

The People.

VOL. VI, NO. 10.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 1896.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {162}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—The working class must overthrow the capitalist class.

BROTHER JONATHAN—That's the most foolish language I can think of.

U.S.—Why so?

B.J.—In the first place there's no such thing as a "capitalist class"; I don't know of any such difference as "capitalist class" and "working class."

U.S.—You don't?!

B.J.—I don't. Where does your "capitalist class" end and your "working class" commence? The distinction is purely imaginary.

U.S. (beginning to quiver like a cat that scents a mouse)—Ha! "Where the one ends and the other begins"?

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—And the distinction between the two is "imaginary"?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—I think I know what you mean, but I'd like to be sure. Would you mind putting it clearer?

B.J.—'Tis clear enough as I put it. But I'll make it still clearer. One man has 100 millions; guess you'll call him a capitalist; another has 50 millions, guess you call him too a capitalist; a third has 1 million, ain't he a capitalist? Yet another has \$100,000, is he a capitalist; a fifth has \$10,000; a sixth has \$100; a seventh has 50 cents. Where are you going to draw the line? One day I hear how a capitalist of \$100,000 "smoked out" a lot of middle class people, and another day I hear of a



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

capitalist having gulped up the property of a millionaire. Unless you can draw the line sharp between capitalists and non-capitalists your distinction is foolish.

U.S.—Now I understand you. Have you ever seen an elephant?

B.J.—Certainly!

U.S.—What is he, a plant or an animal?

B.J.—An animal, of course.

U.S.—Quite sure?

B.J.—Quite sure.

U.S.—And have you ever seen a cocoanut tree?

B.J.—I have.

U.S.—What is it, an animal or a plant?

B.J.—A plant, of course.

U.S.—Quite sure?

B.J.—Quite sure.

U.S.—Accordingly you distinguish between a plant and an animal?

B.J.—I do.

U.S.—Well, old boy, according to what you said before, you must be very foolish to make such a distinction. If you descend along the line of plants and animals you will come to things that you can't tell whether they are plants or animals. Since there is no such thing as drawing a sharp line between plants and animals, because at a very low grade of development they merge into one, it must follow that an elephant may be a plant and a cocoanut tree may be an animal. Do you realize what a horse's tail you make of yourself when you claim that there can be no difference between the capitalist class and the working class simply because at a low grade of development the two merge into one?

B.J. seeks consolation in his snuff-box.

U.S.—The man who has nothing to sell but his labor power is of the working class. He cannot set his labor power at work unless he has access to the tools of production, hence he is the slave of the class that owns these tools of production—machinery, factories, mills, land, etc. He may own \$5 or \$50; and he may have \$100 or more in the savings banks, but that property is not capital and its owner is not a capitalist, because that property is not enough to equip himself with the machinery of production, without which he must starve or sell himself to the

man who does own such machinery. His property is not worth mentioning.

B.J.—I shall grant that. All such are of the working class. But are all the others capitalists?

U.S.—All the others belong to the property-holding class. But they do not all hold an equal amount. The less of it they hold, the less able are they to compete with the bigger ones. That portion of them whose property is so small that it is bound to go down is the middle class; that portion of them whose property is large enough to smoke out lesser fellows constitutes the capitalist class proper. Among them there also is going on a struggle: individuals are ruined, but sufficient individuals remain to profit by this ruin, to absorb the wealth of the ruined and constitute the capitalist class. Catch on?

B.J.—Guess I begin to see.

U.S.—And the quicker you do the better. Then the scales will fall from your eyes. Then you will be able to understand why it is that the working class must stand upon its own pins, not lean upon the capitalist class, set up its own political party, and mop the floor with the bosses at the hustings.

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Uploaded December 2007

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