

Specialized Socialisms

By Daniel De Leon

He who takes for a Socialist anyone labeling himself “Socialist,” and who considers how numerous are the specimens floating about self-labeled “Socialist,” is apt to leap to a curiously mistaken conclusion. Proceeding from the correct maxim: “In union is strength,” his conclusion is that if all these “Socialists” were only to unite they could carry everything before them. True enough—“if”; but could they unite? Let’s see.

There is, for instance, editor Jim Jams. He was originally a farmer; the bonanza farm, together with other capitalist contrivances, bore down upon him; a mortgage cropped up and spread its branches over his fields; the market price of his carrots and pumpkins no longer suffices to make the ends meet; without throwing off his neck the millstone of the petty farm that is dragging him down, he opens another “industry,” starts a paper, and seeks to catch pennies with it. Through his exchanges he becomes acquainted with the socialist movement; he contemplates it; contrasts the shady, peaceful groves of that social system with the burning, harrowing hole in which he was and is; he likes the prospect, and forthwith pronounces himself a “Socialist.” But there is that mortgage that he wants to rid himself of; the desire to do this is paramount with him; the illusion of small “property” still has a strong hold on his mind; he is set upon reacquiring his old dunghill. To do this he becomes a “sixteen-to-oneist.” He is a Socialist, he’ll say, and probably means it in his fashion, but he must *first* have the money to pay off his mortgage. His motto is, “Socialism ultimately; Sixteen-to-oneism first.”

Across the street, or river, or state line from where editor Jim Jams is spilling ink, there is real estate agent Snick Snooks. His face is careworn, he is in shabby habiliments dressed, and the rust has long since invested his vest. He does a little “laying-out of money” in mortgages and the like; but the capital at his disposal is too small a hook to fish with; many an aspiring shark ran off with his bait, hook, line and all—ex-farmer Jim Jams among them; mortgagors would not or could not pay interest, let alone return the principal, and he, being a small fry capitalist, lacks the necessary “pull” to “fix them.” Him also, it is evident that the development of capital is leaving stranded on the beach of the middle class. The bad times afford him leisure to do what he never did before—read. A pamphlet on socialism falls into his hands; he devours it. “Oh,” thinks he, “would we were so far when this unnerving strain for a bare existence is no more! Of course, I am a Socialist.” But he squints at his ledger; he opens it; the taste for his shekels returns at the sight of the long columns of figures due him; he, too, is still dominated by the illusion of small “property”; he wants to recover his little loans. To do this he must be a stout upholder of “sound-moneyism.” He is a

Socialist, he'll tell you, with whatever honesty there is left in him, but he must *first* have his money back from all his mortgagors—ex-farmer Jim Jams included. His motto is: "Socialism as soon as may be; but sound-moneyism right away."

Take a third "Socialist"—Mr. Flim Flams. He lives in shabby-genteel apartments on the fifth floor of a shabby-genteel bachelors' lodging house. He has lived the life of part skinflint, part sponge. The fear of eventual want dried within him the well-springs of the milk of human affections. He spent nothing, reached the age of 50 childless and unmarried. His savings ran up to several thousand dollars; with them he resigned his clerkship, bought U.S. registered bonds, and, on the slim dividends they yield, he lives a life in which he estimates and considers the cost of every breath he draws, and breathes or not accordingly. In his sleepless watchfulness over pennies, he frets at his gas bill, although most of the time he goes to bed in the dark. He hears about the "anti-monopolists" who propose to "wrench the gas plants from the greedy clutches of the gas octopus," and he silently makes up his mind: "That's the ticket for me." In the meantime he waits. To spend money in any pastime is, with him, out of all question. No theatres for him, only free shows. Thus animated, he drops accidentally some cold Sunday evening into some variety show free lecture hall. There he hears the fag end of a speech denouncing the existing social system and putting in some good words for "socialism." Too stingy to purchase sound socialist literature and post himself, Flim Flams declares himself a "Socialist." Next day his gas bill comes in; he pays it with an internal oath and takes his resolve: "Yes, socialism some time; but cheap-gasism now, by thunder!"

The list of these specialized "socialisms" could be prolonged many a yard. Harmonize them?! The bare thought of Jim Jams who wants 16 to 1 now, Snick Snooks who wants first 32 to 1, Flim Flams who cares not a rap for either, but swears he must have cheap gas on the spot, etc., etc., etc.—the bare thought of all such "socialist forces" getting together is preposterous. As well imagine dogs and cats, tied together, each intercepting the other's sun heat, joining in one common purpose.

Specialized socialisms are unlimitable. The basis of socialist union is a right understanding of basic principles. The ash barrel of society furnishes no material for that revolutionary, compact army that socialism requires to overthrow capitalism and save civilization.

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