

The People.

VOL. IV, NO. 38.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1894.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {93}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I have been doing some hard thinking.

UNCLE SAM—You need it badly; hope it has done you good.

B.J.—Can't say it has. The more I think on this question of bonds and taxation the more mixed I get.

U.S.—And yet it is easy as rolling off a log.

B.J.—That may be. But I can't get rid of the idea that taxes are in the nature of a burden upon the people.

U.S.—All the people?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—I think I see your difficulty. You are preoccupied with middle class modes of thought. See here. We are living under the capitalist system of skin, not under any of the systems of skin that have previously prevailed. Do you think you have a clear idea of what the capitalist system means?

B.J.—To be frank, I don't think I have.

U.S.—To get a clear idea thereof it is best to contrast it with the previous, the feudal or landlord system.

B.J.—I think I understand that system.

U.S.—Don't be too hasty. Under the feudal system the vassal was allowed to operate as his own portions of the lord's land. The proceeds of that labor were his own. In payment for this privilege he had, however, to work one or two or more days for the lord exclusively on the lord's domain. Say that the lord demanded two days' work; on those



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

days the vassal's labor was the lord's. The vassal had the other five for himself. Under this system, you perceive, there is no attempt to cover up the fact that the lord appropriated some one else's work.

B.J.—None, whatever.

U.S.—Now suppose that beside the proceeds of those two days' work the lord wanted more.

B.J.—He would then demand of the vassal that he work for him three days.

U.S.—That was one way. Another and a quicker one of getting at the goods was to levy a tax on the vassal. Was not that taken out of the wealth that he produced when working for himself and which, therefore, belonged to him?

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—Now turn to the capitalist system.

B.J. sinks his hands deeper into his pockets.

U.S.—Does the capitalist work at all?

B.J.—Not unless sponging be considered working.

U.S.—Yet he has it all?

B.J.—Every bit.

U.S.—Who works?

B.J.—The working class.

U.S.—Does the capitalist say to the wage worker: "Here is my factory; if you work two days for me, I shall let you work the other five for yourself?"

B.J. looks blank.

U.S.—Not much. He says: "Work six or seven days in the week and I shall give you \$5 or \$7." Do you not perceive that under this system the skinning process is concealed?

B.J.'s eyes open wide.

U.S.—Under this system it does not appear, as under the other, that the worker is propertyless. He imagines himself to be a property holder of some sort. He does not clearly perceive that what he is paid is about the least he can get. He does not notice that, in point of fact, he has been taxed dry of all that he produced as fast as he produced it. The old notion that taxation takes property away from him still lingers when he has no property left to him to be taxed off.

B.J. (claps his hands)—I see!

U.S.—It follows that the matter of taxation concerns property that is stolen from the worker by the capitalist system before he ever gets hold of it. Do you catch on?

B.J.—I do. But another thing begins to puzzle me.

U.S.—Which?

B.J.—Why on earth do not these howling panacea peddlers teach the people these things?

U.S.—There is nothing puzzling about it. The secret is “laziness”—stupendous “laziness.” These people won’t read systematically; they have a notion they can evolve it all out of their inner consciousness, and, as that is by far easier than to study, they shoot off their mouths. I tell you, Jonathan, had I the time I would take these fellows one after another over my knees, right side up, and give them such a walloping as would concentrate in one minute all the spankings they ever received from their mothers.

B.J. (spitting into his hands)—Right you are. I am ready to help you just as soon as you get the time. I’ll hold these fellows, and you dust them.

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

Uploaded October 2007

slpns@slp.org