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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {88}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Do you know one
Dr. William H. von Swartwout?

UNCLE SAM—Yep; the President-elect
of the grand and mystic Republic of Olombia?

B.J.—The very one, I guess.

U.S.—What about him?

B.J.—He is circulating an article on “Olombia vs.
Socialism.”

U.S.—Let him circulate; it will make him happy
and hurt nobody.

B.J.—He refers to a dialogue between Secretary
Carlisle and some people who proposed to
nationalize the railroads, telegraph, etc., in which he tells how Carlisle asked those
people: “But how do you propose to get possession of those properties, which are tied up
with charters, deeds and every conceivable kind of legal protection; do you intend to
confiscate them?” How those would-be nationalizers promptly answered “No!” to this
question.

U.S.—(Utters a weary grunt.)

B.J.—He then goes on to say how Carlisle again asked: “The value of those railroads,
telegraphs, etc., of the country represent about \$10,000,000,000; do you propose to
buy them; are you ready to tax yourselves to this amount?” and that Carlisle was quickly
answered with a volley of “No!” “No!” most emphatically uttered.

U.S. (looking very weary).—Well?

B.J.—Well? Did that really happen?



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U.S.—It did.

B.J.—Then Socialism was squarely knocked out in two rounds?

U.S. (bristling up).—Socialism “knocked out?” Not much! Do you know who those people were who called upon Carlisle and were knocked out?

B.J.—Why, Socialists, I thought.

U.S.—Nary! They were a delegation of Populists. Populism, you must always remember, stands upon the principle of private ownership in the instruments of production. It is reared upon capitalism. That being so, the Populists stand on very slippery ground when they attempt to avoid or escape the logical consequences of capitalism. Their desire to remove monopolies is one of those vain attempts. When, consequently, they meet a logical and consistent capitalist like Carlisle their fur is made to fly; their mouths are quickly stopped; they are bound to recoil before their own propositions; in short, they are rolled, or “knocked out,” as you put it, in short order.

B.J.—But what would a Socialist have answered, what could he answer to such direct questions touching the “modus operandi” or the “process” of socialization? Swartwout says there is no answer.

U.S.—The Socialist could have given Carlisle a series of clinching answers that would have made him look very silly and even sent him to bed with the bellyache.

B.J.—I’d like to hear some of them.

U.S.—If the Socialist happened to be in a statistical and bantering mood he would have answered: “Yes, we mean to buy all those things, that is to say we mean to pay for them. But if a man from whom you buy anything is your debtor you will first deduct the debt he owes you and pay him the balance only.”

B.J.—That is what I would do.

U.S.—Very well. The Socialist would have continued thusly: “We would first appraise the things, watered stock being first squeezed out”—at this point Carlisle’s jaw would begin to drop—

B.J. (brightening up).—Guess so; good!

U.S.—The Socialist would have gone on: “Then we would estimate all the debts due the Government by the owners of those things; all the taxes they have dodged; all the fines they should have paid for violations of law, etc., etc. After that much arithmetic

there may possibly be left a nickel due the owners of those things, and that we shall be quite able to and will cheerfully pay.”

B.J.—Bully! That tune sounds very differently from the one Carlisle was treated to.

U.S.—Exactly. But the Socialist might have been in a wicked mood; in that case he would have let statistics go and answered thusly, to wit: “Mr. Carlisle, did the North buy the slaves it set free during and after the war? Did the North tax itself to pay them off? Did the American Revolutionary Fathers tax themselves to pay King George? Nary! They said slavery is a wrong; the slaveholder a criminal and a rebel; away with his negro slaves; and these were set free.”

B.J.—(clapping his hands).—Better yet!

U.S.—The Socialist would further answer: “Our Revolutionary Fathers said without further ado: ‘These colonies are and of right ought to be free,’ and they sent King George, his cousins, his sisters and his aunts, together with all his Colonial Governors and pursuivants, kiting across the water—

B.J.—And no mistake.

U.S.—By the time the Socialist got so far Carlisle would have been seized with the cramps and would not have been in condition to hear the Socialist proceed, saying: “The Declaration of Independence establishes the principle that when a social institution ceases to promote the welfare of the people these have the right and the duty to abolish it, or to so alter it that its foundations may be laid on such principles as to them may seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. The capitalist system of production, whereby the land and the machinery of production are held and used as private property for private profit, has ceased to promote happiness, and has become a curse upon the people. We propose to abolish it and rear in its stead the Co-operative Commonwealth. Get from under!”

B.J.—By Jove! There are no flies on Socialism. He who comes up against it comes up against a buzz saw.

U.S.—And don’t you forget it. The “knocking out” that is done when a Socialist is around is done by the Socialist himself, with the other fellow filling the role of “knocker-outee.”

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