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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {264}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—See that crowded excursion boat! Heavens, what a jam!

UNCLE SAM—That company will make a good round sum to-day on the discomfort of the excursionists.

B.J.—I should think so! Now, do you see that boat?

U.S.—I doestest.

B.J.—And have you estimated the suffering of its crowd?

U.S.—I hastest.

B.J. (self-complacently)—Well, now, that boat, with its load of suffering, is a floating refutation of Socialist theory.

U.S.—Set the theory afloat.

B.J.—Socialism opposes competition; that boat has no competition; there you have what Socialism would take us to. If that boat had competition, it would not so wrecklessly disregard the comfort of its passengers, whose fares it collects.

U.S.—Of course, you have read up on Socialism—

B.J.—Don't I show I did?

U.S.—Can't say you do.

B.J.—Aren't Socialists opposed to competition?

U.S.—Your question gives you away. To ask whether Socialists are opposed to competition is to imply that Socialist theories are akin to free trade, or protection, or other such theories. A person may oppose free trade and prefer protection; but there is



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no reason why free trade may not go on, even if not desirable. A person may oppose protection and favor free trade; but neither is there any reason why protection may not go on even if not desirable. In both cases opposition implies that the other thing would be better, but it does not imply that the thing opposed to has become impossible.

B.J.—I grant that.

U.S.—Now then, the Socialist attitude toward competition in production is of entirely different nature.

B.J.—In what way “different.” I can’t see the difference.

U.S.—Probably you can’t; and that is why you criticize Socialism. Now, then, as to competition, Socialism holds this language:

“It is no longer the question whether competition be good or bad. The question is whether competition is now possible.”

B.J.—Well, put it that way.

U.S.—If you put it that way, and then proceed intelligently to answer the question, Is competition still possible? then you will understand Socialism.

B.J.—Well, isn’t it any longer possible?

U.S.—No! The capital needed to run an excursion boat business is now so large that it virtually excludes competition. So long as a little money was all that was needed to get up a little sailing craft and take on passengers for an outing, there could be competition. But now, when steamboats are required; when connections with railroads are needed; when large expenditures are requisite for advertisements and the like, then only those can take a hand in the business who have the requisite capital. That requisite capital is found from day to day in fewer hands. Thus competition is made less and less possible, in some cases impossible.

B.J.—Hem!

U.S.—What are you coughing about?

B.J.—This thing looks differently from what I thought.

U.S.—When a capitalist tells you competition is the right thing because it produces a better service, he is humbugging you. He plays upon your ignorance. He tells you a one-quarter seeming truth, and suppresses the other three-quarters. It is the same as if one were to tell you flying is the right thing and did not give you wings to fly with, and

kept you from getting them.

B.J.—By thunder!

U.S.—Thus, that crowded boat, with its load of suffering, is, not “a floating refutation of Socialism,” it is a floating argument in its favor. Socialism holds that, seeing competition is rendered impossible by concentrated capital, by the privately owned tool of production which is so powerful as to render competition hard or impossible, and seeing that the result of that is popular suffering, afloat or ashore, that, therefore, the means of production and distribution should cease to be private property and be made national property owned and operated by, through and for the people.

B.J.—Shake hands, I’m with you!

U.S.—Meet me on election day at the hustings and cast your vote straight for the Socialist Labor party candidates, which means for the only political platform that can abolish the ills that result from {the} competition destroying concentration of capital.

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

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