and children back into the captivity of slavery. These events have repeatedly taken place under the blessings of bishops and other stewards of moral standards. A sermon that “no man who is really a Christian would soil his hands with property the possession of which he could not justify in the sight of Heaven” would undoubtedly have received the approval of the very soldiery, from the King down, who listened laden with the spoils of recent conquest. According to their moral standard, what they did was “justified in the sight of Heaven.”

Though times have changed, and methods with them, the essence has remained. At present, the ruling class, by virtue of that new weapon, Capital, a

weapon that wields both sword and gun, do the identical thing that their forbears of sword and buckler did. Men, women and children are plundered of the wealth they produce, and are kept in the captivity of wage-slavery; and their numbers are increased. The forays of the Capitalist Robber Baron conquer whole “provinces” of the middle class; sack and plunder their havings; and lead them down into the captivity of wage slavery. That process takes place under the form of legality—upheld by modern pundits of the law, the same as the conquests of old and the cruel exploitation of the serfs were upheld by the elaborate pleas of jurists;—“vindicated” by the modern professors of the Colleges, the same as of old the “scholars” learnedly proved the wisdom of tyranny;—sanctified by the modern clergy, the same as the clergy of old approved the olden methods with a text. What has this led to? It has led to the conditions that you decry. Obviously, from every word you said, there must be dollars innumerable “the possession of which the holders could not justify in the sight of Heaven.”

You informed your audience that your home has been the home of the bishops of London for 1,300 years, and you dilated upon “the wretched million in East London.” Obviously there must be something wrong in your method for the introduction on earth of the reign of the Prince of Peace. Absolutely and relatively the wretchedness in your own city has been on the increase during these 1,300 years. A method of soul-purification, tried 1,300 years, and resulting only in increased popular wretchedness must be defective somewhere. Where the wrong lies is not far to seek—the utter indefiniteness of your sermonizings. There can be no doubt that, had you been speaking in a public hall, instead of in a church, the J. Pierpont Morgans and other Capitalist Robber Barons, together with their retinue of swash-buckler brokers who filled the church, would have broken out in loud, long and prolonged applause. You left undefined in what consisted the soilure of the wealth they held. Abstractions, no more than hard words, break no bones. No capitalist, reeking with the crime of human exploitation, cares a fig for denunciations of the “wrongful possession of wealth” so long as the wrongful method of the acquisition is not exposed. When the denunciation of “wrongful possession of wealth” comes from one, who, by direct implication, approves of the wrongful method, then the capitalist criminal not only does not feel rebuked, he feels

encouraged in his course, he feels secure in the fat that encases him—and, he will potently back up with dollars his prayers for the continuance 1,300 years longer of such episcopal homiletics and undefined castigations as you and yours deal in.

ED. THE PEOPLE.

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