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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {206}

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BROTHER JONATHAN—Do you know I find great fault with the intolerance of the Socialists?

UNCLE SAM—Do you know I am getting quite tired to hear that silly statement?

B.J.—'Tis not silly. To give you an illustration. See how the Socialists treat the Populist movement—

U.S.—Do they blackguard it?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—Are the facts they quote against it false?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—Are their arguments against it mistaken?

B.J.—No. All that is all right. But for all that the Socialists don't need to jump upon it as they do. They should realize that the Populist movement has created a pile of discontent, and without discontent Socialists could not find hearers and could not make propaganda.

U.S.—You are tangling up a truth and an untruth. It is true that discontent is a prerequisite to make people ready to hear and accessible to Socialism; it is untrue that populism creates discontent—

B.J.—Why, man—

U.S.—Never mind what you were going to say. See here. Talk, agitation, thrilling denunciation, fervid speeches—none of these can "create" discontent. Discontent is created by physical want and the mental trials that physical want breeds. These things are the creature of the development of capital. Every new machine, every concentration



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of productive forces produces, increases physical want and mental distress; they throw more wage slaves out of work and endanger all the more the jobs of those who remain at work; they render the chances of the small concerns to compete successfully slimmer and slimmer; they make the livelihood of increasing numbers an ever harder thing to gain—they, accordingly, by turning the screws down upon increasing numbers of people, wipe away false hopes that “something will turn up,” and render the masses discontented. This is the effect of the material workings of capitalism; words won’t create discontent. The merit of creating discontent that you attribute to Populism does not belong to it; that merit belongs to capitalism. Give the devil his due: ’Tis capitalism that renders the people accessible to the teachings of Socialism by making them more and more discontented.

B.J.—Very well; I grant that; it is the material conditions that must create discontent. But would you deny that the right kind of talk can intensify the discontent.

U.S.—Most assuredly, I deny that. The man who is starving, and needs to be talked to before he becomes discontented is worthless. The man who is going down hill and is not discontented, you can never reach, even if you were to talk yourself black in the face.

B.J.—Well, granted that, too; and yet I maintain that Populism has helped greatly to set the pot boiling; and I am ready to give it credit for that.

U.S.—In the first place, you will notice that you insist upon your views notwithstanding you admit that your premises are knocked from under you—an evidence of bad reasoning.

In the second place, granted that Populism did help to set the pot boiling by intensifying discontent, do you know who alone can profit by such action?

B.J.—Well?

U.S.—The charlatans; the discontented masses themselves are only rendered all the easier preys for the charlatans. Make a man discontented and abstain from teaching him the right cause of his troubles and the right way out of them, and what you have done is to make him soft as putty in the hands of the first charlatan who comes around.

Say you have made a man discontented and did no more. Along comes a single taxer with his backnumber nostrum; will your discontented man know enough to see through the fallacy of single taxism? No. He may be taken, boots and shoots, and off he

flies. Or along comes a free trader, or a 16 to 1 coinagist{,} or an anti-monopolist, or an anti-Tammanyite, or a Glasgow-planner. What would happen? Your man is ready made material for any of them. We have had altogether too much discontent in this country, and, as it is untrained discontent, the result has been that it has degenerated into hopelessness and apathy. Just compare the condition of things upon that head here and in Europe. Here there is nothing more common than to hear a poor devil of a fellow exclaim: 'Tis no use trying! Why, those whom he met or who "helped to make him discontented," either left him there, or, worse yet, stuffed him with some ridiculous economic notion. The result is that he tried, failed and gave up. No, my good boy, we don't need, we don't want any more discontent. The national pot is running over with discontent. What we now need is solid Socialist teachings. These the Populist movement has not given; just the reverse. Its economics were so absurd that deep and broad streams of discontent to run {ran?} right into the maws of the rapacious combination of silver mine barons and bankrupt farmers who want to become big exploiting farmers themselves. No, Socialists are not intolerant, except in the sense that science is intolerant.

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

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