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DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {89}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**ROTHER JONATHAN—Do you know I have at last found a flaw in Socialist reasoning?

UNCLE SAM—If indeed you did you could get a pension from any of our colleges; they are all looking frantically for a flaw in Socialism. They have “discovered” a score of them from time to time, but they had to abandon them. The flaws lacked the essential quality of a flaw. They proved, each of them, to be the strongest link in the chain mail of Socialism. He who should find a real flaw is a made man.

B.J.—Well, I did!

U.S.—Let her rip; what is it?

B.J.—Socialists want to abolish capital; ain't it?

U.S. (hesitatingly)—Well, say they do!

B.J.—Now, then, without capital we would relapse into the barbarism of universal poverty. There would, true enough, not be any of the shocking contrasts we see to-day between extreme poverty and extreme wealth, with all the evils that that entails, but neither would we enjoy many an advantage we now enjoy. To destroy capital were to destroy a lever of civilization, and that, you know, is an impossible task. Civilization will not back; it will move forward only—

U.S. (applauding enthusiastically)—Well said!

B.J.—Wasn't I right? Is not that a fatal flaw in Socialism? I am glad to see you



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

applaud me; it does not frequently happen.

U.S.—I applauded your last sentiments: “Civilization will not move backward; its course is forward only.” But the premises you started from are all wrong.

B.J.—Wrong!

U.S.—Yes, wrong. We just had two glasses of prime applejack—

B.J.—Prime they were. Shall we have another?

U.S.—Not just now. They were fine, tasted good, did us good—

B.J. (smacking his lips)—And no mistake!

U.S.—Now, then, suppose some man were to say to you: “He who takes applejack dies almost instantly under painful convulsions and in great agony?”

B.J.—I would tell him he was talking through his hat.

U.S.—And suppose he were to proceed to take out of his pocket a bottle labeled “Applejack,” were to give that to a dog, and the dog were forthwith to kick and howl himself out of life?

B.J.—I would say the bottle’s label was a fraud; it may bear the label of “applejack,” but probably it contained strychnine.

U.S.—Suppose, now, that man were to say: “I call this ‘applejack.’”

B.J.—I would say to him that he was free to call it what he liked, but I call it strychnine, and that to give the name of applejack to a thing known as strychnine was a quibble and a fraud and a misleading way of doing things.

U.S.—You have just now accurately described the man who will give the name of “capital” to what is no more capital than strychnine is applejack.

B.J. looks up with surprise.

U.S.—It is not “capital” that constitutes that lever of civilization you spoke of. It is the concentrated and perfected machinery of production whereby co-operative work becomes possible, and the quantity of wealth yielded by labor is plentiful enough to afford comfort to all without arduous toil.

B.J.—Isn’t that capital?

U.S.—No, sir! That becomes capital only when it is owned by private individuals. Owned by private individuals and operated for their private profit, the machinery of production becomes capital, and then, so far from being a lever of civilization and a

source of human welfare, it becomes a lever of barbarism and a source of human misery. It strips concentrated machinery and production and co-operative work of all the good that is in them; it robs them of their civilizing and beneficent powers; it promotes on the one end of the social ladder popular poverty, such as was never before known in the world's history, and on the other end, purse-proud crime, ignorance and immorality.

B.J.'s eyes opened wide.

U.S.—Socialism wants to destroy capital, i.e., the form of private ownership of the machinery of production.

B.J.—I never understood it in that light.

U.S.—Socialists do not oppose; on the contrary they favor, promote and hail every progress of the sciences that causes production to be carried on in a more concentrated way, i.e., more and more co-operatively.

B.J.—Then they are all right and I was all wrong.

U.S.—Whoever attacks Socialism by giving the name of capital to the very thing that Socialists favor and would promote, either knows not what he is talking about, or, like the strychnine man who calls his stuff applejack, he indulges in deliberate misrepresentation.

B.J.—Now that I see it, I, too, am a Socialist!

U.S.—So is every man on whom intelligence dawns. Capital is machinery of production put to bad use—put to individual use. Socialism aims at freeing the machinery of production from that Old Man of the Sea—Capitalism.

B.J.—Let us all give a helping hand!

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