

# The People.

VOL. V, NO. 15.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JULY 7, 1895.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {117}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**ROTHER JONATHAN—I like Socialism well enough, but—  
UNCLE SAM—So you are of the “but” crew?

B.J.—This “but” is a very important one.

U.S.—In what way?

B.J.—Socialism is not radical enough for me.

U.S.—What more radical would you have?

B.J. (in a whisper)—I don’t believe in the efficacy of the ballot, I believe in the bullet. Ballots won’t do. Ballots are like spitballs. (Resuming a louder voice.)

Socialism preaches the ballot.

U.S.—And is that the reason you claim Socialism is not radical enough?

B.J.—Yes. (In a confidential and coaxing tone.) Now, tell me frankly, do you imagine your Socialist ballot will do the work, and that bullets won’t be needed?

U.S.—Let us grant for the sake of argument that bullets will be needed, that fact would not make Socialism not radical enough.

B.J.—Wouldn’t it, though?

U.S.—It wouldn’t. That is radical that goes to the root of things. The nearer a thing goes to the root of a subject the more radical it is. Granted?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Now, then. If you claim that to advocate the bullet is more “radical” than to advocate the ballot, you must be of the opinion that the ballot does not hit as close to the root as does the bullet.



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B.J.—Well—hem—

U.S.—If you start hemming you show you are caught. And so you are. You can't mean that the bullet goes closer to the root of things than the ballot—

B.J.—No—you see—

U.S.—What you do mean is that the bullet is more effective than the ballot.

B.J.—Call it that way. I won't quibble about a word. I am ready to amend my first statement by substituting the word "effective" for the word "radical." I would say: "Socialism advocates the ballot; the bullet is more effective; therefore Socialism is not effective enough for me."

U.S.—Now we are getting out of the woods. You like wild ducks, don't you?

B.J. (smacking his lips)—I do.

U.S.—To eat them you must first catch them, eh?

B.J.—Surely.

U.S.—Would you consider the most "effective" way of trying to catch them to go gunning for them with a loud brass band?

B.J.—What nonsense; of course not!

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—Because in that way you could not get at them.

U.S.—Very well. Would the bullets fired by one man suffice to overthrow the capitalist system?

B.J.—No; and not of a dozen nor of a hundred—

U.S.—Nor of 10,000?

B.J.—Nor of 100,000!

U.S.—You would need thousands upon thousands and yet again thousands of people to do the firing of bullets?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And would it be enough to have them each firing his bullets off in a desultory way?

B.J.—No; they must fire jointly, systematically.

U.S.—And could such large numbers fire systematically and jointly without organization?

B.J.—Why, of course not!

U.S.—And can you imagine “organization” without previous agitation and education?

B.J.—Certainly not!

U.S.—Now, to sum up: In order to {have} the effective shooting of bullets you must start with agitation and education.

B.J. (beginning to see where he is landing)—Yes—that—will have to precede all effective shooting.

U.S.—Now, look me in the face and answer this question: “When you first suggested bullets to me, you dropped your voice to a whisper; how, then, do you expect to reach the many thousands whom you admit you need for the bullet business if you have to conduct your agitation in whispers, i.e., in secrecy?”

B.J. collapses.

U.S.—The trouble with you is that you have again succumbed to the fascination of a phrase, and have disregarded facts. To catch wild ducks you want to get at them; and to get at them, you would be a fool to approach with a brass band. So likewise in the conversion of men into Socialism. To do that you must reach them. To reach them, you must adopt the means that will promote the facilities for agitation, not the means that will hamper you. Talk “bullets,” and forthwith you must drop into a whisper, and crawl into subterranean passages and cellars, and shrink into a conspirator.

B.J. (takes a long breath)—I was off!

U.S.—The Socialist movement cannot be reduced to the small dimensions of a conspiracy. It needs the masses for success. That bursts the bands of conspiracy. You must be able to agitate and educate over and above board; in loud, clear tone; by the light of day. Except you organize and agitate politically with the ballot as your bullet, you muzzle yourself.

B.J. (despondently)—I grant it; it is so. But do you know what you have proved to me?

U.S.—Well?

B.J.—That there is no hope for Socialism. If we talk “bullets,” we can’t agitate effectively—that’s so; to agitate effectively, we must talk “ballots.” But the ballot will

knock down nothing. Consequently, we are left.

U.S.—Not at all!! Even if, what I am not ready to grant, the ballot will knock down nothing, and the bullet alone will, even then the line of work must be by the ballot and political agitation. Upon that line alone the necessary agitation can be conducted; the rise of the vote will inspire confidence; then, in the fullness of time, if the bullet should become necessary, it then can be safely resorted to; the education of the people and the organization of the battalions will have been perfected behind cover, as they were during the anti-slavery agitation. Civilization demands that the weapons of civilization be exhausted before those of barbarism be taken up. Socialism is a four-jointed truth. There is nothing sounder, and, therefore, more radical than Socialism in aims and methods. On to the ballot box!

B.J. and U.S. shake hands warmly and look each other steadily in the eyes.

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

Uploaded October 2007

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