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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {260}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—So long as the capitalist class rules you need not look for improvement: it won't come.

BROTHER JONATHAN—Bother “capitalist class”. There is no such thing as “capitalist class”. We are all capitalists.

U.S.—You among them?

B.J.—Yes; I among them.

U.S.—And what does your “capital” consist in?

B.J.—In what? (stretching out his arms) In these.

U.S.—Do you imagine that the Spanish Admiral Montojo at Manila and his men had no arms?

B.J.—They certainly had arms.

U.S.—And are you aware that he had more men under him than Dewey had?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And yet Dewey and the fewer men under him mopped up Manila Bay with Montojo?

B.J.—Guess they did.

U.S.—How did they manage that?

B.J.—They had infinitely superior guns, and all that.

U.S.—Superior war material?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—But I thought you said Montojo had more men with him, and, accordingly,



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more arms and hands.

B.J.—But arms and hands are not war material.

U.S.—Accordingly, what would you think of me if I said to you, “Bother war materials; there is no such thing as a man equipped with war material; we are all so equipped; look at my arms and hands; these are my war materials”;—What would you say to that?

B.J. looks at U.S. in blank amazement.

U.S.—Have you been struck with dumbness?

B.J.—How can you call arms and hands war materials?

U.S.—That’s absurd, ain’t it?

B.J.—I should think so!

U.S.—Just so absurd it is for you to call your arms and hands capital.

B.J.—What then is “capital”?

U.S.—To be entitled to the term capital a thing must combine two qualities:

1. It must be a tool, or implement of labor: that quality alone excludes your arms and hands; your arms and hands are not the product of human labor, implements of labor are;

2. It must be powerful enough to disable those who do not own it from competing with him who does.

From this last it follows that a thing may be capital at one time and not capital at another; capital at one place and not capital at another place.

B.J.—Why, that becomes very much mixed up.

U.S.—Only if you don’t hold firmly to the definition. The loom that preceded the Northrop loom was capital in New England so long as the Northrop loom did not exist, because that predecessor was powerful enough to exclude competition; but just as soon as the Northrop loom shall have been thoroughly introduced, the old loom ceases to be capital because the Northrop loom is so much more powerful.

Likewise, if the old loom, that ceased to be capital in New England because of the advent of the Northrop loom, is shipped to some distant corner where the Northrop loom has not yet been set up, it will there be capital, while in New England it would not be.

B.J.—I can see that.

U.S.—Then, also, take this illustration, which reduces the matter to dollars and cents. Thirty odd years ago \$500 sufficed to set up a brewery in this city; Ehret, the brewer, did so. That \$500 represented the value of the implements of a brewery and were capital then; to-day \$500,000 would be needed to set up a brewery with any chance of success as a competitor.

B.J.—I heard of that.

U.S.—But you did not digest its significance. Capital, especially to-day, is such a large aggregate of wealth as can defy competition in production. The class that holds that is the capitalist class; you had better not say “bother” about it, or you will get left as Montojo did at Manila.

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