

The People.

VOL. X, NO. 4.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, APRIL 22, 1900.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {312}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I recently attended a lecture on political economy. The question of the cause of the poverty and misery of the wage workers was under discussion, and a statement was made that knocks the underpinning from your Socialism.

UNCLE SAM—"Knocks out the underpinning," eh? Heels over head, I presume!

B.J.—Yes. This was the statement: The reason of poverty is that the wage-earners don't save their earnings. If they did, there would be no trouble.

U.S.—So, "saving" is the panacea?

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—Can saving be done out of what one has not, or must it be done out of what one has?

B.J.—Out of what one has.

U.S.—What are your earnings?

B.J.—\$3 a day.

U.S.—Does that mean that you have a yearly income of 365 times \$3?

B.J.—Lord, no! Sundays and holidays, you know, we don't work; that takes off nearly 80 days. Then also our season is barely six months.

U.S.—Well, on an average, how much do you make a day?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—I don't know as I can state that. But I know that from year end to year end, I don't net \$400.

U.S.—That's about it. Take one day with another, and one working man with another, the earnings of the wage-earning class are about \$365 a year, or \$1 a day.

B.J.—Guess that's about so.

U.S.—Good. Now start to save up.

B.J. *begins to look blank.*

U.S.—Could you save up \$1 a day.

B.J.—I would die on the spot if I did. No; I can't.

U.S.—Could you save up 75 cents a day?

B.J.—And live on 25 cents? Guess not! I am no Cooley.

U.S.—Could you save 50 cents a day?

B.J.—Hardly. No, I couldn't. The pinching would have to be too hard. Can't be done!

U.S.—Well, could you save 25 cents a day?

B.J.—And live on 75 cents? Rent and clothing and food, and all else? (*Shakes his head doubtingly.*) I don't see how I could. But let's say I can. What do you want to prove?

U.S.—Very well; say you save 25 cents a day. How much is that a year?

B.J.—A year? A year? Let's see. I would save in one year \$91.25.

U.S.—Guess that's about it. Now, how many years will you have to save up at that rate before you have gathered in \$25,000?

B.J.—Why so big a sum?

U.S.—For the simple reason that the statistics upon bankruptcy tell us that anybody who now-a-days undertakes an industry with smaller capital than that, will be bankrupt in less than no time. Even that amount is too small to enter into competition with a large number of branches. But it will do in some others, as yet.

B.J.—Yes, I know that the failures are numerous among the small middle class. I guess \$25,000, though it sounds big to me, is none too large to hold your own in these days of large capitalistic concerns.

U.S.—Well, how many years would it take you to save up \$25,000, so as to be free from misery?

B.J.—I ain't good at calculating. But it seems to me fifty years or so would be needed.

U.S.—Fifty years? No; many times that. It would take you over 270 years to do it in!

B.J.—But I can't live that long!

U.S.—That's the point! Do you now realize the fallacy of this "saving panacea" to remove the poverty of the workers with? It is an insult to their intelligence. It is a fraud. The fraud starts with suppressing the fact that small capital can no longer emancipate one from poverty. It holds up a lure that can only deceive. But that does not yet expose all the viciousness of this fraudulent suggestion. Where are you going to keep all that money while it is accumulating?

B.J.—I'd place it in the savings bank.

U.S.—Poor fellow! Do you know that the average life of savings banks in this country is not quite thirty years? The chances are that, long before your 270 years of saving expired, your bank would be busted and its capitalist runners, who counselled you to save, would have skipped to Canada.

B.J.—I would bury it in a hole and watch the hole.

U.S.—Yes, indeed, you would have to watch the hole! You would have to watch it so close that you would have time for nothing else;—and then you could not work any more, and earn money to save.

B.J.—This "saving" is a swindle.

U.S.—But this is not yet all!

B.J.—Is there still worse?

U.S.—Yes, indeed! Stop to think what kind of man these proposers of "saving" would like to make of you. In order to save to a purpose, you would have to starve your mind, to say nothing of your body; you would have to starve your feelings as well. You could not buy a newspaper or a book to fit you out for the intelligent exercise of your functions as a citizen; the working class would have to live in a state of celibacy: wife and children would knock out all the savings. Thus the "savings" plan, besides being ridiculously impossible, is wicked in its essence. It would rear a race of skinflints and ignoramuses, and thus would undermine the nation. You can't live long enough to save to a purpose; and if you did, you might as well be dead, seeing that all the wells of human nature, human affections, and human aspirations would be dead within you.

That lecture on economics that you heard did not knock out Socialism, it knocked out itself.

B.J. (*as mad as he can stick*)—If I ever catch that fellow again, won't I give him a piece of my mind for having played me for a sucker!

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

Uploaded February 2009

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