

The People.

VOL. VII, NO. 6.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, MAY 9, 1897.

PRICE 3 CENTS.

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {201}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I think the conduct of this Congress is simply shameful.

UNCLE SAM—In what way more so than that of any other Congress, lately?

B.J.—Why, look at these high tariff bandits!

U.S.—They surely are a raw-boned set; but, to speak truly, I can't find that they look any less raw-boned than their free trade halves.

B.J.—You mean to say that the tariff reformers, the free traders, these noble men who wish to ease the people's shoulders from the burden of taxation, these heroes who seek to enable the poor man to buy more cheaply, these patriots, these friends of labor—

U.S.—Tut! tut! You are not on the stump, Jonathan; nor am I an audience to be stuffed with words.

B.J.—Now, I don't understand you. You are a sensible man—

U.S. (patting himself on the chest)—So I am!

B.J.—Now, just tell me this much—

U.S.—All you want.

B.J.—I make \$1 a day—

U.S.—Yes; thanks to the free trade and protection capitalists who rob you.

B.J.—I must spend all this money in purchase of what I need—

U.S.—And a lot of other needs are left uncovered.

B.J.—Now, does not free trade lower prices?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—Let's say it does; what of it?

B.J.—Suppose then that by a reduction or removal of the tariff I can buy with 50 cents all that now costs me 100 cents to purchase—

U.S.—Yes; let's suppose that.

B.J.—Don't you see?

U.S.—I see a good many things; which do you mean?

B.J.—That I am the gainer by 50 cents.

U.S.—No; I don't see that.

B.J.—What do you see, then?

U.S.—That you are a damned fool.

B.J.—That takes my time! To-day my living costs me 100 cents a day; with the lowering of the tariff my living costs me only 50 cents. And yet I am a damned fool to say that I am the gainer by 50 cents?

U.S.—Yes. If you get 100 cents and need 100 cents you have nothing left—

B.J.—Yes; that's what I say.

U.S.—If you need 50 cents and get only 50 cents you are no better off.

B.J.—True enough. But I was starting from the principle that I got 100 cents.

U.S.—And there is where your "principle" is a clown. If, indeed, you could continue to earn 100 cents a day after prices had come down 50 cents, then you would be a gainer; if you don't keep up your wages, then you are not a gainer. And the fact is that your wages will go down as much as prices; because, remember this:

Wages are the market price of labor; under capitalism labor's price is controlled by the same laws that control the price of all other merchandise; the price of all other merchandise falls in the measure in which it can be more cheaply produced; the cheaper the goods are on which labor must subsist the cheaper also is labor; consequently, if the tariff is lowered and the price of goods goes down, down also goes the price of labor, to wit, wages; and there you are!

B.J.—Then, this tariff reduction and free trade is an unmitigated swindle?

U.S.—Unmitigated!

B.J.—But why, then, do these free traders grow so enthusiastic?

U.S.—If you had understood why we workingmen are no better off, free trade or no

free trade, you would not ask the question.

B.J.—I understand that we are no better off because our wages go down in proportion to the lowering of prices.

U.S.—And what, do you imagine, becomes of the difference. If prices fall 50 cents and your wages come down as much, what do you imagine becomes of the other 50 cents? Do they vanish in smoke?

B.J.—No; that's true; what becomes of them?

U.S.—They fall into the pockets of your boss. We now get one dollar's worth of wealth in wages for every four dollars' worth of wealth that we produce. If prices go down 50 cents, then they will pay us back in wages only 50 cents for every four dollars' worth of wealth that we produce; in other words, they will keep three and a half dollars' worth of the fruits of our labor.

B.J.—The rascals! That's what they are after, is it?

U.S.—Yes, me lad; don't let them stuff you. Join the S.L.P.

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

Uploaded January 2008

slpns@slp.org