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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {272}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I desire you to explain a thing to me about Socialism.

UNCLE SAM—Which?

B.J.—Has the Socialist Labor party any definite plan for obtaining the means of production and distribution which are now private property?

U.S.—That question is too broad put that way. But to answer in general, the Socialist Labor party has, essentially, no more and no less definite a plan to achieve its ends and carry out its programme than the free traders have when they want to overthrow protection; or than the protectionists have when they want to overthrow free trade; or than the silverites have when they want to overthrow the present financial system; and so on.

B.J.—Why, do you mean that?

U.S.—Certainly. What “plan” have the free traders?

B.J.—Their plan is to elect a Congress and President, repeal the tariff laws and enact free trade legislation. That’s very simple.

U.S.—And what “plan” have the silverites?

B.J.—Similarly: elect a President and Congress and legislate silver in.

U.S.—Well, the Socialist Labor plan is similar. It proposes to capture the public powers, legislate capitalism out, and legislate Socialism in.

B.J.—Ah, but here is where the difference comes.

U.S.—I don’t see it.



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B.J.—I'll show you. Free trade, protection, silver and other such legislation respect "private property." But Socialism does not. The programme of Socialism is to place into the hands of the people collectively the means of production now held in private hands;—is it not?

U.S.—It is.

B.J.—Therefore there must be a vast difference between the plan of the S.L.P. and that of all those other parties. They don't propose to touch private property.

U.S.—Don't they?

B.J.—Do they?

U.S.—Why, certainly.

B.J.—How so?

U.S.—Very simply. Would the private property, held by free traders under a free trade régime, not shrivel in their hands by the overthrow of that régime and the establishment of the opposite, protection?

B.J. ponders.

U.S.—Take your time, think it over.

B.J.—Well, yes; it would.

U.S.—And the property in the hands of the victorious protectionists, would it not proportionally increase?

B.J.—Yes, it would.

U.S.—Would not the property in the hands of protectionists fare similarly if, their régime being up, it is overthrown and free trade introduced.

B.J.—Well, yes.

U.S.—And likewise in the case of victorious silver, etc., etc.?

B.J.—Yes, I see that; but—

U.S.—The only but there is about it is that the legislation that the S.L.P. would enact and enforce would frankly, while that of all the others does covertly affect property. But there is one deep and wide difference. Free trade, protection, silver, gold, etc., etc., all claim that their programme is essential to the welfare of the people, and the moment they have a chance to proceed to carry out their programme which is, and can be, none else than the welfare of that particular set of the capitalist class that is benefited by free

trade, etc., at the expense of the whole rest of the people. Now, the programme of the S.L.P., which also claims that it alone can promote the welfare of the whole people, is a true, a bona fide people's programme, and it alone, indeed, can promote the welfare of the nation. If, accordingly, the others can legislate, and have legislated, property out of the hands of one set of capitalists into the hands of an other, why should not the S.L.P. be able to legislate stolen property from the hands of the robber class, that now holds, back into the hands of the people who produced it?

B.J. ponders.

U.S.—If you feel shocked it is only an evidence that the false pretences of law, order, property, religion, under which the several successful capitalists have successively transferred property through legislation, have commended themselves to you, and have imposed upon you. It is part of the education that the workers have to receive that they emancipate themselves from the domination of capitalist thought. You will have to do that.

B.J.—But—

U.S.—Still a “but”—

B.J.—Yes; on another side of the question. Does the S.L.P. plan embrace the plan of physical force?

U.S.—The S.L.P. plan embraces every step that is in the logic of events. If the capitalist class debauch the ballot box, or if it rise in rebellion against the fiat of the people; if, in short, it so far violates the organic law of the land, why, then, physical force becomes the logic of events, and will be applied with crushing effect. That's all there is to it.

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

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