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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {141}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I am really pained at the narrowness and bigotry of the Socialists; the party's splendid energy and untiring industry are all made ineffective for anything but the meagerest result by reason of its illiberality and dogmatism.

UNCLE SAM (with affected dejectedness)—Let us weep!

B.J.—You don't feel that way, I know; but I do. Such a one-sidedness and intolerance as are revealed by the Socialists are bound to blight their great cause.

U.S.—Let us weep all around once more!

B.J.—Do you imagine you Socialists can make headway if you don't become broader, and cease considering yourselves Popes, and the only depositories of all knowledge?

U.S.—We won't agree upon that; let's change subjects. You are a seafaring man? I'm going to make a trip to Europe.

B.J.—You are! I'm sure you will enjoy it; but pick out a good steamer on a good line of steamers. There are many of these boats going down nowadays.

U.S.—A friend of mine, who is a good fellow, informed me that he is constructing a beautiful papier-mâché steamer, that will be propelled by a secret force produced by a heat of dynamite concussions. The new invention renders compasses, chronometers and quadrants useless. The steamer steers herself. Guess I'll take that.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J. (whose eyes have been dilating in stupefaction)—What! A papier-mâché steamer! Dynamite concussions for propelling force! No chronometers, no compass, no quadrants for observation!

U.S. (very seriously)—Exactly; that’s the steamer I propose taking.

B.J.—Well if you do you will get drowned. It will be a lucky thing for you if your steamer explodes before you leave the bay; you might then have a chance to be picked up. If by some unforeseen accident the explosion and foundering should happen later, then that is the end of you and your insanity.

U.S.—But a papier-mâché steamer—

B.J.—Nonsense, the thing can’t hold.

U.S.—But then dynamite concussions can—

B.J.—Can blow you up, you fool!

U.S.—And compasses are not needed—

B.J. (impatiently)—Aren’t? Oh, shut up!

U.S.—And as to the un-American idea of chronometers and quadrants—

B.J. (bursting out with uncontrollable impatience)—I don’t want to hear another word upon that stupid line! You are either guying me, or you are gone daft! Papier-mâché steamers, for sooth! Compasses “not needed,” I do declare! Chronometers and quadrants “un-American,” that takes the cake! I am a seafaring man; I know you are off.

U.S.—Jonathan, you are narrow!

B.J.—You call “narrow” my rejecting your papier-mâché steamer scheme?

U.S.—Yes; and you are bigoted.

B.J.—“Bigoted” because I won’t accept dynamite concussions {as} a safe force for propulsion?

U.S.—Yes; and you are one-sided.

B.J.—“One-sided” because I consider compasses indispensable to ocean navigation?

U.S.—Yes; and you are intolerant.

B.J.—“Intolerant” because I won’t listen to your twaddle about quadrants and chronometers to be useless and un-American?

U.S.—Yes; and you consider yourself a Pope and the only depository of all seafaring knowledge.

B.J. (wiping the perspiration from his forehead)—A Pope, a Pope, that's good! There ends all reasoning! I am a Pope because I maintain a correct opinion and won't accept arrant nonsense in its stead!

U.S.—What makes you think that papier-mâché steamers won't do?

B.J.—My experience of the sea and my mechanical knowledge.

U.S.—And why won't you consider the feasibility of propulsion by dynamite concussions?

B.J. (impatiently)—For the same reason; the very thought of such a thing is preposterous.

U.S.—And why won't you accept the uselessness of compasses, quadrants and chronometers?

B.J.—Man alive, you tire me! If you knew anything about navigation you would realize how silly your notions are.

U.S.—And if anyone were to insist upon putting these notions into practice—

B.J.—I'd call him an ass.

U.S.—And if he insisted on your trying them with him?

B.J.—I'd run away from him as I would from a raving maniac.

U.S.—And if he called you "Pope" for your pains—

B.J. (bursting out laughing)—Well, I don't know what I would do if not laugh.

U.S.—So would I!

B.J.—Then you agree with me?

U.S.—I do, and very muchly so!

B.J.—Then you were only guying me?

U.S.—Not guying you; laying a trap for you; and you fell in; and you are caught.

B.J.—I'd like to know how.

U.S.—What you said amounts to this: A man who knows navigation and mechanics won't think of trying a papier-mâché steamer, etc.

B.J.—'Course not!

U.S.—Such a man would look "intolerant," "narrow," "bigoted," "one sided," and would be called a "Pope" by the fellow, who knowing nothing of the subject tried to reason upon it and to enforce his views.

B.J.—Guess so.

U.S.—Now, then, there is this about it. Ignorance is the most tolerant of things. Talk to any man, ignorant of navigation, about trying a papier-mâché steamer and crossing the Atlantic without compass, and he will listen attentively and may be roped in—

B.J.—And get drowned.

U.S.—But talk that way and try to enlist the aid of one who knows, and he will “bigotedly,” “narrow-mindedly,” “one-sidedly,” “intolerantly,” and “Popely” insist you are wrong and refuse to act with you, and proceed on the lines he knows to be right.

B.J.—He certainly would, and justly so.

U.S.—So likewise in the navigation of the waters of the Social Question. To deny the class struggle is to deny the invaluable aid of the compass; to imagine progress can be made by the tender sighs of altruism and the weepful weepings of sentimentalism; to dream of reaching the goal of justice by middle-class altruism is to dream of reaching Europe on a papier-mâché steamer propelled by dynamite concussions. Do you understand that?

B.J.—I think so.

U.S.—Consequently, he who knows better will “narrow-mindedly,” etc., refuse to embark on such a political ship, and only he who is an ignoramus will exercise “tolerance” and risk his neck. Do you understand that?

B.J.—Yes, I do.

U.S.—One thing more. These weepful altrurians¹ with their sugar-coated nonsense have had the field all to themselves for nearly forty years. Are their results great?

B.J.—Can’t say they are, unless the greatness of the nation’s misery be the result.

U.S.—The “Popes,” the “intolerants,” are now on deck, wait and see the result; it will not be failures and disasters, it will be the successes that positive knowledge wrings from the foe. So then, you will now agree with me that all these altrurian denunciations of the Socialists as “intolerant,” “bigoted,” etc., are badges of honor that distinguish the trained veterans from the rabblerrout of dilettantes who are responsible for much of the misery we now suffer.

¹ [Fictitious altruistic inhabitants of “Altruria,” from William D. Howells’ utopian novel, *A Visitor from Altruria*.]

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