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EDITORIAL

CONVERSATION NO. 2.

By DANIEL DE LEON

(Under this head will be reproduced a series of conversations that were either listened to or partaken in by the editor of *The People* in the company of the capitalist passengers, whom he met in the Pullmans in the course of his recent extensive tour in the West.)

THE smoking compartment of the solitary Pullman car that left Spokane, Wash., on the morning of April 20th, bound south to Pendleton, was the scene of a lively discussion, conducted throughout in the best of good nature, and frequently interrupted by peals of laughter, notwithstanding the repartees were frequently pointed and sharp. Besides the Editor of *The People*, there were three traveling agents, a land surveyor, a life insurance official, and, as it appeared from his own statements, a portly, self-sufficient speculator in stocks, content with himself and willing to be still more content. These six passengers came in successively, except the three drummers who were acquainted with one another, and probably took their seats in the compartment from the start. As each successive passenger walked in and settled down to smoke, he was irresistibly drawn into the conversation.

The drummers had set the ball a-rolling. The subject of their several prowesses gave easy opportunities for digressions. The first digression was the Thaw verdict. One passenger stated he knew the jury would not convict. With the levity that marked most of the responses, a number of questions were showered upon him, trending on the obscene. He good naturedly parried the shafts, and then explained in an off-hand way: "The Thaws have too much money to be convicted." The observation led directly to the state of the country, to politics, to the "labor troubles," to "William Jennings," to the "big stick," etc., etc. The consensus of opinion was that "the country was booming," that "everyone was making money,"

that “never was there such prosperity.” While it was clear, at least probable, that there was much bragging in the statements made and much levity was obvious, the talk gradually grew soberer and soberer. Presently maxims of politics, economics, sociology began to be thrown up and discussed with sober brows. This episode of the conversation was the episode of interest. The sentiments there uttered probably did not drop exactly in the following order; the order in which they are here given is substantially correct:

“I’d like to see Taft President.”

“I can’t say I would. I’d prefer William Jennings.”

“Roosevelt is good enough for me,” from the speculator in stocks. “Even if the same party wins there always is a shake-up. Prices tumble before they rise again. Why, even if the same President is re-elected there always is a period of incertitude. I’ll tell you just how I feel about it. I favor a monarchy. So long as the reigning king lives things go at an even pace. And we shall come to that. The good sense of the business interests will demand it.”

All the others fell over the speculator in stocks. They believed in a republic. He took them up one by one. With pretty good dialectics he brought it home to each that his respective business would be promoted by a monarchy.

“It is all a matter of sentiment with you people,” the speculator in stocks summed up. “The business interests of the country demand a monarchy. I’m for Roosevelt, simply because I would rather have a poor President for life than a change every four years, even if the change be from good to better. It always deranges prices. Why, Roosevelt has brought the country to the verge of war half a dozen times—all for popularity. We want a monarchy—”

“Who is to be the nobility?”

“I don’t care who. And I don’t know that we need have ‘Counts’ and ‘Dukes’ by name. Whatever stability the country enjoys to-day, it enjoys by virtue of the leading capitalists. Their families are established facts, they cannot be overthrown. I don’t care whether Rockefeller be called Duke Rockefeller, or Harriman Count Harriman. The thing is the thing. Now, the King should be taken from one of those families. Business will then be stable.”

“It never will be.”

“You will live to see it,” from the speculator.

“Never!”

“And if you don’t live to see that, you will live to see the workingmen hang you all, the way they did the property holders in the French Revolution—that’s the alternative,” from the speculator. And turning to the Editor of *The People*, who had been listening in interested and sympathetic silence, “Isn’t that about the size of it?”

Ed. *The P.*—“For one thing, it was not the working class that cut off the heads of the property holders in the French Revolution. That surgical operation was performed by the bourgeois, the class that is now the capitalist class. For another thing, France had a King at the time. If a long established monarchy could not prevent the French Revolution, how will an upstart monarchy prevent an upheaval in America?”

“I thought you agreed with me,” said the stock speculator in astonishment.

Ed. *The P.*—“I do, in a way. I agree with you that as things are, they will last not much longer. And I agree with you, if I understand you rightly, that the real danger lies from the quarter of the workingmen. They are beginning to stand on their hind legs. A people that rises, like a horse that rears, is apt to throw the rider. I agree with you, there is serious trouble ahead.”

In the rest of the conversation all the other passengers took a brisk hand. If one wishes to fathom capitalist ignorance on economics and sociology all he has to do is to patronize the Pullmans. The Labor Question was bandied about. Suffice it to say that even the speculator in stocks, who had displayed the best powers in systematic thinking, agreed that the cause of the “Labor Troubles” was that “the workingmen got too well paid!”

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