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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {97}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—The class struggle—
BROTHER JONATHAN—Oh, hang your “class struggle!” I am sick and tired of that senseless phrase.

U.S.—“Hang?” “sick?” “tired?” “senseless phrase?” I thought you understood the thing and accepted it.

B.J.—Yes; I accepted it when I did not understand it; now that I understand it, I reject it. I have been reading up on Socialism; there is nothing in that “class struggle.”

U.S.—Tut, tut; you must have been reading dime novels, or the *Police Gazette*.

B.J.—No dime novels or *Police Gazette*, either, but the authorized official organs of Socialism in Germany, France, England and here.

U.S.—And you there learned that the “class struggle” is “senseless?”

B.J.—They don’t say so in so many words; but out of them I picked out facts enough to knock the theory of the “class struggle” into a cocked hat.

U.S.—When you talk that way it looks to me that your brains have been “knocked into a cocked hat.”

B.J.—Let’s see. Is Prof. Jean Jaures, the Socialist Deputy in the French Chamber, a leading Socialist, or is he not?

U.S.—He is.

B.J.—Is he a horny-handed, manual worker?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S. (a slight twinkle perceptible in his eyes)—Nay.

B.J.—Is August Bebel, {in} the German Reichstag, a leading Socialist, or is he not?

U.S.—He is.

B.J.—Is he a horny-handed manual worker?

U.S. (a brighter twinkle in his eyes)—Nay.

B.J.—Is H.M. Hyndman, the editor of the Socialist paper, the London *Justice*{,} a leading Socialist, or is he not?

U.S.—He is.

B.J.—Is he a horny-handed, manual worker?

U.S. (a still brighter twinkle in his eye)—Nay.

B.J.—Is Prof. Ferri, the Socialist delegate in the Italian Parliament, a leading Socialist, or is he not?

U.S.—He is.

B.J.—Is he a horny-handed, manual worker?

U.S. (the twinkle in his eye ready to snap)—Nay.

B.J.—I don't need to go further. Here you have it; the leading Socialists in England, France, Germany, Italy and other places are men of intellect and culture, who do not earn their livings by manual work; none is a wage worker or proletarian; they are all members of the ruling class; they are all champions of the working class. That knocks the bottom out of the class struggle. Give in.

U.S. (the twinkle in his eye all ablaze)—Just you wait and let me get in my innings. An army consists of soldiers?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is one soldier an army?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—A forest consists of trees?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is one tree a forest?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—The capitalist class consists of capitalists?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is one capitalist the whole capitalist class?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—The class of the proletariat consists of proletarians?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is one proletarian the whole class of the proletariat?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—No more can the presence of a few non-proletarians in the movement of the proletariat change the character of this movement. You know Artemus Ward?

B.J.—Yes, indeed.

U.S.—You recollect he said: “The African may be our brother, but he isn’t our sister and our wife and our uncle; he isn’t several of our brothers and all our fust wife’s relashuns; he isn’t our grandfather, and our grate-grandfather, and our aunt in the country; he isn’t everybody, and everybody else likewise.” Neither are such valuable leaders as Ferri, Jaures, Hyndman, Bebel, together with all such others you might enumerate, everybody and everybody else likewise; they may be and are a good deal, but they are not the whole movement and everything else likewise. You can’t make out from the presence and prominence of such men in the movement of the proletariat that the movement is not the struggle of a class against the class that oppresses it. If you do, then a tree is a forest, a soldier an army—and “the African” becomes all our relations, “our aunt in the country” included.

B.J. looks blank.

U.S.—But I am not yet through with you. The class struggle means the struggle of the economic necessities of one class against the economic privileges of another class. Would you deny that the capitalist class is enjoying privileges which the economic necessities of the class of the proletariat cannot tolerate?

B.J.—I guess that’s so.

U.S.—That being so, the class struggle between the two exists—the one struggling to preserve its privileges, the other compelled to struggle to overthrow its foe or to go down.

B.J. (pensive)—Yes, there is a class struggle, no mistake about that, but—

U.S.—What now?

B.J.—But it is not absolutely necessary that the cause of the proletariat be upheld by proletarians, nor that the cause of the capitalists be upheld by capitalists. I have shown you how some non-proletarians are championing the cause of the proletariat; can't you conceive of the reverse, of proletarians upholding the cause of the capitalists?

U.S.—Most assuredly I can; the “pure and simple” labor misleaders—the Lennons, the P.J. McGuires, the McSweeneys, the Skeffingtons, and such others—are doing so right along.

B.J.—Now, then, what I did mean to say from the start was that it is senseless to judge a movement by the element that runs it.

U.S.—Even so, you err. Your premises are right, but your conclusions are wrong. The theory of the class struggle begins and ends with the demonstration of the fact that the present social movement involves the struggle between the economic class interests of the class that is stripped of property and the class privileges of the class that has sponged up all property. If a member of the capitalist class upholds the economic interests of the proletariat, he stands squarely upon the class struggle against capitalism; vice versa, if a member of the proletariat upholds the economic interests of the capitalist class, he stands upon the principles of capitalism. The test in each case is: What principles does a man maintain?

B.J.—That's so.

U.S.—Now, then, the movement that lays stress upon the money question is a capitalist and not a proletarian movement. It gives no thought to the wage question. Its mind is taken up with capitalist economics. Will you deny that?

B.J.—Guess I can't.

U.S.—That's the reason I pronounce Populism a middle-class movement; and that is the reason it is not a wage workers' movement. The non-wage worker who talks capitalist economics and is busied about capitalist issues, like money, is not on the side of the workers. The question is not whether Bebel, Jaures, Hyndman and others are of the proletariat or not. The question is whether the doctrines they preach are proletarian or capitalist doctrines. They preach proletarian doctrines, and that places them and their movement fully on the side of the proletariat.

B.J.—Y-e-s.

U.S.—The facts are, then, these:

1. The presence of two or three or more people of non-proletarian extraction in the movement of the proletarians does not change its character.

2. The character of a class movement depends upon the principles it stands on. If the principles are capitalist, it is a capitalist; if they are proletarian, it is a proletarian movement.

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