

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {380}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN.—I and some other reformers, I mean those who advocate public ownership of railroads, street cars, etc., were holding discussion the other day. A man in the audience broke in upon us with the following question: “But how do you propose to get possession of those properties, which are tied up with charters, deeds and every conceivable kind of legal protection; do you intend to confiscate them?”



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

UNCLE SAM.—What answer did they make?

B.J.—They answered “No!” And then the man went on to say: “The value of these railroads, etc., of the country represents about \$10,000,000,000; do you propose to buy them; are you ready to tax yourselves to this amount?”

U.S.—I guess the same “No!” oozed out of the capitalist brains.

B.J.—Yes; and don’t you really think that this squarely knocked Socialism out in two rounds?

U.S. (bristling up)—Socialism “knocked” out? Not much! Do you know who those were who called themselves Socialists and were knocked out?

B.J.—Why, Socialists, I thought.

U.S.—Nary! They were a lot of middle class folks. You must remember that this middle class stands upon the principle of private ownership in the instruments of production. They were reared upon capitalism. That being so, this class stands upon

very slippery ground when they attempt to avoid or escape the logical consequences of capitalism. Their desire to remove monopolies is one of those vain attempts. When, consequently, they meet a logical and consistent capitalist like that man who asked questions their fur is made to fly; their mouths are quickly stopped; they are bound to recoil before their own propositions; in short, they are rolled, or “knocked out,” as you put it, in short order.

B.J.—But what would a Socialist have answered?

U.S.—The Socialist could have given this capitalist questioner a series of clinching answers that would have made him look very silly and even sent him to bed with the bellyache.

B.J.—I’d like to hear some of them.

U.S.—If the Socialist happened to be in a statistical and bantering mood he would have answered: “Yes, we mean to buy all those things, that is to say, we mean to pay for them. But if a man from whom you buy anything is your debtor you will first deduct the debt he owes you and pay him the balance only.

B.J.—That is what I would do.

U.S.—Very well. The Socialist would have continued thusly: “We would first appraise the things, watered stock being first squeezed out”—at this point the capitalist questioner’s jaw would begin to drop.

B.J. (brightening up)—Guess so; good!

U.S.—The Socialist would have gone on: “Then we would estimate all the debts due the Government by the owners of those things; all the debts they have dodged; all the fines they should have paid for violations of law, etc., etc. After that much arithmetic and statistics there may possibly be left a nickel due the owners of those things, and we shall be quite able to, and will cheerfully pay.”

B.J.—Bully. That tune sounds very different from the one that questioner was treated to.

U.S.—Exactly. But the Socialist might have been in a wicked mood; in that case he would have let statistics go and answered thusly, to wit: “Sir; did the North buy the slaves it set free during and after the war? Did the North tax itself to pay them off? Did the American Revolutionary fathers tax themselves to pay King George? Nary! They said slavery is wrong; the slaveholder is a criminal and a rebel; away

with his negro slaves; and these were set free.”

B.J. (clapping his hands)—Better yet!

U.S.—The Socialist would further answer: “Our Revolutionary Fathers said without further ado: ‘These colonies are and of right ought to be free,’ and they sent King George, his cousins, his sisters and his aunts, together with his colonial Governors and pursuivants, kiting across the water.”

B.J.—And no mistake!

U.S.—By the time the Socialist got so far your capitalist questioner would have been seized with the cramps and would not have been in a condition to hear the Socialist proceed saying: “The Declaration of Independence establishes the principle that when a social institution ceases to promote the welfare of the people, these have the right and duty to abolish it, or to so alter it that its foundations may be most likely to effect their safety and happiness. We propose to abolish it and rear in its stead the Co-operative Commonwealth, the Socialist Republic. Get from under!”

B.J.—By Jove! There are no flies on Socialism. He who comes up against it comes up against a buzz-saw.

U.S.—And don’t you forget it. The knocking out that is done when a Socialist is around is done by the Socialist himself, with the other fellow filling the role of knocker-outee.

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