

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 10.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 1897.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {205}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Is this America, or is it not?

UNCLE SAM—According to my latest information “hit his, me modder, hit his.”

B.J.—And are you and I not citizens?

U.S.—Methinks we is.

B.J.—Can you explain to me why you and the rest of the Socialists are all the time blabbing about us being slaves? A citizen is not a slave!

U.S.—We babble about us being “wage slaves.”

B.J.—What’s the difference? A slave is a slave.

U.S.—I wish you would tell me what you call a slave.

B.J.—A slave? Why, a slave? Don’t you know what a slave is —well a slave—don’t you know?

U.S.—I do; and that’s why I maintain that you and I are wage slaves.

B.J.—But a slave must be owned by somebody else, and we are not.

U.S.—Is that your definition of slavery, a system of ownership of the body of others?

B.J.—Yes; that’s it.

U.S.—Well, that is not of the essence of slavery. The ownership is only an incident that sometimes accompanies slavery, but not always. When it does, it is called chattel slavery.

B.J.—And what is the essence of slavery?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—The essence of slavery is that condition of a man under which he is compelled to yield to another a part of his product. If you produce 100 cents and are compelled to give up 1 cent of your product to some one else, you are a slave to the extent of 1 cent.

B.J.—I admit that.

U.S.—If you are compelled to yield to some one else 75 cents of the fruits of your labor, you are still more enslaved.

B.J.—Granted.

U.S.—Now, then, you and I can't get bread and butter unless we have money—

B.J.—True.

U.S.—And we can't get any money unless we hire ourselves to a boss, to a man who has got possession of the machinery of production.

B.J.—That's true, too, but—

U.S.—Just wait. No boss will employ us unless he can get more of us than what he gives us in pay—

B.J. (surprised)—Is that so?

U.S.—We workingmen, people who do not own the necessary capital to work with, are treated by a boss in the matter of pay somewhat as he treats his horse. Do you imagine a man will keep a horse on the field if the animal eats more than he produces?

B.J.—Why, no!

U.S.—He would get rid of that horse, if he can get some one to buy it off his hands; and, if he can't, he will turn the horse into Bologna sausage.

B.J.—Guess so.

U.S.—Just so with us workingmen. The boss hires us when he can get out of us more than he gives in wages. In other words, he hires us when he can keep a part of the fruit of our toil, allowing us to keep the other part ourselves. As we are compelled by hunger to hire ourselves out to him, we are compelled to become his slaves, his wage slaves, to the amount of the product of our labor that he withholds from us. Now this amount is not at the rate of 1 cent out of 100; it is at the rate of 75 cents out of 100. We are not only slaves theoretically, but we are very much enslaved, having to let the boss class take the bulk of what we produce.

B.J.—But a slave can't change his master unless the master is willing.

U.S.—And you think you can?

B.J.—Of course, I can.

U.S.—You think so, because you imagine now that you are a wage slave of your individual boss. The fact is you are a slave of the boss class. You may change your individual master, sometimes; not always. In the industries that are trustified, the trust is the master and wherever you work in that industry, you work for the same boss. In the other industries, you may actually change your individual master, but that is all; you do not change your condition of slavery. And that's why we Socialists, who have no gas in our heads, "blab" about being wage slaves. It would do you no harm to "blab" some of that "blabbing," it is much more solid stuff than your notions about being a free citizen.

B.J.—According to that I am not a free citizen, eh?

U.S.—You are a free citizen only in so far as you are free to use your ballot so as to overthrow this system of slavery. But, so long as this system lasts, your "free citizenship" is a very lop-sided affair. Imagine a "citizen" whom a boss can kick out of work, and thus out of bread any time that boss likes, what sort of a citizen do you call that?

B.J. ponders.

U.S.—Let me tell you—a wage slave citizen. Start to "blab" a little, and try with the Socialists to become truly a free citizen.

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

Uploaded January 2008

slpns@slp.org