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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {212}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—I saw you talking to a Socialist friend of mine, are you going to join the Socialist Labor party?

BROTHER JONATHAN—No; I was talking to him to induce him to leave the S.L.P.

U.S.—Why?

B.J.—Because the S.L.P. puts the cart before the horse. It urges people who have no economic power to vote and get the political power. Now, that is absurd. It should urge people to first get the economic power and then vote to get the political power.

U.S.—All of which is as heels-over-head a notion as to urge a man, who is being starved by another, to first get food and then knock his would-be murderer down.

B.J. (looks startled)—I don't know about that comparison. I do know, though, that I have been reading an article by an original thinker, who lays it down as a maxim that "political power naturally follows, it does not precede economic power," and from him I have learned that the S.L.P. is no good.

U.S. (breaks out in a roar of laughter)—Your "original" thinker is an "original mutton-head," without intellectual preparation or capacity to understand a scientific principle, he has run across such a principle, feels blown, and misapplies it with all the viciousness and insolence peculiar to such characters.

B.J.—Well, what's right and what is wrong in all this?

U.S.—Do you know that there are two sets of laws that rule matter—STATICS and



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DYNAMICS?

B.J.—I don't understand those words.

U.S. pulls out a card, balances it on the tip of the index finger of his left hand; then he pulls out a silver dollar and balances that on top of the card; then he takes aim, and, with the fingers of his right hand, he flings the card off; the dollar remains poised on his left hand finger, the card flies off and hits Brother Jonathan on tip of the nose.

B.J. (rubbing his nose)—What are you after?

U.S.—Trying to prove to you what an original mutton-head your “original thinker” is.

B.J.—I don't see the connection.

U.S. (holding the dollar still poised on his finger, while the card lies a couple of yards away on the floor)—Listen. You have seen here illustrated a law of STATICS, and one of DYNAMICS. By statics, a body at rest is, obedient to the power of inertia, inclined to remain at rest, and this power of inertia may resist force. Accordingly, the force I imparted to the card under the dollar, was resisted by the dollar's power of inertia: the card flew off, but the dollar stayed balanced on my finger.

By dynamics, force applied to a body may produce motion, and this force may overcome the body's power of inertia, together with other forces acting upon it. Accordingly, the force I imparted to the card under the dollar, was not resisted by the dollar: the dollar stayed balanced on my finger, the card flew off and struck your nose.

B.J.—What of all that?

U.S.—This much, for one: The “original thinker,” who has dabbled in dynamics only, and knows nothing about statics, would lay it down as certain that, if I impart force to a card, on which lies a silver dollar, motion would be imparted to both dollar and card, and both would go banging against your nose. (B.J. ducks his head.)

On the other hand, the “original thinker,” who has dabbled in statics only, and knows nothing about dynamics, would with equal cock-sureness maintain that, if I impart force to a card, on which lies a silver dollar, their power of inertia would resist force and leave both unmoved. Do you begin to see?

B.J. (hesitatingly)—I can't quite say I do.

U.S.—“Political power naturally follows, it does not precede economic power” is a

law of the STATICS of society, of society at rest. A social system once in existence, he who holds economic power also holds, or will inevitably hold, political power. In the statics of society, with society at rest, economic power is indeed the basis of political power.

But otherwise it is in the DYNAMICS of society. With society in motion, moving towards another social system, the political effort is the prerequisite for the acquisition of that economic power that, according to the STATICS of the new society, is to be the groundwork of a new social system, and the basis of future political power.

Under the feudal system, economic power lay in the ownership of the land, the political power of feudal society was grounded on and followed the economic power. That was the case with feudal society at rest, that was the statics of society. But take the instance of William of Normandy, the founder of actual feudalism in England. Did he hold the land of England before he set forth the requisite political effort to get it? No! It was a deed of fierce political force that he enacted at the battle of Senlac when his mace crushed in the head of Harold's standard-bearer, and himself seized the insignia of political supremacy over Harold's corpse. In the social dynamics of that event, political effort preceded the acquisition of the economic power from which future political power was to flow in statics of feudal society in England.

Take our own instance in America. In the capitalist social system, economic power lies in the ownership of capital, and the political power in our social system is grounded on and flows from this economic power. This is the case with capitalist society at rest, that is the statics of our social system, after it was in existence. But the social dynamics implied in the Revolutionary War teaches us that economic power was not enjoyed by the revolutionists, this power was hampered and arrogated by the feudal Parliament of Great Britain; to gain this power, a force, strictly political, was put forth; revolutionary delegates were elected to the Continental Congress; and through this political effort in social dynamics, the economic power was fully seized upon, which now, in the social statics, political power is predicated.

B.J.—I now do see.

U.S.—So seeing, you will perceive that the giving of dynamic significance to the purely static principle that “political power follows naturally but does not precede

economic power,” is:

1st—Unhistoric and unscientific; and

2d—Is equivalent to barring all chance of proletarian emancipation. It being an economic law of capital that the smaller capitalist can not stand up against the bigger one and is bound to lose his economic power, it follows that the proletariat, who already are stripped of all economic power, cannot hope to gain this under the capitalist system. Unable to gain that, they could never gain political power, if it were true absolutely that economic power must precede political power. The bosses like to cultivate this notion; the “pure and simplers” advance it in their stupid motto “Fight Capital with Capital.” If the notion could only prevail Capital would remain safe on its usurped throne. But the notion will not prevail. The S.L.P. will hammer it into pulp. It will fire the proletariat to put forth that political effort that is requisite to overthrow the social system that deprives them of economic, and, consequently, of political power, and to set up that social system under which they will enjoy political through the assumption of economic power.

B.J.—I see a third conclusion.

U.S.—Which?

B.J.—That really my “original thinker” is but an “original mutton-head.”

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

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