

# The People.

VOL. VI, NO. 3.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 1896.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {154}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**ROTHER JONATHAN—It does sometimes seem to me that these Socialists are unreasonable.

UNCLE SAM—Inasmuch as to how?

B.J.—They don't seem to realize the benefits conferred upon society by the capitalists.

U.S. (sneezing)—Suppose you enlighten me on these "benefits."

B.J.—Take any instance at random. Here is a man, John Jones; he has a hundred thousand dollars in the bank; and yonder are a hundred men out of work. These men will starve unless

they get a job; John Jones won't starve, you can't starve with a hundred thousand dollars. John Jones could, if he wanted, eat up his money. If he did, he would be having a good time, but the hundred men would hunger. Right here steps up the capitalist as a benefactor—

U.S. (placing his right hand to his right ear)—A what?

B.J.—A benefactor. The capitalist steps in as a benefactor of society. Instead of lolling comfortably on his \$100,000, he invests them; he sets up a factory that employs these one hundred men out of work. From that moment on the men cease to starve. Has not this capitalist done a positive service to the community?

U.S.—You are quite sure he did?

B.J.—Of course!

U.S.—And you consider him a benefactor?

B.J.—Don't you?



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U.S.—And you would conclude from that that he and the whole capitalist class should be preserved?

B.J.—Certainly.

U.S.—Because if he and it were wiped out society would cease to be benefacted?

B.J.—That's it.

U.S.—Now let's look at all that a little closer. In the first place let me know what you understand by a "benefactor."

B.J.—A man who does me a good service.

U.S.—If such a man is compelled, by his own interest, to do you that good service, would he still be a benefactor?

B.J.—W-e-l-l, n-o; n-ot qu-ite.

U.S.—To entitle a man to the title of a "benefactor" his act must combine several qualities. I shall mention 2:

1. It must do good; and
2. It must be done out of his own free will, undriven by personal interest.

B.J. (rubbing his hands)—That's very well put. That's exactly. That's just what I have shown you that the capitalist does:

No. 1. His act does good in that he gives bread to men who would otherwise starve for want of work.

No. 2. He does so out of his own free will.

U.S.—We shall, for the present, grant No. 1. The No. 2 is false.

B.J.—Not much! Why, the capitalist needn't—

U.S.—Will you oblige me by keeping your shirt on for 2 minutes and 15 seconds?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—The No. 2 which you claim is that the capitalist is not driven by his own needs to "give work"—

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—It is just the reverse. I shall show you that if he didn't, if he allowed the workers to starve, he would have eventually to starve too.

B.J.—What?

U.S.—Can a \$100,000 last forever?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—If this capitalist lived on even as little as \$5,000 a year, how long would his \$100,000 last?

B.J. (winks his eyes as if a candle light had been suddenly held up before them)—Twenty years.

U.S.—And after that?

B.J. remains silent and pensive.

U.S.—After that his money would be all gone and he would have to starve, or go to work, or steal, eh?

B.J.—Hem!

U.S.—Can you get out of that?

B.J. remains silent and still more pensive.

U.S.—When your capitalist invests his money, “gives labor bread” or plays the “benefactor,” he is simply giving himself bread and benefacting himself. What he accomplishes by his investment is to get his yearly \$5,000 out of the sweat of the brows of his workers and keep his original \$100,000 untouched. When he invests he does so, accordingly, not to do good to others, but to do himself the double good of living grandly without consuming the amount of his capital and doing so by fleecing his “benefactorees.” Save me from such “benefactors” and such “benefactions”!

B.J. during this time has been inspecting closely a distant fleck of cloud against the azure sky.

U.S.—What has become of your “benefactor”?

B.J.—I have been trying to find where he is.

U.S.—Your search is now difficult enough; but I propose to make it so difficult that you couldn’t find your benefactor were you to look for him with a Lick telescope.

B.J. gives up the fleck of cloud and turns his eyes to Uncle Sam.

U.S.—I said before that a benefaction must combine several qualities. For the moment I granted No. 1, to wit, that it must be a good act, and knocked No. 2 into a cocked hat. I now propose to turn to No. 1.

B.J.—What, is that also false?

U.S.—Yep!

B.J. (dejectedly)—Well, well—

U.S.—Suppose I waylaid you, knocked you down and robbed you, and being in

possession of all your property, your pistol included, I were to cover you with that weapon and say to you: “You are a dead duck if you don’t do as I tell you”; and taking a loaf out of your own wallet which I just took from you, I were to say further: “You will starve if you don’t eat; here is a loaf of bread for you; you may have that if you work for me.” Your distress would drive you to submit. You would produce 4 loaves and I would give you 1. How would you like that for a “benefaction”?

B.J.—Like it? You call that “benefaction”?

U.S.—How would you like me for a “benefactor”?

B.J.—To hell with such a benefactor!

U.S.—Now, that is just the sort of a “benefactor” the capitalist is. The capitalist class has waylaid and knocked down and robbed the working class, and the property or capital these capitalists now hold is stolen goods, stolen from the workers, who alone produced it. Whatever wealth any capitalist ever did produce he has long since consumed; all the wealth the capitalists now hold is stolen; out of that first and continuous theft they “give bread” to the workers; and the pistol with which they cover the working class so as to keep it in subjection—as I would be keeping you in subjection with the pistol I snatched out of your hands—is the government of the country, snatched out of the hands of the working class with the aid of the labor fakir.

B.J. begins to be visibly moved.

U.S.—Did you say anything?

B.J.—No; but I was going to say that if you waylaid me, and got my pistol from me, and by that means were keeping me down, I would never sleep with both eyes shut.

U.S. looks interested.

B.J.—And the first chance I saw I would snatch that weapon of oppression from you, turn it upon you, and thus recover my own.

U.S.—And, like an unreasonable Socialist, drive off your benefactor who was “giving you bread”?

B.J.—These Socialists are right every time. Yes, I would drive that “benefactor” out of sight.

U.S.—Bravo! Now you talk sense. What you or any sensible man would do is

just what the Socialists would do and are gathering the force to do it with. They are seeking to snatch the pistol—the government—out of the hands of the highwayman class that now rides them by organizing the Socialist Labor party and walloping the capitalist class at the hustings.

B.J.—Count me as one!

U.S. and B.J. walk off together. B.J. explaining that he always did suspect the Socialists knew what they were after, and U.S. smiling rolls of smiles.

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

Uploaded December 2007

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