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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {282}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN (in great rage)—It is a shame to see the Socialists quarrelling among themselves.

UNCLE SAM (cool as a cucumber)—Do they?

B.J.—You don't need to look so innocent. You do it yourself. See, for instance, how you are denouncing John Tobin—

U.S. (pulling himself and looking in dreadful earnest)—Stop right there! I refuse to reason with a man who reasons dishonestly.

B.J.—How dishonestly?

U.S.—Say that I were to grab you by the neck and drag you to jail saying: "As you are a thief you ought to be locked up"—

B.J.—But I am no thief!

U.S.—You realize quick enough, don't you? the absurdity of such reasoning as that, and its dishonesty. When I say: "As you are a thief, therefore you should be locked up," I turn up side down all honest method of reasoning, because I take as my premises and for granted the very thing that is disputed and is to be proved, and having thus fraudulently built up my premises, I can, of course, arrive at any preposterous conclusion that I choose. That sort of reasoning does not beseem a thinking man if he is honest.

B.J. remains dumb.

U.S.—The same as I started with the false premises of your being a thief, so did you start with the false premises that that fellow is a Socialist; the same as, in my sentence,



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THE thing to prove is that you are a thief, the rest following of itself, so, in your case, THE thing to prove is that that fellow is a Socialist, the rest then following of itself; the same as I absurdly took for granted the very thing that should first be proved, and then, of course, reached in what would be a fraudulent way the conclusion that suited me, to wit, that you should be locked up, so did you absurdly take for granted the very thing that should first be proved, and then, of course, you reached in what I justly call dishonest the conclusion that suits your fancy. That sort of reasoning is unbecoming a decent man. No honest man spends a minute's time in discussing what is self-evident. No honest man, honestly wishing to discuss a matter can imagine that there can be any doubt upon the wrongfulness of "Socialists fighting Socialists." To place the discussion on that field is an act of dishonesty because it is an attempt to evade putting the discussion on the proper field. The proper field is, Is John Tobin a Socialist? When we have settled that then we have settled the rest, and, if we can't agree upon that, then we disagree upon our premises, both nevertheless agreeing on the general principle that "Socialists must not fight Socialists." Go to!

B.J.—Well, I'll admit I introduced the matter wrongly; I was angry. But will you now explain to me what you call a Socialist?

U.S.—Gladly!

B.J.—What is he?

U.S.—To be a Socialist a man must combine three essential points.

B.J.—Which?

U.S.—First, he must hold that the Co-operative Commonwealth or Socialist Republic is a desirable, is a necessary, and is an inevitable thing.

B.J.—I accept that point. Does not John Tobin hold such views?

U.S.—He does. Secondly, he must understand WHY the Socialist Republic is desirable, necessary and inevitable. So understanding it, he will understand the theory of the class struggle and thus the tactics necessary to reach the goal.

B.J.—I grant that point too. Does not John Tobin understand all that?

U.S.—I feel quite sure he does. Thirdly and finally, he must act up to that knowledge. He who does not combine these three points is no Socialist.

B.J.—And doesn't Tobin cover that last point too, only in his way?

U.S.—NO! Tobin's conduct is at variance with the last point, and thereby he is untrue to the other two. It is not acting up to his understanding of the first two points when he seeks to organize shoeworkers' unions with the aid of men whom he knows to be disreputable fakirs; when he sits on the platform and hears such fakirs advance the most damnable fakirish, dues-grabbing, swindling, class struggle-denying arguments on the wages question, and when he rises to speak right after such fellows has not a word of contradiction and rectification to make. Such conduct is the endorsement of anti-Socialism.

B.J.—Has he done that?

U.S.—Yes, right here in New York and elsewhere. Again, it is not acting up to his understanding of the first two points when he heralds as a labor political victory such a capitalist victory as the late municipal election of Marlboro was; it was a belying of his understanding of points one and two when he thus seeks to aid along the swindling political practices of capitalist politicians and labor fakirs, and thereby obscures the class struggle principle and its manly course so necessary for the emancipation of the workers.

B.J. looks dumbfounded.

U.S.—Finally it is a belying of his knowledge on points one and two and of his own conscience when he tries to defame the S.L.P., that he knows is true to all the three points, but the upholding of which is unprofitable to him. In short it is not the conduct of a Socialist to play the Judas act: sell out the working class.

B.J. remains silent.

U.S.—Can you deny that these charges against him are true.

B.J.—I can not deny their truth; nor do I of my own knowledge know enough about them to be sure that you are not mistaken.

U.S.—Good. Then find out. Until then, you are justified to suspend your judgment. But not until you have information that will justify you to think I am mistaken can you hold him for a Socialist; and if you find, as you are sure to in case you inquire, that I am right you must admit that he is no Socialist. John Tobin being none, we Socialists fight him and his ilk to the knife. We fight none others.

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

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