

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 49.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 1898.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {244}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Are you a Socialist?

UNCLE SAM—Yes.

B.J.—I'm glad of it! I have been putting a couple of questions to every Socialist I have met, and I have stumped every one of them; I expect to stump you, too.

U.S.—What are your wonderful questions?

B.J.—Socialists say Socialism will give equal opportunities to all. Now, how can that be when we are not in the start equal? That is my first question.

U.S.—Who tells you that we won't be in the start equal?

B.J.—Will we?

U.S.—If you know what is meant by equal opportunities you will see that we would start equal. What is understood by "opportunities"? What opportunities has the workingman to-day, or the middle class man? None, or very little. The former cannot work and thereby earn a living without he hires himself out to men who own machinery of production; his only opportunity to earn a living depends upon the will of him who holds the necessaries for work, the machinery or capital; to enjoy that opportunity, he must yield the bulk of his products to that capitalist.

The latter's, the middle-class man's opportunities, are slight. To live he must sell his goods. In trying to sell them he must compete with others. Those of his competitors who have large capital can produce cheaper, and thereby undersell and ruin him.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

The opportunities to live enjoyed by these two are, as between them, unequal; and these opportunities, when compared with the opportunities of the capitalist, are again inferior.

The capitalist has the best opportunities, the middle class less, the working class still less.

Why? Because the necessaries to produce wealth with{,} the capital{,} are unequal in the hands of the three; the capitalist has the best, the middle class has less, the workingman none of it.

Now Socialism, by rendering the land on and the machinery with which to work the joint property of all, destroys the cause of inequality in opportunities. It is of the essence of the Social Revolution that it STARTS ALL EQUAL, in that it starts all with joint and equal ownership of that, the private and exclusive ownership of which is the cause of unequal opportunities.

B.J. puckers up his brows.

U.S.—Thus you see your premises are false, being false, your conclusion must be false. As Socialism DOES make us equal in the start, and preserves the condition for equality (the joint and common ownership of the necessaries for production), it will afford equal opportunities to all.

B.J.—That’s all very fine provided the capital that the capitalists now hold were first confiscated from them; but if they keep that capital they start ahead of us and we start unequal—

U.S.—Oh, I see! What you need is a little reading of our own American history. You will be able to answer your own objection if you put yourself back some hundred and odd years, when the question of freedom from England was up. Imagine some one in those days talking to a patriot and raising the objection: “It is very well for you to say that if we throw England overboard we will be free; but we won’t; we would be, provided the land of these colonies that England now holds were first confiscated from it; but if England is to keep that land it starts ahead of us, and we won’t be free.” What would you have thought of such an objector and such an objection?

B.J. preserves a worried silence.

U.S.—Would such a question have stumped you?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—Because that fellow—well—

U.S.—Because he would be proceeding upon a theory that denied the foundation of the Revolution against England. That foundation was that the land of these colonies belonged not to England but to the colonists, and was to be grabbed first thing, however loudly the British yelled “Confiscation!”

B.J.—That’s so.

U.S.—And just so with the present Social Revolution. Its foundation is that the land on which to work and the capital with which to work, now held by the capitalist class, is stolen goods; that they belong to the people, and, consequently, is {are?} to be taken—however loudly the successors of the British, our capitalist class, may yell “Confiscation!”—Catch on?

B.J.—Well, on that I was stumped. But here is another: Suppose two men are very fond of a single house and each one’s happiness depends on the possession of that house; how will Socialism satisfy both?

U.S.—If two men are in love with one woman, and the happiness of each depends on possessing her, guess under Socialism and any other system they will have to settle the matter among themselves with “coffee and pistols for two” or any other way. As to your instance, it is too puerile. Socialism does not claim to be a system that will satisfy whims and settle disputes among idiots. The man whose “happiness depends” upon living in one of thousands and hundreds of thousands of houses is not sane. Such cases belong to the domain of medicine, not to that of sociology.

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

Uploaded February 2008

slpns@slp.org