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Friday, August 27, 1915

Churches Exempt

Press despatches bring the news that the Constitutional Convention is likely to adopt the report of committees that church property is to continue exempt from taxation. The theory is that were churches taxed it would impose a more severe burden on the church-goers because it is admitted that they are pretty heavy taxpayers, as a rule, far more so than those who criticize the exemption and then evade their just obligations to support the government.

Those who sought to tax the churches forgot, perhaps, intentionally, the great amount of charitable relief institutions provide for the unfortunate. Were they to be taxed, either they would be forced to discontinue this relief work or their members would be compelled to contribute far more than they do at present and this would constitute a grave injustice.

There is another side to the question. Even their bitter enemies are forced to concede that the churches exert a splendid moral force for good in the community at large and the State should not endeavor by changes in its fundamental law to hamper or impress this moral force for the benefit of the entire community.

This movement was started by the bigots and conceived in bigotry for no other purpose than to hamper and harass the Catholic Church. Rightly or wrongly, it was argued that to tax church property would strike a blow at the us on the theory that we are the heaviest holders of property. Moreover, the financial supporters of the non-Catholic churches are, as a rule, wealthy men and it was figured they would not mind or feel the added burden of taxation. On the other hand, it was argued that the majority of the supporters of the Catholic churches are poor and they could not afford to pay full taxes.

As a matter of fact, we think that the exact opposite would have resulted. The poor are the most liberal supporters of religion and we fancy they would rally to support of their churches in a manner which would have confounded their enemies.

However, we think the Constitutional Convention never will dare to take the chance of imperiling chances of success at the polls of its new Constitution by loading it down with such an unpopular rider.

Study It.

From the stenographic reports—not from the press reports because the war news is so much more sensational if not so instructive—we learn that the Constitutional Convention, now in progress, is settling down to serious business and is preparing to put

its finished labors into final draft for submission to the electorate of the entire state for approval or disapproval.

At this date, it is impossible to measure whether the proposed new Constitution, as a finished whole, will be a radical reaction or a compromise measure. History would bid us prepare for either, rightly or wrongly, and if the a compromise measure, But there are many delegates sitting in the convention with pronouncedly reactionary reputations and punishment, especially upon records. Unless the leopard changes his spots, it is inconceivable that they would ever put their signatures to even a mildly radical document. However, many thinkers and students of strange things happen and politics very often make strange bed-fellows.

Voters of all classes and conditions should study well and carefully the entire new constitution, as soon as it is agreed upon and published, because every citizen, no matter what his position in the community, will be affected more or less by the new organic law of the State, which, if adopted by the people in November, is likely to stand unaltered, in the main, for twenty years at least.

We should not vote, away our political birthrights hastily or without due deliberation. If we do, then upon our heads be the blame!

A Foul Blot.

Whether Leo Frank was guilty or whether he was innocent, the citizenship of Georgia stands irretrievably smirched for over-riding the law and lynching him, murdering him, rather.

For the action of former Governor Slaton in commuting Frank's sentence was as clearly an act of the law as was the verdict of the jury in pronouncing him guilty of murder as charged. The executive is as much a part of the legal and judicial machinery of a State as is the court of last resort. To be sure, there is no good reason why he should be vested with such absolute power, but such is the condition of affairs.

Unfortunately for Georgia, there are thousands of citizens all over the State and in Georgia, too, who are possessed of the belief that Frank not only did not have a fair trial but that he was entirely innocent of the crime charged. If that be true, then lynching is a foul, premeditated last resort. It cannot be condemned by no other purpose than to punish those guilty of the foul deed. Church. Rightly or wrongly, it was argued that to tax church property would strike a blow at the minds of the public at large.

Abolished.

While the compromise amendment to the constitution which has been agreed upon by the Bill of Rights Committee of the Constitutional Convention does not actually abolish capital punishment, and shifts responsibility for imposition of the death penalty upon the jury which finds the verdict, nevertheless it does in effect abolish capital punishment in New York State.

The agreed upon amendment provides that, in finding a verdict in a capital case, the jury may fix the penalty at either death or imprisonment for life. At present, the ent life imprisonment is the penalty for conviction of murder in the first degree, but the convicted person may be pardoned or pardoned after he has served thirty years, in some states where he has served twenty years. The proposed New York State amendment would forbid pardon of one convicted of murder unless his innocence is positively established.

To-day in Illinois, at least, the jury fixes the penalty as is now proposed for New York state. This relieves the judge of imposing the penalty and shifts respon-

sibility upon the jury. It is safe to predict that, if the proposed change is approved by the people in the general election this fall, but very few convictions for murder in the first degree will be had in this State. At present there is a pronounced sentiment against capital punishment—whether History would bid us prepare for it, rightly or wrongly, and if the Constitution is changed as is proposed we fancy very few juries would ever impose the capital punishment, especially upon records. Unless the leopard changes his spots, it is inconceivable that they would ever put their signatures to even a mildly radical document. However, many thinkers and students of strange things happen and politics very often make strange bed-fellows.

Whether the change will operate to lessen the number of murders is another question. Very criminology hold that it will not. On the other hand, there are students who think that it would tend to make juries be less inclined to acquit murderers if there were the alternative of life imprisonment to fall back upon.

A Rochester baseball club, with John Ganzel will be like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. With all the filth and nastiness that is abroad in the secular press there never was a time when Catholics needed the presence more in their homes of Catholic papers and magazines. Now is a good time to subscribe for the Catholic Journal.

Nosophistry, no pleading of honor and all that, can excuse the murder of Leo Frank by a Georgia mob.

We do not believe that all this fuss about infringement upon the rights of automobilists comes from the motorists but from other interested parties.

From the fact that the New York State Railways want to put the jitney out of business, we infer that Rochester is about to have better street car service.

What has become of the baseball boosters' league?

Why do not the police pay a little more attention to the bigots who give street talks every little while at the corner of Main and Water streets?

The net results of "Clean up week" are wearing off as the days go on. There should be a spirit of civic pride developed sufficiently to carry on cleaning up process fifty-two weeks in the year.

Evidently, the Constitutional Convention is not unlike the State Legislature in that it leaves all its important work until the very last minute.

Former Governor Slaton, of Georgia, talks very boldly at long range. So does Mayor Woodward, of Atlanta.

Let us redouble our prayers that the hot-heads may not put us for a share in the European war.

In the death of Cardinal Van der Meer the Church loses a valiant son and Christianity a devoted champion. May his soul rest in peace!

Apparently the yellow journals are not content to permit the Holy Father to judge his own course in the European war. If he repudiates their gratuitous denunciations, then they denounced him. It is, or should be, the duty of a thinking person that the Pope does not permit himself to be dictated to by the newspapers. Furthermore, he cannot permit himself to be swayed this way and that as it pleases the editors of the jingo press.

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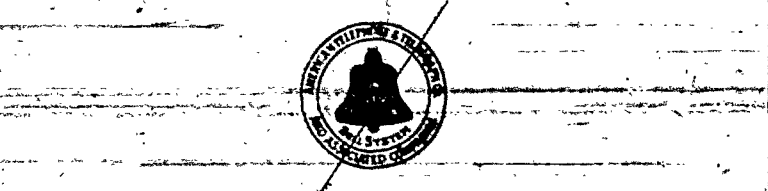
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