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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {342}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN (looking as if the skies had closed over his head)—If I understand things right your party—

UNCLE SAM—The Socialist Labor Party?

B.J.—Yes, the party that has Malloney and Rimmel on the Presidential ticket—

U.S.—And Corregan and Armstrong for Governor and Lieutenant Governor?

B.J.—Exactly. That's the party, I mean. If I understand things right, that party will establish Socialism.

U.S.—Bet your bottom dollar it will!

B.J.—But that would be very bad!

U.S.—Inasmuch as to which?

B.J.—Don't you see? Under Socialism no one would have a chance to set up a little shop, say a little grocery—

U.S.—One of those cockroach stores?

B.J.—Well, call them "cockroach stores." They are cockroach stores, I'll admit. Nevertheless, the man who has one of them can on a summer's day tip back his chair against his front door, take it easy, and boss things in his own shanty. And that surely is something. Under Socialism there could be no small stores. Big stores only would do the retailing. No one could have his own store. We all would have to be workingmen.

U.S.—You understand, don't you, that "workingman" under Socialism is not what "workingman" means to-day, under Capitalism.

B.J.—Yes. I understand that. The workingman under Socialism is a free being—



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—Who enjoys the full fruit of his labor; he is part-owner in the Co-operative Commonwealth: he works under conditions that he himself has a voice in deciding—

B.J.—Yes, whereas now he has nothing to say upon that, the shop rules are determined by the employer, and the worker is treated as a galley-slave. I recognize all that. And yet—

U.S.—One moment! And you understand also, don't you, that the small shop-keeper to-day is everything but a free man?

B.J.—I know there are many thorns to that rose.

U.S.—The small shop-keeper has to wear himself to a bone in order to make two ends meet;—

B.J.—I know that.

U.S.—He is subject to a thousand and one vexations, inflicted upon him by the politicians;—

B.J.—That's so, I know it! Tho' I'm not a shop-keeper myself, my shop-keeper friends have told me some very galling experiences.

U.S.—The small shop-keeper travels on the ragged edge of ruin, carrying on a losing, hopeless, competitive struggle against the large department stores;—

B.J.—I know all that; and yet—

U.S.—The existence of the small shop-keeper is bound up in petty things, and he is bound to find his mind and his family's mind warped by his pursuit, and become petty;—

B.J.—I grant all that.

U.S.—And yet you would like that petty, crawling “independence” that you see in the small shop-keeper?

B.J.—Yes, I do.

U.S.—When our forefathers kicked out King George, and set up a republic here, the petty, groveling lords that hung on the skirts of royalty had no chance, had they?

B.J. (proudly)—None, whatever!

U.S.—With the overthrow of King George, the political system that leaves room for these petty lackey-lords was overthrown?

B.J. (very proudly)—Totally overthrown!

U.S.—A new political system was set up, where, politically, all were alike?

B.J. (still more proudly)—Yes, indeed! No more political lords for us, whether big ones, or little cockroach lords!

U.S.—“Cockroach Lords” is a very good expression. Now, Jonathan, suppose that at the time when our Revolutionary Fathers were battling, engaged in the work of setting up this new and better political system, some fellow had come to them and said: “Your republican system of politics will leave no room for a man to raise himself into a Cockroach Lordship; all would have to be alike. That’s very bad”; what treatment do you imagine our Revolutionary Fathers would have given to such a fellow? Answer!

B.J.—I don’t think they would have taken any notice of him.

U.S.—They WOULD have taken some notice of him. They would not have trimmed their course one bit; but they would have said to him: “Good man, if a Cockroach Lordship is your aspiration, by all means join King George’s red-jackets! You can’t get “Cockroach Lordship in the American Republic.”

B.J. feels he is up against it.

U.S.—And so say we Socialists to you now: “If what you aspire after is the cockroach independence of a cockroach little shop, then, by all means, don’t vote for Malloney and Remmel; no cockroach business is possible under Socialism; but vote Democratic or Republican, it matters not which, if you ever reach your ideal, you will have the opportunity to fawn, and crawl, and be subject to the vexations imposed upon you by capitalists; you will have that opportunity to your heart’s content. That’s my answer.

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