



DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {78}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—If the masses do not now get together against the classes when will they?

UNCLE SAM—Have you, too, been infected with that silly notion about “masses” as against “classes?”

B.J.—Silly notion?

U.S.—Certainly silly.

B.J.—Why, isn’t the social question the conflict of the masses with the classes?

U.S.—Which are the “classes,” pray?

B.J.—Why, the rich, the capitalists.

U.S.—Why do you call them the “classes?”

B.J.—There are several classes among them.

U.S.—Which?

B.J.—There is, for instance, the banking class; then there is the railroad kings class; then there is the mine barons class; then there is the landlord class; then there is the manufacturing class; then there is the merchant princes class, don’t you see?

U.S.—Let me grant for the present that these are “classes” proper.

B.J.—Are they not?

U.S.—Hardly; but granted that they are classes in the proper sense, it follows that, if you call these the “classes” and the others the “masses,” you imply that there are no “classes” in the latter.

B.J.—Neither are there.

U.S.—Let’s see. Is there not a railroad workers’ class?



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B.J. hesitates.

U.S.—Is there not a mine workers' class?

B.J. looks puzzled.

U.S.—Is there not a manufacturers' employees' class?

B.J. grows visibly embarrassed.

U.S.—Is there not a clerks', a book-keepers', waiters', messengers' class?

B.J.—True, true.

U.S.—It follows that if you give the designation of “classes” to the capitalists because of the various means by which they skin the workers, then you are bound to give the designation of “classes” to the workers too, because of the various means by which they are skinned.

B.J.—I see that; but—

U.S.—One moment. Do you realize that all workers as well as bosses would justly fall into “classes” if by that word you mean their pursuits?

B.J.—Yes; I give up that line of argument; but there is another.

U.S.—Which?

B.J.—On which side is the large majority—on the side of the workers or on that of the bosses or capitalists?

U.S.—On that of the workers, decidedly.

B.J.—Then I am right to call the workers' side the “masses?”

U.S.—Most assuredly you are; provided, however, you don't mix up two thoughts.

B.J.—How “mix up?”

U.S.—When you think of “masses,” what thought is on your mind—the thought of numbers or the thought of pursuit?

B.J.—The thought of numbers, of course.

U.S.—And when you think of “classes,” what thought is on your mind—the thought of pursuit, or the thought of numbers?

B.J. (brightening)—Why, the thought of pursuits, of course.

U.S.—Do you now realize that you mix up two thoughts, jumble them together, when you talk of “masses” as against “classes?”

B.J. (sticking his hands deeper into his trousers and with conviction)—Yes, the two

thoughts are incorrect—

U.S.—Absurdly connected?

B.J.—Yes, absurdly connected.

U.S.—Silly?

B.J.—Yes, silly. If I talk of “masses” on the one hand, I must talk of the “few” on the other. That’s correct; but—

U.S.—What, are there still any “buts” lurking?

B.J.—A kind of a “but.” I thought the labor movement was a “class” struggle.

U.S.—So it is.

B.J.—But where comes in the “class?”

U.S.—The answer to this question will show you also the impropriety of talking of “classes” when one means pursuits. Social “classes” means a very different thing.

B.J.—Then there are classes?

U.S.—Certainly. Look at those that you have hitherto been calling the classes, and you will see that they all have certain things in common, and that the exact reverse of those things is found among the masses.

B.J.—Explain.

U.S.—Those that you have called “classes” are the property holders, they are the employers; those that you have called “masses” are the propertyless, the employed.

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—Now then, upon such fundamental distinctions as these, and not upon the slighter ones of pursuits, are “classes” built. We have, accordingly, on the one hand, the class of the property holders and employers, and, on the other, the class of the propertyless and employed; on the one hand, the capitalist class, on the other the working class.

B.J.—Then they are two opposing classes?

U.S.—Yes; the social question is a conflict of classes—a conflict between the wage slave or working class, and the slave driver or capitalist class.

B.J.—But how comes that term “the masses against the classes” to be so general?

U.S.—I’ll tell you. It is one of several clownish expressions bestowed upon our generation by the most clownish “statesman” and most overrated man of the age.

B.J.—Whom?

U.S.—Gladstone.

B.J.—Gladstone!

U.S.—Yes. He got off that silly phrase among many others, and set it floating, and the unthinking have repeated it, and much harm has been done thereby.

B.J.—Do you really think harm is done by it?

U.S.—Certainly. An expression that does not include a definition upon which to base action is misleading. The social question of to-day deals with the question of tenure of property, not with that of numbers, etc. No definition of the ranks of society that does not embrace this point is good; all such wrong definitions tend to draw the eye from the point it should be fastened on, and to keep it on points of no immediate concern.

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