

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 7, NO. 358.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 1907.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

## CONVERSATION NO. 4.

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.]

**T**HE Pullman smoker on the so-called “Oregon Express,” that dragged itself snail-like from San Francisco to Portland on the 8th and 9th of last March, was crowded with an indignant set of capitalists of various industries.

One of them declared hopelessly: “Nowadays one may be glad if he gets at all to his destination. It is a bit of good luck not to lose a leg, or an arm, or be killed by a railroad accident.”

Another had a long, sad story to tell of his experience on the roads. With a robust oath he summed up his sentiments: “It is ‘cough up, and shut up!’ with the railroads. They do as they please with the public.”

A third was of the opinion that even the one-time meek porters on the Pullmans had caught the infection. “Why,” said he, “you have to bribe the baboons to make your bed, or bring you clean towels!”

Yet another, as he looked out of the window at a cattle train that was dashing by while the passenger train itself was side-tracked to give the freight train the right of way, exclaimed: “Look at that, the public is treated worse than cattle!”

A fifth indignant Pullmanite shook his finger at an imaginary bunch of railroad directors, as he balanced himself on the edge of the wash stand: “These fellows are yet going to drive people to a revolution, I tell ye!”

It went on in this way, off and on during those two days. The more time the train fell behind the more incensed did these Pullmanites become. On one of these occasions, when the indignant mass meeting was at its hottest, the spirit moved one

of the passengers to say: "I call this cheating—just cheating—it is robbery—they might as well dig their hands down into the pockets of the public, and pull out our fares, and then make us hoof it!"

Strongly in contrast with the high treble of the voice that was just heard broke in another voice. It came from a passenger who had taken no or little part in the previous conversations. For all the world he looked like a slick capitalist. He looked well fed. He was rotund. With a deep bass voice and deliberate utterance this gentleman said:

"Well—it may be 'cheating.' What business is not 'cheating'?" Profound silence ensued. The speaker took his time. With all eyes centered on him he proceeded: "You have been denouncing the railroads.—They may be all you claim.—All I got to say is they are no worse than any other business, and better than some I could mention." Profounder silence. "Take the fire insurance business, for instance.—Not many years ago I lived in Provo, Utah.—There was not a house, barn, or stable insured," with a twinkle in his eyes,— "I doubt if there is any insured NOW, either.—Well one day a fire insurance agent came to town; he opened an office; he advertised for insurance; he did a good deal of drumming.—Then we took it up. The Judge of the Court of Probate wrote several articles in the paper, opposing fire insurance;—the Mormon elder spoke against fire insurance;—the Mormon tithe collector advised against fire insurance; I opposed fire insurance. And what do you think happened?" He looked around. "Can you guess, gentlemen?" No one guessed. "Well, I'll tell ye—a fire broke out and burned down the barn of the Judge of Probate,—a few days later a second fire broke out and burned down an out house of the Mormon elder,—three or four days later the store-house of the tithes' collector took fire and all the tithes were destroyed." He looked around and proceeded: "The next morning, bright and early, the Judge of Probate, the Mormon elder, the tithes' collector and myself went to the house of that fire insurance agent, with shot-guns on our shoulders, and we said to him—'Now, look ye here, if another fire breaks out in Provo we'll run you out of town—or lynch you!'" Again he looked around, and after a pause, during which he stretched out his arms for exercise, said: "THERE WERE NO MORE FIRES."

No one doubted the accuracy of this story. They said not whether the cap fitted

them, or whether “all business is cheating,” with some of them even worse than the railroads. They looked depressed. The truth overwhelmed them.

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

Uploaded October 2009

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)