

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 21.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 1897.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {214}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Heavens, how intolerant the Socialists are!

UNCLE SAM—In what way have they again interfered with your schemes?

B.J.—They have not interfered with any scheme of mine; that's not it; but they want their own way and won't admit that anybody else is right.

U.S.—Have you any way of your own that you think will solve the Social Question?

B.J.—I won't call it "a way of my own," but I have a way.

U.S.—Which is it?

B.J.—I'll tell you: This social system puts me in mind of a bird with a big, broad, long tail and hardly any body or head. Now, such birds are easy to catch. All you have to do is to put a lump of salt three pounds and a half heavy on their tails, and you have got them. It is upon that theory that I base my solution.

U.S.—In what way?

B.J.—This way: Just set up public baths everywhere. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. Just get people to be clean, and the weight of the cleanliness of the masses will be so heavy on the tail of the classes that you can just catch 'em and do away with them. This theory is not mine. It is called the Social Cleanliness theory. I believe in it.

U.S.—Then you must believe that you are right and others are wrong.

B.J.—Of course I do; but I don't act as if I thought that I can not possibly be mistaken. I always hold that others may be right.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—You thereby show that you take no stock in your own theory. If you did, you would maintain it as right against all others; but seeing you don't, it is clear you feel your ground very weak under you. No wonder you are tolerant. A social principle is right or it is wrong. If you think yours is right you must hold that all others are wrong, and then you cease to be tolerant.

B.J.—There is where you make your mistake. It is not true that a social principle is either wrong or right; and even if it were the way to get at the truth or the right one is to keep on trying.

U.S.—You have excellently defined the social school of the empirics {empiricists?}. These refuse to profit by the experience of previous generations. They must make their own experience. According to them, all the experience made in investigating electricity, for instance, should be ignored; the investigator must get one arm blown off by ignoring one set of experiences; must get a leg burnt off by ignoring another; must get his hair singed by ignoring a third; and if, by ignoring several others he escapes being fried alive and there is enough of him left to profit by what he learned he may become an expert, scientific electrician—

B.J.—Well, now—

U.S.—And if the electricians, who have gone through a systematic course, and are equipped with the accumulated experience of their predecessors, warn such a man and tell him he is blundering, he forthwith answers them that they are “dogmatic,” and they may esteem themselves happy if his friends and personal admirers don't fall over him with bucketfuls {bucketsful?} of vilification. That's your “school.”

B.J.—Well, now—

U.S.—And that “school” is infinitely more dangerous when its tenets are applied to society. The empiric electrician may mutilate or even kill himself alone in the course of his experimenting. Much would not be lost thereby. But the empiric in social science can do no end of mischief. He may and does cost society no end of accidents in the course of his conceited career of experimentation. He causes social mutilations, and may cause social cataclysms. While he is learning, society's sufferings are prolonged, and a new set of sufferings are piled upon it. This is what comes from your “trying.”

B.J.—Well, now—

U.S.—But there is worse that comes from such “trying” in the social movement. The “tryer,” the empiric experimenter, may himself be honest, but his conduct attracts the biggest lot of crooks, as fly-paper attracts flies. Hence, not only does it happen that society suffers by the experimenter, but its future welfare is put in jeopardy by these carrion crows, who invariably flock to such “experimenters.” Take, for instance, this latest of experimentations, Debs’ colonization plan; who turns up at the head of the “Colonization Commission” of the “Social Democracy of America”? One Col. Richard J. Hinton, a veritable bird of ill omen to any revolutionary movement, a man whom the Socialist Labor party had to expel, not for insubordination or such comparatively minor offence, but for the grave one of a breach of the trust reposed in him as editor of its paper in the very midst of a campaign, in other words, for an act of moral turpitude, a man, who, forthwith after that, the movement of ’86–87 having gone down, landed on his feet as an employee of the capitalist government at Washington! That comes from “experimenting.” No. Protection, Free Trade, Single Tax, Glasgow plans, bimetallism, “Reforms,” etc., etc., have all been tried. Based upon the experience of others, proceeding as an enlightened body, the Socialist Labor party takes its stand, and, without any wobbling, says pointedly: THIS IS THE PARTY, AND NONE OTHER.

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

Uploaded February 2008

slpns@slp.org