

The People.

VOL. V, NO. 19.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 1895.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {121}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—The workingmen—
BROTHER JONATHAN—Every time you refer to the workingmen, the way you no doubt are about to do, as the class upon which one should build to overthrow the capitalist system, I feel like kicking the whole gang of them.

U.S.—And why, pray, so kinky?

B.J.—Because they are beyond hope.

U.S.—And why, pray, so hopeless?

B.J.—I'll give you an instance. These workmen howl against scabs, don't they?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—Now, after howling against the scabs, what do these d---d fools do but walk right into a shop where scab goods are sold and buy those very goods, just because they are cheap. What can you do with such idiots?

U.S.—You stated your case, and then neatly proceeded to knock yourself down.

B.J.—Don't they run down scabs?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—Don't they buy scab goods?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—And yet I knocked myself down!

U.S.—Yes, in that you went on to state the reason why they did so.

B.J.—What reason?

U.S.—The cheapness of the goods they buy.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—And that you claim is a self-knockdown?

U.S.—I does! See you here—

B.J.—Yes, I want to “see.” I wonder how you can excuse these pets of yours, these donkeys, these—

U.S.—Not so fast. Suppose a man who gets 100 cents a day wages—

B.J.—Yes?

U.S.—He can’t live very well on that. The 100 cents can’t buy the food, clothing and housing he needs.

B.J.—I admit that.

U.S.—Union goods are dearer than scab goods, adulterated goods are cheaper than pure ones—

B.J.—Granted.

U.S.—Now, our 100-cents-a-day man wants to make the two ends meet—

B.J.—And so you are going to justify scab purchasing, are you?

U.S.—Keep your shirt on. Our 100-cents-a-day man wants to make the two ends meet. There are just one of two ways in which to do so:

Either he must raise his wages so as to be able to purchase the dearer goods;

Or he must resort to, fall back upon, cheaper goods.

B.J.—That’s all right, but who will kick at cheap scab goods and then turn around to buy them unless he is an ass, a stupid fool, a—

U.S.—Now your shirt is flying off again; just keep it on two minutes longer.

B.J. (suppressing his indignation and impatience)—It is on, it is on; go ahead and sing the praises of purchasing scab goods!

U.S.—As I was saying, our 100-cents-a-day man must do one of two things:

Either raise his wages to the price of honest goods;

Or reduce the price of his purchases within the compass of his low wages.

B.J.—Very well.

U.S.—Is there any other way?

B.J.—None.

U.S.—If, then, the purchase{s} are not to be kept down to the level of the low wages, in other words, if scab and adulterated goods are not to be purchased by our 100-cents-

a-day man, there is nothing for him to do but—but what?

B.J. (somewhat disconcerted)—Well, what?

U.S.—But:

Either not to buy any goods and starve;

Or strike for higher wages.

B.J.—Hem!

U.S.—Shall we consider the first alternative? Would you have him starve?

B.J.—Of course not.

U.S.—Then he must strike. And it won't do to strike in one place alone. The strike must be a national one—

B.J.—Very well; let it be a national one.

U.S.—Even for a small local strike you must have a powerful organization; for a national strike your strikers must be infinitely more powerful in numbers, discipline and management.

B.J.—Well, let them organize on the best plan for a general and national strike.

U.S.—If I had a looking-glass here I'd like to hold it up to your face to show you how a silly man looks.

B.J.—S—

U.S.—Be still. Just stop to consider how silly it is to imagine that there ever could be so powerful a national organization brought together, and that it would waste its energies upon a demand for a little or even a big rise of wages. Such an organization would apply its power to smashing the capitalist system, and not to clip its wings with a manicure scissors.

B.J.—Guess that's so.

U.S.—It follows that the national strike is now out of the question; it should and certainly is kept in mind, and education and agitation on Socialist or new trade union lines is building up such a national organization. In the mean time, however, the pressing necessities of the moment drive men to buy where they can buy cheapest, the same as it drives them to work wherever they have a chance, even though it be at starvation wages.

B.J. looks thoughtful.

U.S.—Those who make such a fuss about the working class buying the cheapest goods they can proceed from the idea that to stop buying such goods would solve the labor question. Nothing will do that short of the social revolution which shall put the implements of labor and the land on which to labor into the hands of the workers. Before that is done labor will be constrained to bite into many a sour apple—the purchasing of cheap and scab goods included. Stop your picayune measures. Rise to the emergency.

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Uploaded October 2007

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