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EDITORIAL

MATTER TO BE WEIGHED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ELSEWHERE in this issue will be found an open letter to the ex-President of the I.W.W.¹ from H.F. Flentje,² a non-Socialist Labor Party man, of South Manchester, Conn., in the course of which the writer reports a statement made to him by a commercial traveler who claims to have recently been “all over Colorado, Idaho and other western States,” where he gathered the general impression of the people to be that it is not the intention of the Mine Owners’ Association to hang Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone, but to keep them in jail long enough for the Association to “destroy the usefulness of the three men to the Western Federation of Miners,” adding, as explanatory to this theory, that the Mine Owners’ Association got their tools in the higher offices of the Federation “and control their paper.”

Nothing can be imagined more base than the suggestion of defamatory matter. Nor is anything more reckless or harmful to the movement than the repetition of grave statements as true without the precaution of cross-examining the informant and weighing the source of his information. The systematic disregard of these principles by the Socialist party press towards the Socialist Labor Party and its officers should serve as a horrible example to all decent men, to say nothing of those who really have at heart the Cause of the working class. One thing, however, is the willful or malicious circulation of unsupported defamatory matter, another thing is to do what *The People* does to-day in publishing Flentje’s letter, and accompanying it by this editorial warning.

For John M. O’Neill—the person almost designated by name in Flentje’s report of his conversation with the western traveler—we have little or no use. At his best

¹ [Charles O. Sherman.]

² [To be appended at a future date.—R.B.]

he has approved himself a rattle-brained ranter. More lately—by his utter disregard of self-respect; by his exclusively abusive language towards the uncorruptible S.L.P.; by his readiness to yield space and boom the diatribes against men, who differ from him regarding the I.W.W. convention, by an “ex-President Starr” of Arizona proven to be a robber, not of the living only, but of dead workingmen as well; by his obscene insinuations against officers of the S.L.P.; by his application to poor wage slaves of the capitalist insults of “proletaire rabble,” “coffee-and-doughnut brigade”; by his emulation of the Mine Owners’ Association derision of the r-r-r-e-v-o-l-u-t-i-o-n-a-r-y I.W.W. majority; etc., etc.,—the gentleman has shown himself, to say the least, utterly unfit to be trusted with any responsible post in the Labor Movement. All this notwithstanding, whatever we may think of John M. O’Neill, there are two facts that may not be disregarded. One is that he is a human being; the other is that that human being does hold an office of trust in the American Labor Movement. The two facts combined dictate one course—the protection of the man; the protection of the Movement.

That the Socialist Labor Party or its officers has not nailed every grave slander set afloat against them comes from the circumstance that most of these slanders are simply whispered about. Every one that has been uttered loud enough, concrete enough, to be grabbed, has been nailed fast. It so happened with the Lee-Spargo slander about De Leon’s being a Bismarck spy; it so happened with the Rosen slander concerning alleged statements made by Bebel about the S.L.P. That Socialist party officials, together with their dominators, Gompers’s labor lieutenants of the capitalist class, should act as whispering echoes of defamation is fitting. For the {that?} very reason the S.L.P. takes the opposite course. It turns the light upon whatever grave defamatory matter floats across its way. It does so now. If the popular opinion reported to prevail in the West against O’Neill is false, he should not be kept in the dark about it, all the less by reason of his recent conduct which might give a color to the slander; knowledge thereof will enable him to meet it, and silence his covert defamers—he is entitled to that much from us as a human being. On the other hand, if the reported public opinion be true, the Movement should be enlightened—the Movement is entitled to that at the hands of the militants in its ranks.

Flentje's name is given in full, also his address.

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