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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {254}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Do you know anything about Socialism?

UNCLE SAM—A thing or two.

B.J.—Then you are the man I want to meet. I want to ask a question about it.

U.S.—Let's have it.

B.J.—Under collective industry would wealth be reckoned by weight and measure, or by dollars and cents, or by some other process.

U.S.—Me seems your question involves a confusion of thought.

B.J.—Eh?

U.S.—When you mention “weight and measure” in the same breath as “dollars and cents” you do.

B.J.—How so?

U.S.—Because “dollars and cents” are the conception of a social idea or system, while “weight and measure” are natural conceptions. Everything has weight, everything has size; nor can we imagine such expressions as these: “Three yards of coffee,” or “One pound of book,” etc. The conceptions of weight and measure are bound to continue; they are in the nature of things. On the other hand, “money” is a measure of value, created exclusively by the system of individual production for sale—a social system that eventually develops into capitalism. That measure of value, being the creature and consequence of a certain social system, and not the result of any inherent quality in the things it measures, cannot, like “weight and measure,” be permanent, but is bound to



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change according as the system that it is a reflection of changes. A long thing casts a long shadow, a round one a round shadow, etc. So with “dollars and cents,” they are the shadows cast by individual production; collective production has its own shape of shadow.

B.J.—Very well. Then, money—“dollars and cents” would vanish. What would take their places?

U.S.—In THE PEOPLE,—do you ever see that paper?

B.J.—I think I saw it once.

U.S.—You ought to see it regularly once a week, and read it carefully. In THE PEOPLE, about two years ago, the matter was treated very fully and luminously. It was treated in a speech delivered by the French Socialist Labor party Deputy, Jules Guesde, in the French Chambers. A similar question was then asked to him—

B.J.—How did he answer it?

U.S.—You ought to get that copy. I’ll here just give a rough outline. Under this capitalist system of production, even the fundamental law of value is perverted. What gives value to an article is the amount of labor that there is in it; yet under this system we find frequently that the articles, that cost most labor or life-tissue, are often cheap.

B.J.—That’s so!

U.S.—But these freaks of capitalism do not alter the central truth. Now, then, the value of things, in the collective system, is not subject to such aberrations. The measure of their value is the amount of life-tissue they absorb in production. The amount of yards of cloth, of pounds of butter, of tons of coal that are equal to one another, depends upon the amount of life-tissue they contain; equal amounts of life-tissue transmuted into useful articles are equal and exchangeable. That is the measure of value in collectivism.

B.J. (after reflecting a while)—But that is substantially the theory now, and “dollars and cents” are needed as the things in which to express value.

U.S.—Correct. Under an individualistic system that is necessary. Under a collective system it is not. Vouchers for labor performed by one man will secure to him the goods produced by another to the amount of similar labor.

B.J.—But who is to determine the relative value of work. Some work is pleasant,

other disagreeable.

U.S.—An easy thing. The more agreeable the work, the more applicants for it there will be; the more disagreeable the work the less applicants. The result would be the establishing an equilibrium between the two. The numbers of applicants for each will do that. Thus, the more numerous the applicants for one class of work and the fewer the applicants for another, it would follow that a larger number of hours of work in the former is needed to exchange for a smaller number of hours of work in the latter.

B.J.—Accordingly, vouchers representing the life-tissue expended in production would take the place of money, and be the medium for distribution or exchange?

U.S.—You have got it now.

B.J.—Then metallic money would not be needed. The vouchers could be printed on paper.

U.S.—Correct.

B.J.—But that is the Greenback idea.

U.S.—Only with this important difference that the Greenback idea places the cart before the horse, and Socialism does not. The Greenbackers seek to establish the money of collective production before they have established the system of collective production. Now “money” or the medium of exchange, as I told you before, is the shadow or reflection of a social system. The Greenbacker would have the shadow or reflection before setting up the body to throw that shadow. The Socialist proceeds to set up the system first, its “money” reflection would come of itself as all reflexions or shadows do.

Now think this over.

B.J.—I shall.

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

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