

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 3.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 1897.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {198}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I'd like to know upon what principle Socialists claim that the working class should have all the wealth, and the capitalist class none.

UNCLE SAM—Upon the very simple principle that the working class does all the work of production and the capitalist does none.

B.J.—Go away!

U.S.—Whither?

B.J.—I don't care whither in particular. That's not so!

U.S.—What's not so?

B.J.—That the capitalists do not work.

U.S.—If you know of any who does, let me know.

B.J.—Did you ever hear of Jay Gould?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—Did you ever read his biography?

U.S.—Several of them, and they prove my statement.

B.J.—You must have been asleep while reading them; or you must have read very imperfect ones.

U.S.—Neither.

B.J.—Why, I remember distinctly that it is recorded in the one I read that he used to work regularly 16 hours a day.

U.S. puts his hands to his hips and roars.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—What are you roaring about?

U.S.—At your blunder. I now see the funny error that you have fallen in.

B.J.—What error?

U.S.—You are getting mixed up on the word “work.” See here. Does a pickpocket “work,” or does he not?

B.J.—Guess he does.

U.S.—Does a pirate “work,” or does he not?

B.J.—Guess he does.

U.S.—Does a forger “work,” or does he not?

B.J.—I guess he, too, works.

U.S.—Now, don’t you yet see the difference between “work” and “work”?

B.J. puckers his eyelids as if a flood of light is pouring into his eyes.

U.S.—All exertion may be termed “work.” But there are two sorts of exertions:

One sort is productive of benefits to society: it either directly enriches its store of wealth or of knowledge, or it does so indirectly. This sort of exertion is the work done by the working class.

Another sort of exertion is productive of nothing, at least of nothing that is good, and may be productive of much that is bad. Not an additional blade of grass, or an additional shoe string, not one particle of the material wealth needed by man is brought forth by the exertion of the pirate, the forger, the pickpocket or any other criminal, nor does their exertion bring forth one bit of useful knowledge. The exertion of all such people does only this: it transfers to their own pockets the wealth created by the productive work of others. This sort of exertion is the work of the capitalist class.

B.J.—Well, that throws a new light upon the question.

U.S.—The capitalist class does not do any useful work. It schemes, indulges in tricks by which it transfers from the hands of the working class the wealth that these produce, and its several members cudgel their brains and “work” 16 or more hours a day upon fraudulent devices to cheat one another. This sort of work, so far from being entitled to any reward, is entitled only to severe punishment. That’s why we Socialists say that the capitalists are entitled to nothing except to bolts and bars.

B.J.—If that’s the only sort of work they do they surely deserve the prison.

U.S.—On the other hand, the intellectual and manual workers, the working class exerts itself in the interest of life. Its mental and manual efforts do all the needed thinking and produce all the material things that civilized man aspires to and that life requires. That's why we Socialists say that all the wealth belongs to the working class.

B.J.—So say I, now.

U.S.—Don't ever again allow yourself to be deceived by the words that capitalists and their hirelings fling about. WORK is noble. No capitalist works, except in the sense of the multimillionaire father in the following story:

Multimillionaire to applicant for his daughter's hand—"Do you work, sir?"

Applicant for the hand of multimillionaire's daughter—"I do, sir."

Multimillionaire to applicant for his daughter's hand—"Whom do you work?"

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded January 2008

slpns@slp.org