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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {85}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I have discovered a flaw in Socialism.

UNCLE SAM—I am all ears; let me hear it.

B.J.—Does not Socialist philosophy teach that the machine does away with skill?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—Where no machine is used and the worker himself manages his tools, he must be equipped with skill, experience, a practiced hand and eye, and often with physical strength. Is it not so?

U.S.—Exactly.

B.J.—The moment a machine is introduced into his trade it does away to some extent with all these qualities—skill, experience, the practiced hand, eye, etc.?

U.S.—Most assuredly.

B.J.—And the more the machine is perfected, the more it does away with all these qualities?

U.S.—Certainly.

B.J.—And as this process goes on we may look to the time when all those qualities may be essentially unnecessary; the pressing of a button being able to produce all that is wanted?

U.S.—You got it straight.

B.J.—This being thus I find this flaw in Socialist teachings—

U.S. puts both his hands to his ears.

B.J.—Socialism claims that labor produces all wealth, that the increased wealth produced by machinery is not given to labor, and that labor should have it all. Now, then, in view of the fact that labor does less and less work, exerts less and less skill,

needs less and less experience, vigor and so forth, I claim Socialism is wrong to want that all the benefits of increased wealth brought on by machinery should fall to labor. What have you got to say?

U.S. (taking down his hands)—Now, stand firm, because I am going to throw you, that is your argument, heels over head.

B.J. spreads out his legs and braces himself up.

U.S.—Who produced the machine?

B.J.—Why—er—hem.

U.S.—Labor, intellectual labor. With here and there an exception, all the inventors from Watt and Eli Whitney down, have died poor. Their invention was stolen by the capitalist. You know that?

B.J.—Yes, that's true.

U.S.—Again, granted that skill, etc., is more and more absorbed into the machine and rendered unnecessary to labor, still, whatever skill, experience or labor is yet left necessary is exercised by whom, the worker or the idle capitalist?

B.J.—The worker.

U.S.—The worker may exercise less skill, but the capitalist exercises none whatever; the same as before he is and remains an idler.

B.J.—Hem—yes.

U.S.—Who is entitled to the wealth that comes out of the machine, the idler, i.e., the capitalist, or he who does whatever work is needed to produce?

B.J.—The—worker—hem—of course.

U.S.—You begin to look smashed. Now to the last point. Suppose machinery has been so perfected that all the wealth one can want can be produced by the touching of buttons, and that the idle, lazy capitalist would be willing to do that much work, would it follow from that {that} the class which produced the machine but does not own it, it having been stolen from it by {the} capitalist, should starve because its work has become wholly superfluous, and that the class that did not produce the machine should enjoy it just because it holds that stolen property?

B.J.—That were wrong indeed.

U.S.—Socialism maintains that the class that does the work should enjoy the fruits.

It also maintains if that class is kept down to a minimum of wealth the result would be the inhuman one of finally exterminating it.

B.J.—I begin to see.

U.S.—So, then, if you want to be consistent and to deny to the worker the increase of wealth because of the diminished skill he needs, you must also deny that increase and all wealth to the capitalist who exercises no skill or productive effort whatever.

B.J.—I yield; I am overthrown.

U.S.—In that case the increased wealth would have to be dumped into the sea, or left to rot.

B.J.—I throw up my hands.

U.S.—You had better; there is no flaw in Socialism. Whatever wealth there is in the land to-day is the product of labor, to that labor it belongs wholly. The capitalist is entitled to nothing, because he produces nothing. The only thing he is entitled to at the hands of so humane a movement as Socialism is to be pitied, and put into a house of correction to cleanse him of the immorality that breeds and is bred by parasitism.

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

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