

EDITORIAL

BISHOP LUDDEN'S INDISCRETION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHATEVER chance there was of William F. Sheehan's triumphantly breaking the deadlock in the New York Legislature on the Senatorial election, was dissipated by the tirade that the Roman Catholic Bishop Ludden of Syracuse let fly in the heat of the contest at the insurgent Democratic minority who opposed "the election of Sheehan, or any man of his type." "Sheehan, or any man of his type" the bishop gave out meant any Irish Catholic, and he condemned the Sheehan opposition as "bigoted and Knownothing."

Any clerical intervention in the premises, even if clothed in the phraseology of piety, would have been indiscreet, as an injection of religion into politics; such intervention as Bishop Ludden's, clothed in the vituperative language of capitalist political strife, was the very essence of indiscretion: it could not choose but accomplish the very opposite of what it was intended to.

The Albany reporter for the *World*, writing under date of January 26, sized up quite closely the situation created by the bishop's intervention: "The leaders of both factions discussed the contribution of Bishop Ludden most gingerly to-night, *much as if it were a sword that cuts both ways.*"

Why should the insurgent Democrats find in the sword, besides an edge meant to cut into their own flesh, an edge that cut into the flesh of the Tammany Caucus? Why should the Tammany Caucus find in the sword, besides an edge that cut into the insurgents' flesh, an edge that gashed Tammany itself?

As everybody knew, who knew anything, the nomination of Sheehan was



RIGHT REV. PATRICK ANTHONY
LUDDEN (1836-1912)

dictated by the Roman Catholic capitalist political machine. As everybody knows, who knows anything, all capitalist political machines are organizations with an eye to the acquisition and the holding of property. As everybody knows, who knows anything—the capitalist system being the impersonation {personification?} of cut-throat Competition, of Strife, of War—the taking of the field by any one capitalist political machine is the certain signal for taking of the field by one or more competing dittos. Finally, as everybody knows, who knows anything, no devotional, that is, religious preferences mark to-day—in America, the country of sublimated Capitalism—the boundaries of any capitalist political machine. Professed Jew and Gentile; professed Catholics, Greek, Roman or otherwise, and professed Protestants of the “fifty-seven varieties” of Protestantism; Deists and professional Atheists;—all mingle fraternally within the several capitalist political machines, held tight together by the common capitalist bond of their respective lines of capitalist Interests for the exploitation of the Working Class. It goes without saying that so soon as the particular corporations and syndicates, in short, Interests, that foregathered on the Roman Catholic political train to convey Sheehan to the Senate in Washington started to work, another set of corporations and syndicates, Interests, in short, also foregathered on a competitive train, and also started to work to convey their particular agent to the Federal Capitol.

It needs no great depth to perceive that Bishop Ludden’s intervention, at such a juncture, was a sword that “cut both ways”—and was bound to cut deepest into the flesh of the Tammany or Roman Catholic political machine:—

Aware of the human weakness, recognized in the election laws that forbid any religious motto or emblem on the ballot, the Insurgent Democratic camp could not but feel apprehensive about those in its midst of Roman Catholic devotional preferences. On the other hand, and for identical reasons, the Roman Catholic political camp could not but, in turn, feel apprehensive about those of its members who were of Protestant, Jew, or some other non-Catholic devotional sentiments. So far, “honors were even,” the sword cut both ways. Beyond that the sword played havoc in the Roman Catholic political camp only.

The Roman Catholic political party, national, State and local, has a feature that distinguishes it from all other national, State and local political parties. That feature consists in its officers—national, State and ward leaders—being prelates, who, upon the strength of their prelacy, claim for themselves ex-officio holiness,

hence infallibility. Such a claim is particularly attractive in all capitalist circles, of Jewish, Protestant and Catholic devotional preferences alike. It furnishes an excuse to disregard adverse argument, and a pretext to demand unquestioning obedience. Being, however, a claim of special fascination for the *Capitalist Class*—a Class of feud, strife and discord—the claim gives, within the Capitalist Class itself, a handle to “patriotic” opposition, an opposition to which a color is given by the notorious fact that the head of the Roman Catholic political party of all countries is the pope in Rome. It goes without saying that the Roman Catholic political party endeavors to conceal this its distinguishing feature; hence, can only be hurt when the feature is bared. Bishop Ludden bared the feature in this instance; and, typically enough, the handle thus offered was promptly seized by Assemblyman Edmund O’Connor, an Irishman of Catholic devotional preferences in the Insurgent Democratic political camp. He said:

“The corrupt political black hander, whether his name Murphy, Cary, Sheehan, McDermott, Ryan or O’Connor, who appeals to a generous Irish race for protection or approbation is on a par with the Italian black hander who, on being caught with the goods, appeals to the great Italian race and is treated with the same contempt. The real Irish spirit, the spirit which animated Emmet, Wolfe, Tone, John Mitchell, O’Connell and Parnell, is the same spirit which now animates the noble little band of patriots at Albany who are battling for American independence and American manhood against a more dangerous foe than was King George and his redcoats.

“The idea that race or religion has entered into the minds of these men is too ridiculous to even warrant contradiction. The good bishop should mind his own business. We all love him in his proper place.”

The mention of Daniel O’Connell’s name was a pointed allusion to his slogan—“All the religion you want from Rome—but no politics.” It settled the Sheehan candidacy; it stabbed it with the sword the bishop himself had furnished.

Indiscretion—a misstep that all political leaders of Capitalism are exposed to—is a misstep that the leaders of a political party in ambush behind religion are thrust into by the fatality of their doubly false position.

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

slpns@slp.org