

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 1.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 1, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE FRIAR LANDS AND THE SUGAR TRUST.

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNDER the flag of Spain the Philippine Islands was the territorial and political satrapy of the friars of four orders—the Dominicans, the Augustinians, the Franciscans and the Recoletos. The Spanish rule was nominal. It consisted in the appointment of the Captain General of the Archipelago, a sinecurist, and the locating, also as a pretext for the appointment of idle placemen, of some antique tubs, called vessels of war, in Manila and contiguous waters. Actual political rule was exercised, formally and organically, by the clergy. The heads of the four religious orders and the head of the hierarchy, the Archbishop of Manila, were of the Council of the Captain-General of the Islands. So completely was rule in the hands of the friars that, when the natives rose to the call of independence, the rebellion, though, of course, against Spain, was de facto against the friars.

Thus stood things when the treaty of peace between the United States and Spain was signed at Paris in 1898, one of the stipulations of which was the payment by the United States of \$20,000,000 to the Crown of Spain for all its proprietary rights in the Archipelago. Among the property thus paid for were the tracts of land comprising about 425,000 acres which the Friars held. No construction, short of the \$20,000,000 covering the “friar lands,” is admissible, either under the terms of the treaty of Paris, or of international law. A Captain-General, or any, or all of the members of his government, who purchased property in his or their own name, would be entitled to the same, and the same could not be included in the transfer of the overlord’s property to the overlord’s successors. The “Friar lands” were, however, not private property. The property was the overlord’s, the Spanish Crown’s, held and used by its political agents in pursuit of their political functions, by the same title as the White House is the property of the United States and not of any of

the White House presidential incumbents.

This notwithstanding, the friars, the very “corpus delicti” against which the revolution of the Filipinos was directed, and which, when the marines of Admiral Dewey held Manila, transferred their hostilities from the Filipino patriots to the United States forces—these very friar political satraps of Spain claimed, after the treaty of Paris, that they be paid separately for “their” lands.

The negotiations—be they “diplomatic,” or purely “real estate”—for the settlement of the Friar claims were long and devious, until suddenly they came to an end by a series of transfers of the lands in dispute, and payments governmental and private therefor.

Off and on, since then, there have been inquiries and resolutions to inquire into these transfers. As often the matter was hushed up, with assurances, from some official source or other, that there was no fraud in the matter. On the 31st of last May, the House Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Justice having Attorney General Wickersham on the witness-stand put to him certain questions that raised anew the lid over the malodorous “Friar lands.”

It is generally known that the Sugar Trust of false weights celebrity, and powerful Roman Catholic political connections, “bought” large portions of the Friar lands. It is also known that while the Sugar Trust was “negotiating,” the United States was negotiating also. Furthermore, it is known that the successful negotiations on the part of the Sugar Trust with the Friars having had a suggestion of fishiness, Mr. Wickersham gave an opinion holding that the transfer of Friar lands to the Sugar Trust was legal. It now transpires from the Attorney-General’s testimony that the law firm of Strong and Cadwalader consisted of several “silent partners.” Besides the members whose name the firm bore, and Mr. Wickersham himself at one time, the firm consisted of Henry W. Taft, the now President’s brother and John Hays Hammond, both of whom were legal employes of the Sugar Trust, the former in the Earl case of Philadelphia, and the latter representing Henry O. Havemeyer in the Friar lands transactions.

The lid is yet to come off many more facts before this dark affair is accurately known in all its details. The facts so far uncovered allow a glimpse of the following state of affairs in outline.

The Friar lands, already paid for by the United States under the Treaty of Paris, the Friars demanded extra pay for. The Sugar Trust coveted a large portion of the said lands. A three-cornered real estate negotiation ensued. The Friars wanted to receive as much as possible; the United States and the Sugar Trust each wanted to pay as little as possible. Thereupon, the Sugar Trust, with its tentacles at once in the Government at Washington and in the Friars' council at Manila, or their representatives' in the United States, succeeded in beating down the Friars' demands with the promise to cause the United States Treasury to raise its "ante" to the Friars as much as, or more than, the Friars themselves lowered their price to the Sugar Trust. Thus a deal was consummated whereby, in point of fact, the United States Treasury, which now paid the Friars seven and a half millions, at the same time paid the bulk of the price for the sugar lands in the Philippines that the Sugar Trust acquired from the Friars. In other words, after having paid the Crown of Spain \$20,000,000 for its holdings in the Philippines, which included the Friar lands, the United States was jockeyed by the Sugar Trust into paying for the Friar lands over again, and the second purchase was jacked up to seven and a half million dollars, the sum being raised high enough to cover the bulk of the price that the Sugar Trust would otherwise have had to pay either to the United States or to the Friars.

Which is why we say, and our language is plain, that, for ways that are dark and for tricks that are vain, give us the combination of business chicanery with political depravity, ambushed behind Trust "patriotism" and Friar "religion."

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded May 2012

slpns@slp.org