
The Rights of Working Women

by Eugene V. Debs

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Cardinal James Gibbons has issued an address to women denying them the right to suffrage and warning them that they must not “trench on the domain of man.”

Who is Cardinal Gibbons that he should presume to decide for women that they have no right to vote and that they will incur his pious displeasure if they have the temerity to protest against being the mere property of men and to claim a voice in the government under which they live?

What has Cardinal Gibbons ever done for the six million women who are working for wages in the United States that should restrain them from rebuking his impertinence?

The factory owners who exploit these women to the last degree are also opposed to “woman’s rights” and Cardinal Gibbons and the like of him are the pious agents of the master class who admonish their subjects to obey their masters and be content with their lot.

The working women are under no obligation to Cardinal Gibbons or to any other cardinal or high priest. No cardinal has ever added a penny to a working woman’s wages or reduced her work day by a minute or bettered her condition in the slightest degree.

Why then should these women who earn their own living and support themselves allow a parasite priest who lives out of their labor, and who is far more of a politician than a priest, to persuade them to resign themselves meekly to their slavish lot?

Cardinal Gibbons and the rest of the cardinals and archbishops live in fine residences, have servants to wait on them, and pass their hours in luxury and ease. They drink champagne wine, smoke the finest cigars, and eat the choicest viands.

How do I know this? From the employees of establishments that furnish their tables and cellars.

You working women have to be satisfied, most of you, with long hours of drudgery, with scant and course food, shoddy clothes, and cheap lodgings. You don't drink champagne wine, eat truffled tidbits, and wear costly jewels. No, you have to work like slaves for what you get, and this will be your lot as long as you allow robed parasites to prevail upon you to think that God has commissioned them to do your thinking.

Working women of America, I appeal to you to do your own thinking and to serve notice on Cardinal Gibbons and other plutocratic prelates when they have the impudence to claim the authority to speak for you and to deny you the right to vote, that you are no longer taking orders from the clerical agents of your economic masters and exploiters.

All these spiritual advisers, so-called, are intimately associated with the rich and are always on the side of the moneybags.

Caiaphas, the high priest of the ruling class of Rome twenty centuries ago, was a potent instrument in having Jesus Christ hunted down and nailed to the cross as a felon, and were the same Christ to appear on earth today, preaching the same doctrine, the Gibbonses, Farleys, O'Connells, and Irelands, the high priests of capitalism, would denounce his as Caiaphas did, in pious cant, in the name of religion.

Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop Ireland, and other high priests have not only declared against the right of women to vote but they have announced their opposition to the initiative and referendum, the recall, and every other measure that has to do with democracy and self-government.

These gentlemen in gowns speak for Wall Street, for the plutocracy, the ruling class. They traffic in the ignorant reverence of the masses. At heart they hold the common people in contempt. They pretend to be chosen of God and to be his representatives on earth, a pious invention that has served in every age to keep the ignorant masses at their mercy.

Working women of America, these men are not your friends, they are your enemies. They are the friends of those who rob you of the fruit of your labor and share in the spoil.

Do not be deceived because they are the professes priests of religion, and remember that blind obedience to another, even though that

other be robed and mitered, and rolls his eyes and mumbles phrases you do not understand, is not religious duty but debasing slavery.

Do not mistake superstition for religion, nor a pious politician for a minister of Christ.

Cardinal Gibbons cares nothing about you wage-slaves. You are not invited to the fashionable functions where he is the guest of honor and the capitalists who pluck you are the hosts. No, when he tells you that you have no right to vote it is as a high priest of capitalism and not as a minister of religion, and when you are force out on strike you will find him on the side of your masters, and when you are finally driven into prostitution it will be because you and your class listen to the siren voices of your betrayers instead of depending upon yourselves.

Such limited rights as you have today you have in spite of the high priests. Let them no longer traffic in your ignorance in the name of religion and serve the devil in the livery of heaven.

Blind obedience, abject servility to the high priests of capitalist misrule is blasphemy, not religion.

A political hierarchy masquerading as a holy church of religion is unclean and repulsive as a white sepulcher filled with dead men's bones.

Let it be distinctly understood that what is here said is my own personal expression and I alone am responsible for it.

The retainers of capitalism, too cowardly to face the issue, will raise the cry that the church has again been attacked and that another attempt has been made to destroy religion, but no one of intelligence will be deceived by it. That cry has had its day and something else will have to be invented to frighten the faithful and keep them huddled in the cells of superstition.

Arouse, you working women, from your passive obedience, your servile submission, and resolve to have your rights! Arise from your knees and stand erect, and declare that henceforth you will depend upon yourselves!

The day of awakening is at hand. The workers of all the world are breaking away from kingcraft and priestcraft and swelling the conquering hosts of the international army of emancipation.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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