



DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {300}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I happened to come across a Socialist paper; I read the thing. Do you know that I find there is much good in Socialism?

UNCLE SAM—You don't say so!

B.J.—Yes; there are many good points in it. For instance, the nationalization of the railroads. That should be the first step.

U.S. (meditative)—The “first step?” Hem! “First step.” Do you mean the first, the very first step that society should take towards the new order of things?

B.J.—Yes; that's just what I mean; this individualistic way of doing things has run its course; the railroads are just the thing that society should begin with as a first step.

U.S. (takes B.J. by the shoulders, turns him around, and points to a large building at the other end of the street)—Do you see that building?

B.J.—Yes; that's the Post Office.

U.S.—Is it run individualistically?

B.J.—No; it is run by the nation.

U.S.—The business of letter-delivering was not always run collectively, as now, was it?

B.J.—No; wasn't it originally a private undertaking?

U.S.—So it was: Originally run individualistically; now it is run collectively.



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Accordingly, nationalization of the railroads now would not be the “first step” taken by society—

B.J.—Well, no; the nationalization of the mail business was done first.

U.S.—And how about the employees of the Post Office? Are they a happy, free lot of people?

B.J. (reflectively, with a distant look)—N—n—o; they surely are not happy; they surely are not free.

U.S.—Guess they are not. Look at the letter carriers; they who do the work, are kept down with low wages, are subjected to all manner of petty vexations, and their tenure, despite of civil service regulations, is quite precarious; look at the girls who work in the mail-bag department, mending the bags; it is a regular sweat-shop affair, to say nothing of the mean, petty tricks the poor girls are subjected to. You know all that, don’t you?

B.J.—Yes, I do; it is a burning shame, too!

U.S.—And I have only mentioned one-half of the burning shame. You know, don’t you, that little bills, for the improvement of the conditions of these employees are either promptly pigeon-holed, or are bandied like a football from one chamber of Congress to the other, and allowed to drop dead in the end, while all bills providing larger pay to the railroad companies for carrying the mails go through “with promptness and precision,”—don’t you know that, too?

B.J.—’Course I do. And I know also that the claims of those railroads are fraudulent, to the knowledge of Congress.

U.S.—Right you are. (Taking B.J. again by the shoulders, turning him around to the left, and pointing to a structure over which cars are running)—Do you see that structure over there?

B.J.—Why, that’s the Brooklyn bridge.

U.S.—Is IT run individualistically?

B.J.—No; it is owned by the city.

U.S.—And the cable cars on it?

B.J.—They, too.

U.S.—Now, how about their employees?

B.J.—Pretty damned bad: Wages tumble, and the hours so long that an awful large percentage die of exposure.

U.S.—You are well posted on that, too. Now, to quote no further illustrations, doesn't the experience with the Post Office and with the Bridge prove that there is "nationalization" and "nationalization?"

B.J. contemplates the ground.

U.S.—Now, this is the point: Nationalization is not of itself a step toward Socialism. Nationalization IS, only when it redounds to the interest of the working class. Such Nationalization nationalizes; the other don't. The Nationalization that is done and superintended by the capitalist class, does good only to the capitalist class. Capitalist society is like a barrel leaking from a thousand holes, each hole being a capitalist-run concern; stop ONE hole and there will be just so much more water to run through the remaining holes. There is no nationalization worth the name, or worth straining for except that one that, knowing of all the holes, has a program whereby all the holes are to be stopped.

B.J.—But one thing will have to be done at a time.

U.S.—Which?

B.J.—I don't know; ANY one thing.

U.S.—Not at all! No ONE thing will ever be feasible until the working class is sufficiently informed, united, to undertake ALL things. At the same time that the workers in ONE trade will nationalize the trade in their charge, the workers in other trades can nationalize the other trades. To do this, the working class must have learned the true meaning of solidarity, and hence, among other reasons, the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance is a social-political necessity. The only ONE first step, that IS a step, is the revolutionary education of the workers. The S.L.P. and the S.T. & L.A. are attending to that.

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

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