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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {285}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I can't explain how it is that Socialism is not adopted more rapidly than it is. There must be some defect in the way in which it is presented.

UNCLE SAM—What do you imagine is the defect?

B.J.—I can't tell. If anyone simply considers that Christ was a Socialist—

U.S.—Hello, there! What was that? CHRIST a SOCIALIST?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Nay, nay, my good man! The surest way to prevent people from understanding Socialism would be to declare Christ a Socialist. Such a statement would be sure to muddle up people so completely that the schemers and “reformers” could keep on bamboozling them forever. What ever the light in which Christ be considered, he was no Socialist, and could have been none.

B.J. (filled with amazement)—Do you mean to say that Jesus was a bad man, that he had a cruel capitalist heart?

U.S.—I don't mean to dodge the question by first putting an other to you. I shall answer you. But be good enough to answer me these few questions first: Do you think that Jesus liked to waste time?

B.J.—I don't think he did.

U.S.—When he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and entered into one of the ships, and he told Simon to launch out into the deep, would he not have preferred to get out into the deep quickly, rather than slowly?



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B.J.—Quickly, I should think.

U.S.—One more question, had he been able to get into a steam tug-boat, would he not have preferred that to the slow-moving yawl?

B.J.—Guess he would.

U.S.—And now a final question: Why didn't he?

B.J.—Why he didn't? Why, simply because there were no steam tug-boats in existence then.

U.S.—Correct, correct! Consequently, his taking of a yawl was not the result of his liking to waste time.

B.J.—'Course not.

U.S.—Now, for the same reason, Jesus' not being a Socialist is not an evidence of his having been a bad man, or having had a cruel capitalist heart. He was no Socialist, and could have been none, simply for a reason similar to the reason he had at the lake of Gennesaret for not entering into a steam tug-boat—there was none in existence to enter into. So, likewise, he was not, and could not be, a Socialist because Socialism was not yet possible.

B.J.—Did he not favor a community of goods?

U.S.—At any rate his disciples did; but that is not Socialism.

B.J.—What, then, is Socialism?

U.S.—Socialism is that social system where WORK is DONE co-operatively. Socialism does not imply a community of goods, it implies a common ownership of the machinery by which the goods are produced. The goods thus produced are not held in common; everyone has that share of the total that is equivalent to his share of labor in producing it. Community of goods means common ENJOYMENT; Socialism means common WORK—each man then enjoying his share of the common product in whatever manner may suit his bent

B.J.—I can't yet see, from this, why Jesus could not have been a Socialist.

U.S.—What I said proves that Jesus could not have been a Socialist BECAUSE the common ownership of the instruments of production can have no sense until they are of such gigantic structure and great productive power that no one man, or small set of men, can operate them. In the days of Jesus the tool of production was in its most infant state, pliable by the individual; hence, it was owned by the individual; hence, nothing that even approximates Socialism could then have been possible. Socialism is the apex

of a pyramid whose broad basis is the mechanical knowledge slowly acquired by man long after the year 32 A.D.

B.J.—But even so, if you look at Socialism from the side of a noble moral aspiration, would you not say that Jesus WAS a Socialist?

U.S.—You little imagine what serious tactical errors and misconceptions you open the door to by putting the matter that way. The aspirations of man depend upon the material basis of the society of his time—

B.J.—But Jesus—

U.S.—I know what you mean to say, just wait. When will you be able to embrace a broader horizon, when you stand down in a valley, or when you stand on a hill-top?

B.J.—When I stand on a hill-top.

U.S.—The lower the hill, the narrower your horizon?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And the higher the hill, the broader your horizon?

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—And will the nobility of your aspirations enable you to see as far when you stand on a small hill as when you stand on a high one?

B.J.—'Course not.

U.S.—Just so with the noble aspirations of man. The material basis of the social system in which man lives is the elevation that intelligently determines his aspirations. The material basis of society is its system of production, and that depends upon its capacity to produce wealth. The less the wealth producible, the lower is the level that determines man's moral horizon, his aspirations; the larger the quantity of wealth producible, the higher also is the level that determines man's moral horizon, his aspirations. The noble aspirations of Socialism could not have existed before there existed the present machinery of production, that renders co-operative labor compulsory and so productive that the burden of toil can be safely raised from the shoulders of the race, insuring to all not only affluence, but freedom from that worst, most malignant of all spectres—the fear of want. Socialism—neither as a social-material basis, nor as an aspiration—, could have existed in the days of Jesus. The social economy of Jesus and his disciples was that of equality of poverty; the social economy of Socialism is equality of opportunity to enjoy the affluence now possible.

B.J.—What, then, becomes of Sir Thomas More, of Plato, of Hasrrington? Did not

all these noble men, who clearly aspired after humaner conditions, as shown by the books they wrote, did not they see clean ahead, notwithstanding they did not stand, and could not have stood, upon the high material basis of our present society? Were not they Socialists either?

U.S.—No; they did not see CLEAN AHEAD; nor were they Socialists; could not be. The material basis of the social system, that all of these lived in, so limited their horizons that they schemed social orders, in point of labor and production, entirely in keeping with the material conditions of their own times.

B.J.—But their aspirations; their aspirations after universal well-being; does not that make them out Socialists?

U.S.—No more than a child is a man, though the two have lots in common.

B.J. opens his eyes in amazement.

U.S.—You open your eyes, and seem stunned. Yet the thing is plain. A part is not a whole. The heart may have yearnings, but these yearnings alone, without the guidance of the requisite knowledge, are productive of no practical results; they are gropings in the dark, with bumped heads as the end of the song. And that is just what happened to the schemes of the Platos, the Mores, the Harringtons—the Utopians, in short. Not until the race has attained the present point of mechanical perfection, can it have that knowledge that enables it to guide the promptings of the heart. With the Utopians the heart was there, but the requisite race knowledge was necessarily absent. The Socialist is the complete man: with him the heart does not overleap the intellect, nor does the intellect—thanks to the modern mechanism of production known to him—, lag behind the heart.

B.J.—And if Jesus lived to-day, what do you think; would he not be a Socialist?

U.S.—Every decent man who is abreast of his times must be a Socialist. He who is none to-day, is either a moral abortion, or is behind his times in social knowledge.

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

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