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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {183}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I had just been thinking that I had caught the hang of Socialism at last, when yesterday the thread seemed to slip out of my head again, and now I find myself all out at sea once more.

UNCLE SAM—What happened to you yesterday?

B.J.—I heard a Socialist deliver an address.

U.S.—And that did it?

B.J.—Yes. I had come to believe that this Capitalist system was a curse.

U.S.—So it is.

B.J.—And that, being a curse, Socialism proposes to wipe it out.

U.S.—Correct again.

B.J.—But that Socialist speaker yesterday—

U.S.—Did he propose to keep up this Capitalist system?

B.J.—No; that's just the rub. He wanted to wipe it out notwithstanding that from his talk it appeared that he thought Capitalism had done and was doing a great work.

U.S.—So it has and is.

B.J. (clean out of patience)—And you would wipe out a thing that's doing good?

U.S.—Keep your shirt on, Fatty. Do you know what Capitalism means?

B.J. (testily)—What does it mean?

U.S.—Capitalism is a social system under which a larger and ever larger number of people are rendered miserable, and fewer and fewer people are gorged with wealth—



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—That’s a curse of a system; wipe it out!

U.S.—Keep cool. Under Capitalism, the man who has a good machine to work with makes it impossible for him who has not got such a good one to compete with him: he can produce so much more cheaply and plentifully that the other fellow is undersold and thrown into bankruptcy.

B.J.—That’s so. Wipe it out, I say.

U.S.—Just wait. The machinery of production becomes ever more perfect; that is to say, it produces ever more plentifully and cheaply, consequently, the machine that yesterday could knock out a weaker machine is itself knocked out to-day by a stronger one—

B.J.—Exactly. Such a system should be done away with.

U.S.—Its owner is in turn driven into poverty. And so right along. The more perfect machine or Capital keeps knocking out the less perfect one, and pauperizing more and more people.

B.J.—I know all that.

U.S.—Just keep cool, and let us go step by step. If the man with some machinery of production can’t stand up against the man with better machinery, what chance has the man who has no machinery whatever, no capital?

B.J.—Why, none whatever. That’s why I say this Capitalist system is an unmitigated curse, that we can’t wipe out any too soon.

U.S.—The men without any capital, machinery, are bound to sell themselves in wage slavery; that is to say, for the sake of a living, which they can’t get unless the capitalist allows them access to the machine, they will allow the capitalist to keep as much of their product as the capitalist needs to live in luxurious idleness, while they themselves are forced to drudge in poverty.

B.J.—Yes, yes, I know all that.

U.S.—And the more perfect the machinery of production becomes, it follows that more small capitalists will be pauperized. They will thus be thrown into the ranks of the propertiless, the proletariat, the working class—

B.J. (impatiently)—Yes.

U.S.—And the more workingmen there are, the lower will be their wages, the less

powerful will they be to resist Capitalist domination, the more miserable will they be—

B.J.—Now, what is the use of this long rigmarole. I know all that.

U.S.—Capitalism, consequently, increases the quantity of wealth, and it also increases the quantity of wealth that could be produced, and yet it increases the number of people who starve and deepens their misery. It makes human happiness possible, and yet increases human misery.

B.J. (losing all patience)—Will you kindly explain to me why you go through this long harrowing tale? I am well aware of all that, and that's why I am puzzled to hear you deny that capitalism is an unmitigated curse.

U.S.—I am just going to take that up. None of the several social systems that preceded capitalism did what capitalism does. Their institutions were such that poverty, and its inevitable result, slavery, were made bearable because these were not aggravated. Capitalism, on the contrary, **MAKES POVERTY AND ITS INEVITABLE RESULT, SLAVERY, UNBEARABLE**, because it aggravates them. Do you now see the merit of capitalism?

B.J. (with a far-off look)—Well, hem, can't say I do, quite.

U.S.—Human nature is inclined to put up with sufferings. It needs a tremendous impulse to move the human race to rebel against wrong. Capitalism gives that impulse. So long as poverty, or slavery, is bearable, there is no hope for its abolition. People will put up with it rather than make the effort to free themselves. But Capitalism does not allow the people to accommodate themselves to a condition of slavery. No sooner have those small property holders, whom it keeps in hot water, begun to accommodate themselves to their hard lot, when it wakes them up with a kick by some further concentration or improvement of the machinery of production that makes their lot harder, their existence more precarious.

B.J.—That's true, by Jericho!

U.S.—No sooner have these begun to re-accommodate themselves to their worse conditions and to lull themselves in the hope that "something will turn up" in their behalf, when a fresh kick, given by some further concentration and improvement of capital, reawakens them and tumbles them into the class of the wage earners.

B.J.—I agree; that's so.

U.S.—Then, as to the wage earners themselves, they try with might and main to keep up the system that holds them in slavery by setting up all sorts of barriers against capitalist encroachment. Imagining that they can protect themselves against Capitalism, they lie down confident. But up comes Mr. Capital, and with a mighty kick breaks down their barrier and shakes their confidence—

B.J.—Guess I begin to see.

U.S.—Presently their confidence returns in their worse condition, but up again turns Mr. Capital, and by some further improvement in his machinery of production gives them another kick by throwing more people into the labor market, more of these into the army of the unemployed, and thereby all into deeper misery. This process is kept up by the law that underlies Capitalism. As fast as the slaves begin to accustom and accommodate themselves to their deeper slavery, they get a rude kick that re-awakens them, and that by driving them down {to} deeper and deeper depths of slavery and misery brings home to them the necessity of freedom from Capitalist tyranny. Thus it is that, were it not for Capitalism, slavery would be eternal. But Capitalism prevents mankind from falling into a stupor of slavery. By kicking it down further and further, it forces mankind to the point where it MUST choose between FREEDOM and DEATH. Capitalism will not tolerate slavery. If man won't be FREE, and take possession of the freedom-imparting machinery of production, Capitalism compels him to DIE. Therein lies its merit. Hence Socialists bow before it with reverence.

B.J.—Well, well. I never would have thought it. It is just so!

U.S.—Inscrutable are the ways of Providence. Benigner social systems would, if perpetuated, have left slavery a permanent social condition. On the other hand, Capitalism, this hyena from hell, redolent with the stench of corruption, smeared from head to foot with crime, shocking in its vulgarity, cruel in its every breath—this monster is the HANDMAID OF FREEDOM.

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