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FIRST EDITORIAL

SENSE AND NONSENSE OF FATHER BAART.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A PRESS despatch from Marshall, Mich., reports a sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. P.A. Baart, rector of St. Mary's Church, of that city, in the course of which he declared that the oath, taken by the members of the International Typographical Union, whereby they pledge to their union a fidelity and allegiance superior to their fidelity and allegiance to any other organization, "social, political or religious," cannot be tolerated on the ground that it "impeaches the loyalty of the members to the Catholic Church and to the Constitution of the United States." Father Baart's declaration contains much sense and also a stack of nonsense.

It is nonsense to say that any such oath impeaches the loyalty of him who takes it to the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution of the United States does not consist of any one clause or set of clauses. It consists of the whole body of clauses. These clauses are divisible into two categories—those that relate to form and those that relate to principle. Among those that relate to principle there is one that characterizes all the others. It is the clause that provides for amendments. That clause characterizes the whole document. By virtue of the clause the document is a landmark. It opens a new era. It was unique in its day; it has had few imitators of any account since. From Washington down, the Revolutionary Fathers pointed to that clause with pride. The oath of loyalty to a Constitution, without that clause, branded a perjurer him who strove to alter it. With that clause in, the path of progress is not barred by oaths, nor need it be strewn with perjury or disloyalty. Civilized man knows that nothing is immutable. With full good faith he can take the oath of loyalty to a Constitution that provides for its own alteration, and that places the power of altering it in the hands of those who take the oath. In fact, the clause

in question, and thereby the Constitution of the United States, is but a formulation in statutory form of the Declaration of Independence, where the principle is laid down that “whenever any form of government becomes destructive of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” The United States vests its people with the right, and places in their hands the power to alter it at will. It is, accordingly, nonsense to say that the Typographical oath is incompatible with loyalty to the State.

Otherwise lie things with regard to the Father Baart’s hierarchy. There the sense of his utterance comes in. Father Baart’s hierarchy is based on the principle of “immutability,” it claims power from above, it felicitously implies, if it does say not so direct, that its rank and file are expected to be sheep. Not their’s is the part to shape, their part is to accept what is given; not theirs is the part to think, their part is to obey. Unquestionably, loyalty to such an organization is incompatible with loyalty to a union that demands the Typographical pledge. The former excludes the latter.

For the sake of the sense that Father Baart seems able to utter, one may well indulge him in the nonsense he seems equally able to rant.

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

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