

The People.

VOL. VI, NO. 7.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MAY 17, 1896.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {158}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I am at a loss to comprehend what you Socialists mean by dividing the people into three different classes.

UNCLE SAM—If you would only read Socialist literature and use your own intelligence, you would cease to be “at a loss.”

B.J.—We have but one kind of people—citizens, all equal before the law, and our free institutions are for the benefit of all.

U.S.—The devil you say!

B.J. (testily)—That’s just what I say.

U.S.—Mention one of those free institutions.

B.J.—I’ll mention you a dozen: 1st, The suffrage; 2d, The right of any one to go into any pursuit he likes; 3d, Our free schools; 4th, We are all born equal, we have no lords with special privileges; 5th—

U.S.—That’ll do. Let’s take up the first. You are a motorman; you told me that last year you did not vote. Did you not want to?

B.J.—I wanted to, but could not get off.

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—I had to work.

U.S.—Why did you not drop work?

B.J.—And lose my job and starve?

U.S. (Grabs B.J. by the nape of the neck, pulls him to a near pump and holds his



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

head under while he pumps a bucket full of water on B.J.'s head. When B.J. has recovered his breath U.S. proceeds.)—That much for equality before the law No. 1. Much good does the written “equality” do you if in practice you can't avail yourself of it!

B.J. tries to dry his head.

U.S.—Now for No. 2. Do you like standing ten and more hours on the front platform of a car, summer and winter at the starvation wages you complain about?

B.J.—No, I don't like that.

U.S.—Why don't you go into the business of owning your own trolley line, or your own factory and have a good living and choose your own pursuit?

B.J.—I haven't the capital to do that.

U.S. (Pulls B.J. again under the pump and gives his head another soaking. When he has again recovered his breath U.S. proceeds.)—You cannot exercise your functions unless you have capital or access to capital; you have none, and the only way you can get access to capital is by selling yourself at starvation wages to the capitalist. You have no choice. That much for “equality before the law” No. 2.

B.J. mops his head.

U.S.—Now for No. 3.—Would you not like to have gone through college?

B.J.—Indeed, I would!

U.S.—Why didn't you?

B.J.—My parents were too poor; they even had to take me out of the grammar school to help them earn a living.

U.S.—And the schoolhouse was open all the time ready for you?

B.J.—Of course!

U.S. (Pulls B.J. a third time to the pump and gives his head a third soaking.)—That much for “equality before the law” No. 3. Much good does the school do you or the abstract right to go there if the social system you live under bars you from access through poverty. Now to No. 4.

B.J.—At any rate we have no lords that we must knuckle under—

U.S.—Let's see. Must you and all workers not “knuckle under” to your bosses from early infancy, or can you do what you want? Don't they compel you to sign away the rights the law give {gives?} you to protection from injury in exchange of a crust? And

furthermore, do you not know that our workers in America support more lords, princes and marquises than any European country? Who are the Duchess of Marlborough, the Marchionesses of Castellane, the Princesses of Hatzfeldt, the Countesses of Campofelice and scores of others if not American women who own our American property, and whom we must support with the sweat of our brows, and who bully us and have us clubbed and shot if we strike? (Pulls B.J. a fourth time under the pump and administers a fourth soaking.) That much for “equality before the law” No. 4. Much good does the absence of lords and dukes in our constitution do us if practically they are on our backs! Now go on with your No. 5.

B.J. (wet as a ducked hen and quite crest-fallen)—No, thank you. The starch is taken clean out of my “equality before the law.”

U.S.—Now you may be able to understand what Socialists mean by “classes.”

The thing to look at is the material condition of a man. According as his material conditions so will his aspirations and his needs be. The men who own large capital constitute a class that needs not to work. They can live upon the work of those who do not own any capital because without land on which and machinery with which to labor a man cannot exercise his functions as worker. Thus we have two classes: 1. The idle capitalist class that has sponged up the nation’s wealth, and 2d, the working class, or proletariat, who alone does all the work and produces all the wealth but lives in poverty.

In between these two you have the middle class. It consists of people who have a little property, just enough to keep them from working for others, but not enough to compete with the big fellows. This middle class is going by the board fast. Catch on?

B.J.—I begin to see.

U.S.—All political struggles are conducted upon the lines of the class interests of these three. The big class want to preserve their stolen goods; the middle class want to prevent the big fellows from swallowing them up {and} also want to preserve the power of fleecing the workers. The workers want to prevent all these vampires from fleecing them. Hence the class struggle of the proletariat is and must be conducted upon the lines of abolishing the private ownership of the land and the machinery of production.

Without one realizes the fact of class distinctions, he will not understand what the several political parties are after, nor will he, if a workingman be able to see where his

class interests should take them {him?}.

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

Uploaded December 2007

slpns@slp.org