

EDITORIAL

EASY LESSON NO. 4.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ANOTHER argument made by Father F.X. Van Nistelroy against Socialism is that “a man’s private property is his own and nobody has a right to the property of his neighbor.”

Now, Father dear, this is just what Socialism holds, and the opposite of which Socialism charges is cardinal with capitalism.

Now, Father dear, we propose to make your “brains perspire.” They have evidently done little perspiring, so far:—

What capitalism holds with regard to other people’s property is best ascertained by its actions. But its actions are numerous. Which one shall we choose? We shall choose one that comes under your jurisdiction, so to speak. Of all organized creeds, yours—the Ultramontane Roman Catholic—is the one that has made itself the most conspicuous defender of the capitalist posture towards the property of others. What your organization does in the matter must, accordingly, be typical of what capitalism stands for.

We have before us the work of a priest—*Behind the Curtain*. We recommend the book to you. Turn to its page 136. You will there read that, “The first Catholic Bishop in the States, John Carrol, patriot and revolutionary soldier and later archbishop of Baltimore, in 1803 decreed and maintained that all [church] property should be held by contributing lay-members, and should be administered by lay trustees as elected by the members of the respective congregation. . . . Later on most of the bishops had bills introduced in various legislatures granting them special privileges, and taking away from the people all rights just as any real corporation, trust, or monopoly would do. And this was being done, so it is asserted, without the previous knowledge of the people concerned. Small wonder, therefore, that congre-

gations begin to be demanding the recall of these privileges and the restoration of their rights to them. The bishops holding the title to all church properties—lands, churches, schools, priests' houses, teachers' residences and cemeteries even—in most cases are the sole owners and do just as they please, the people who paid for it all being practically 'frozen out' [Page 137] Complaints to the bishops by laymen in most cases are of no avail. And when troubles begin growing too thick, then comes the last argument: 'obey, or you will be excommunicated' [page 140] Recently two Catholic congregations in Pennsylvania have sued their bishop for the return of the title to their church property. After an expensive and long fight in the courts, decisions were rendered in favor of the people, the judges deciding and the Supreme Court approving that the title to the property of each congregation should be vested in whomsoever the majority of the contributing members, 'pew holders,' of the congregation shall choose. In both cases these congregations chose themselves as owners. They were promptly excommunicated," page 141.

Now, Father dear, you may say that the two congregations (they are located in Scranton) set themselves up independently, and have been enjoying life, despite the excommunication. That's all very true. But the fact remains that your Ultramontane organization tried to deprive these people of their property.

On account of all of which, Father dear, we recommend to you that you pull out of your Ultramontane hierarchy, which does, in fact, that which you condemn, and Socialism condemns, along with you, dearest Father.

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