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EDITORIAL

CONVERSATION NO. 6.

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.]

A LITTLE over a month after the conversation, recorded last week in *The People*, took place on the train from Los Angeles to San Francisco, the almost empty Pullman car that left New Orleans on the morning of May 13th for Evansville, Ind., was boarded at Birmingham, Ala., by three drummers, who incontinently continued in the smoker the conversation which they evidently had started while waiting for the train. The conversation was on the subject of the Negro, his capacities as worker, and the status that should be his.

Two of the drummers were Southerners; the third was a Michigan man. All three traveled for some kind of hardware firm or firms. It leaked out that the Michigander was a college man; one of the Southerners had “tried Annapolis” but could not “stand it.” The antecedents of the other did not leak out.

“The South is not meant for White labor,” observed the ex-Annapolisian. “We are here in the Black Belt of the South. This is the most prosperous section of the South. And we keep the Nigger down where he belongs.”

The Michigander put in: “The South is not understood in the North. We hear up there a whole lot of sentimental gush about the Negro. I see how it is down here. Our northern papers seem to toady after the Negro vote. I guess Tillman is right about that.”

“The North will find out what is what, soon enough,” was the ex-Annapolisian’s opinion. “You are having more and more trouble with your workingmen—”

“Those Dagos,” put in the other Southerner, “are no better than Niggers—the

Italians, the Dutch, the Jews, the Hungarians, all of them must be kept down together. They are good workingmen, but bad citizens.”

“I have been South and I have been North,” further observed the ex-Annapolisian with his assumption of military airs, “and my observation is that the North will have to follow the pace set by the South. What people call the Negro Question is not a Negro question at all—IT IS THE LABOR QUESTION.” At this point the S.L.P. man who happened to be present looked in the direction of the speaker’s pockets. It was an involuntary motion. The utterance: “What is called the Negro Question is not a Negro question at all, it is the Labor Question” sounded so much like S.L.P. principle, that the S.L.P. man expected to see a copy of *The People* sticking out of that Southerner’s pocket. Of course, there was none such. He went on to say: “The place of the workingman is the field or the factory. He has no time to inform himself on matters of national policy. If he gets a smattering of that it puffs him up. Then a lot of scheming politicians get around him. That settles him. A good workingman is destroyed to make a bad citizen. There is where the Anarchists and Socialists recruit their forces from.”

“It was that way in Newport News a short while ago. So long as the men were kept working all was well. In came a man who talked politics. From that time all went wrong. The Negroes and the Whites were changed alike,” was the experience furnished by the other Southerner.

The Michigander nodded assent and added: “The Negro Question is not understood in the North.”

“We here in the Black Belt have solved the problem. The Nigger is a workingman, the Dago is a workingman. They are both alike. Give them the ballot? You might as well give the ballot to so many razer-back hogs. Sentiment should cut no figure when it comes to the saving of the country. The Constitution must be changed; the workingman must be taught to keep to his station.”

“But how if it should happen, as I think it happens at least ‘once in a while,’ that the workingman is neither ‘Dago’ nor ‘Nigger,’ but a full blooded native American?” courteously put in the S.L.P. man who happened to be present.

Almost in chorus the two Southerners answered: “He is a workingman, that’s enough.”

“That’s enough,” echoed the Michigander.

The S.L.P. man present thought so too—the common status of WORKINGMAN makes “Nigger,” “Dago” and “American” one family, one brotherhood, ONE CLASS.

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