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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {192}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I am a Socialist.

UNCLE SAM (mockingly)—But—

B.J.—Yes, “But”—But I am an American Socialist; none of your imported Socialists. I am a Socialist who believes in the domestic article. I am an American Socialist, I am, and believe in American Socialism.

U.S.—That’s very fine. Now give me some idea of how that article looks.

B.J.—Populism is American Socialism.

U.S.—Then what Populism says is American Socialism?

B.J.—Never mind what people SAY; a good many things may be SAID by Populists; they are to be judged by what they DO.

U.S.—That suits me. Populism is in power in Kansas; it has the Executive and both branches of the Legislature and a majority of the Supreme Court in the State. There it surely has a chance to show what it is—

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And what it does there is American Socialism?

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—Kansas Populism made it a penal offence for the State Printer to introduce the type setting machine. In other words it fights the machine. Is that your American Socialism?

B.J.—Isn’t that Socialism? Don’t Socialists fight the machine?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—No; that is not Socialism; it is middle class peanut politics. Socialism does not fight the machine.

B.J.—Why, you are mistaken.

U.S.—I am not. Socialism loves the machine; the more machinery and the more perfect the machine, all the better is man able to produce wealth and all the less toil is needed to have all that man wants.

B.J.—If that's so, what are you Socialists kicking about? You ought to be the happiest men out. We are having a flood of machinery. According to you, if that is Socialism, everybody ought to be now wealthy with but a few hours' work. I knew that your imported Socialism was no good. Despite all the machinery our people are suffering! I believe in American Socialism. Every genuine American, whose ancestors like mine came over on the Plymouth Rock and took possession of the Indian village of May Flower will repudiate your un-American Socialism. American Socialism fights the machine. The machine is the cause of poverty.

U.S.—And you have proved two things:

First, that, like all blusterers who parade their nativity, you are an ignoramus on the history of the country—

B.J.—What!

U.S.—Yes; a howling ignoramus. You got it all mixed upon on {mixed up on} the Pilgrim {Plymouth?} Rock and May Flower affair.

Second, that you have no knowledge whatever of economics.

B.J.—And me a Plymouth Rock man!

U.S.—The trouble is not with the machine, it is with the way it is owned. Destroy the machine and you put us all back a hundred years, back to the time when, with the best of will, sufficient wealth was not producible to insure an abundance to all. The existence of the machine makes abundance for all POSSIBLE. The reason that abundance for all is not a FACT is that the machine is owned by a private class who allow its use only for private profit. It is for that reason that, despite the machine, people who work or would want to work go hungry and cold, while people who don't work and don't want to work enjoy luxury.

B.J.—And what do you propose?

U.S.—Before that problem, presented by the machine, the people divide into three classes:

One class, which owns the machine, wants to keep it for itself, and in that way continue to live without work, while the masses famish. That class is the Capitalist class.

An other class, which owns some little machinery, but not as good as the Capitalist class, and therefore can't compete with the capitalists, wants to smash the machinery of the Capitalist class. In other words, it is itself a Capitalist class at heart; it wants to skin the poor fellow who has no capital whatever, but it don't want to be crushed by the upper fellow; it wants to preserve that feature of the machine which is the cause of popular poverty, to wit, private ownership, but it wants to fight machinery; it therefore wants to set civilization back. That class is the middle class, and what it wants is POPULISM.

The third class, which is the overwhelming one in numbers and does really all the work of the country, owns no machinery whatever; for that reason it is kept in poverty, plucked by the other two. That class is the working class. It has every interest in the introduction and improvement of machinery because that makes an abundance possible, and possible also a reduction of toil; but in order that the abundance, which the machine makes possible, shall fall to the toilers and not to the loafers, the working class want to own the machine, and what it is after is, not the destruction of the machine, but its public ownership—that is SOCIALISM.

B.J.—I declare!

U.S.—When you call Populism “American Socialism” it is just as if you called COWBOYISM “American Freedom.” Other countries also went through the cowboy period; in America, the country being younger, that period came later, but there was nothing American about it any more than measles are peculiar to your children, most children get them. So your Populism; it is nothing but the death rattle of the middle class in America.

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

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