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EDITORIAL

SHOT NO. 3.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE Louisville, Ky., *Journal of Labor*, well known as an organ of the capitalist class, has gathered a long string of questions which it heads “Pertinent Questions for Socialists to Answer.” It is not our habit to answer the dog that barks from behind a fence. For the canine we keep the toes of our shoes, should he get too near. But even if he remains at a distance, if he is too insolent, we see to—what? To him? No! To his master. And so now, especially seeing that his master—the piebald combination that feeds and eggs him on—has been stupid enough to expose himself through these questions as a target that it will be fun to riddle with shot. So now and at it, shot after shot—at the master. Shots Nos. 1 and 2 having been previously fired, now for shot No. 3.

Another of the questions is this:

“How does Socialism propose to get possession of the vast property, the railroads, telegraphs, land, mills, machinery, etc.—**WILL THEY BE BOUGHT OR CONFISCATED?**”

And this question dove-tails into this other:

“Is it not true that the Socialist philosophy and practice are distinctly irreligious and un-American?”

Both points have been again and again covered, separately and jointly. The below “Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan” dialogue which has appeared before in these columns disposes of both points jointly. Here it is:

BROTHER JONATHAN—To me it is very clear that the Socialist programme will go to smash against the moral, the religious and the law-abiding sense of the American people.

UNCLE SAM—Inasmuch as to which?

B.J.—Inasmuch as the moral, the religious and the law-abiding sense of the American people will revolt against the idea of confiscation.

U.S.—Confiscation? For instance?

B.J.—The Socialists will, for instance, tell you point blank that they mean to appropriate the railroads without indemnifying their owners.

U.S.—Supposing they did!

B.J.—That is a confiscation, and confiscation is an immoral, an irreligious and an un-law-abiding act, and no moral, religious and law-abiding people like the American would countenance such a thing.

U.S. (after a pause)—What is the name of the Austrian village in which you were born?

B.J. (indignant)—Austrian village! I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and you know it!

U.S.—Oh, I mean your father, in what Italian village was he born?

B.J.—My father was born in Boston, sir, near to Boston Common.

U.S.—Oho! Well then it was your mother. What heathen village does she hail from?

B.J. (very indignant)—Do you call Lynn a “heathen or an un-American village”? You know very well she was born in Lynn.

U.S. (affecting embarrassment)—Well, I mean your father’s mother or your mother’s father. In what foreign and unchristian village were they born?

B.J. (very haughtily)—I want you to understand that not only was I born here and my parents, too, but all my four grand-parents, and all their grand-parents were born in this country; we are of pure Mayflower, law-abiding, religious extraction, and New England stock.

U.S.—Then you all descend from the neighborhood of where Bunker Hill Monument now stands?

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—Then you feel very proud about the American Revolution, do you not?

B.J.—Don’t YOU?

U.S.—I do, most assuredly; but remember that I am a Socialist, one of those people you call “irreligious” and “un-law-abiding.” And do you think our ancestors acted irreligiously or un-law-abidingly on that occasion?

B.J.—Certainly not! Do YOU?

U.S.—Of course not. But will you oblige me by imparting to me a certain information after which my heart now yearns?

B.J.—With pleasure.

U.S.—How much indemnity did our ancestors pay King George when they took the colonies away from him?

B.J.—Indemnity?!?

U.S.—Yes, my sweet preacher of sweet “religiousness” and “law-abidingness,”—“indemnity.”

B.J.—You must be crazy!

U.S.—Were not our ancestors “religious” and “law-abiding”?

B.J.—Certainly.

U.S.—Did not King George own these colonies?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And were they not yanked away from him?

B.J.—Certainly! And wasn't that right?

U.S.—You see, I am a Socialist, you are a perambulating lump of anti-Socialism, which is to say of “religiousness” and “law-abidingness.” Tell me how much indemnity our ancestors paid King George for having yanked his property from him? According to you, for a people to take a thing without giving the owner indemnity is “irreligious” and “un-law-abiding.” King George owned the colonies; they were taken from him; and our ancestors who did the taking were, as you declare, “religious” and “law-abiding.” It follows that they must have indemnified him.

B.J. remains stupefied.

U.S.—Hullo, there! The indemnity!

B.J. fidgets about.

U.S.—You don't seem to hear (yelling in his ear). The indemnity! The indemnity! How much indemnity did King George get?

B.J. (exasperated)—None! Hang you, none!

U.S.—And yet our ancestors were religious and law-abiding?

B.J.—Stop bantering me. Tell me how that is. I don't quite understand it. Was it irreligious and un-law-abiding on the part of our ancestors not to indemnify King George?

U.S.—No; it was right. If they had, it would have been stupid and criminal. You don't indemnify the highway robber for the stolen goods you take back from him, do you?

B.J.—Nixy!

U.S.—Neither does a nation. The question is simply this: Does the American people need the railroads to live? If they do, the railroads can be and must be appropriated, just the same as the colonies were without indemnity. Moreover, such appropriation is eminently just. The present owners of the railroads and of all other machinery and land needed by the people never produced them. The land is nature's gift, the machinery is the product of the brain and manual labor of the working class, stolen from them by the capitalist class. To take this property is but to restore it to its owners. The same common sense—and morality is always on the side of common sense—that caused our ancestors to yank the colonies out of the clutches of the British Crown without indemnity, and that caused all the ministers, after the thing was done, to bless the act of religiousness and law-abidingness, will guide our people to vote themselves into power and to legislate the land and the capital back into their own hands. The deep-dyed irreligiousness and un-law-abidingness lies on the side of the thieves who stole the people's heritage and are seeking to keep it, and on the side of

those who seek to uphold the plunderers.¹

And there goes the third shot through the poodle's master.

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

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¹ [This is a modified version of the original from *The People*, July 19, 1896.]