

# The People.

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DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {115}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**ROTHER JONATHAN—I don't believe that the single tax is altogether nonsense.

UNCLE SAM—No more do I.

B.J.—I even think it is a grand scheme.

U.S.—So do I.

B.J.—You are agreeing with suspicious unanimity. What do you mean?

U.S.—I'd first like to know what you mean.

B.J.—Well, I'll tell you. The cause of poverty is the private ownership of land. Remove the cause and poverty ceases. Make land free to all, and no poverty can be. Ain't it?

U.S.—Nixy!

B.J.—Nixy?

U.S.—Didn't you know Farmer Zedekiah Obediah Jones?

B.J.—He whose farm was foreclosed and sold at auction, and who then shot himself?

U.S.—The identical one.

B.J.—I knew him well. I knew him when he was a shoemaker in Marlboro.

U.S.—Did he then own the land on which he later started farming?

B.J.—He did.

U.S.—And why did he give up shoemaking?

B.J.—He told me he could not compete with the machine in the factory.

U.S.—And all the time he had land?



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B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And what did he do next?

B.J.—He first turned cobbler, then he threw into the lumber room all his tools. They had become useless to him from the time the machine started to turn out shoes, and he took to farming.

U.S.—How did he fare then?

B.J.—Pretty well at first.

U.S.—Only “at first?”

B.J.—Because presently machinery was applied to the raising of agricultural products. From that time on I began to hear him grumble. He complained he could not produce corn as cheaply as the bonanza farmers could, any more than he could produce shoes as cheaply as the fellow who had the shoe machine.

U.S.—And did he grumble and plod along?

B.J.—No; after a while he raised a loan of \$500 to meet his household needs and get some horses and such like implements.

U.S.—He was all right from then on, was he?

B.J.—The devil, all right! He pretty soon found that the \$500 loan was helping to drag him down. Without it, he could not make the two ends meet; the interest on the loan on top of all made him cave in.

U.S.—Was sold out?

B.J.—Yes, and then he shot himself.

U.S.—Well, you have given me the history of capital’s power to ruin him who has not got it. The fate of Zedekiah Obediah Jones, once a mechanic, then a farmer, is the fate of those who have to compete with more capital than they themselves possess. Some mechanics dropped from their former independence straightaway into wages slavery; others became small farmers first, and from there they landed into wage slavery, or suicided. You have refuted your own claim that access to land is all a man needs to-day to be freed from poverty.

B.J. (after some hesitation)—What then did you mean when you agreed that the single tax was not all nonsense, and when you agreed that it was a grand scheme?

U.S.—I meant that the single TAX was a grand scheme.

B.J.—I am no wiser now.

U.S.—I meant that, as a system of TAXATION, the scheme was grand. It does the taxing with neatness and dispatch. It is an ideal system of taxation.

B.J.—Well, let it be so. Even then it would be a good thing to introduce.

U.S.—Let me tell you, you innocent, another little story:

A cook once stepped into a chicken coop and, whetting his knife, said:

“Now, my little chicks, in what sauce would you like to be fried?”

“We don’t want to be fried at all!” cried out a big shanghai among them, flopping his wings. “We want to live.”

Catch on?

B.J. looks blank.

U.S.—Let me explain. All kinds of taxation imply the existence of class government. Class government implies the existence of classes. Classes exist when one set, a minority, does no work, and does the enjoying of the wealth that labor produces, while another class, the majority, does the toiling and does the getting along without enjoying the fruits of its labor.

Systems of taxation are, accordingly, like the sauce in which chickens are fried. The best system of taxation may be like the best sauce, the best for the capitalist, and so it is, but, like the best sauce in which the chicken is fried, it may be the most toothsome to the eater of the chicken, but it means death to the chicken every time. Catch on now?

B.J.—I begin to.

U.S.—The single tax should suit capitalists first rate, and thither we are going rapidly. More and more the taxes are laid on land or land values alone, less and less on personal property or capital; and hand in hand with this performance goes the downward condition of the workers.

B.J.—Then the workers should drop that issue!

U.S.—So they should. That and all such issues—free trade, protection, finance are so many different sauces in which the workingman is fried. The only issue that concerns him is to abolish the wages system and get public ownership of the land and the capital wherewith to work. The sensible toiler to-day does what the shanghai in the story did—declares he does not want to be fried in any sauce, however excellent the sauce.

B.J. nods assent.

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

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