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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {32}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I think I see light.

UNCLE SAM—What have you been doing?

B.J.—I have been reading up on Protection and Free Trade.

U.S.—And you see light?

B.J.—Guess I do!

U.S.—In what direction?

B.J.—Protection.

U.S.—You don't say so!

B.J.—Yes!

U.S.—How do you make that out?

B.J.—You must admit that there is many an industry, glassware for instance, where a 50 per cent. reduction of the tariff would compel the manufacturer either to reduce the wages of his employes in order that he may compete with the importer, or to close his plant and become an importer himself, in which case all his employes would be thrown on the streets.

U.S.—Granted.

B.J.—Then you agree with me, that Protection is the thing!

U.S.—Not much!

B.J.—Well, well! You grant that under free trade the wages would be reduced; or that the employes in certain industries might be thrown on the streets and forced to look for other jobs at equally reduced wages, and yet you calmly look me in the face and say "Not much!" that Protection is the thing?

U.S.—That is just what I did, and just what I said.

B.J.—Well, that takes my time!



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—If a brick-bat won't feed you, does it follow that a hickory club would?

B.J.—Of course not!

U.S.—Just so with free trade and protection. If free trade won't do the workers any good, it don't follow that protection will.

B.J.—Why not?

U.S.—What are you after?

B.J.—The welfare of the workers. I want to see them have large earnings so that they may be free men, with happy wives and laughing children.

U.S.—Well said. Now, then, every day a new or a perfected machine is brought into operation. Take this very glass industry, for an instance. Within the last few weeks three machines were there introduced: the Marsh machine, that will make thin and thick plate glass with *practically unskilled* labor; the Owens lehr apparatus that will dispense with carrying-in hands; and the “Tumbler Smoother” that will do the work of three men. With less and less skill needed from the workers and more and more of them thrown out of work as the effect of the introduction and perfection of machinery, do you imagine the earnings of the workers will go up; do you imagine they will gain in freedom; do you imagine their wives will grow happier; do you imagine their children will be more frolicsome?

B.J.—I can't say I do!

U.S.—Right you are. The introduction and perfection of machinery will steadily impoverish the working class.

B.J.—I grant that.

U.S.—Now just answer me this one question: “What will a protective tariff do towards keeping the machine away, or preventing its harmful effects upon the workers?”

B.J.—Well . . . hem . . . nothing, that I can see!

U.S.—Nor I either.

B.J.—Then Free Trade is after all the thing?

U.S.—Hoopla! If a tariff-wall that should reach the moon would not keep off the machine, nor prevent its harmful effects upon the workers, would the total absence of a tariff do it?

B.J.—I can't see how it would.

U.S.—Nor I either.

B.J.—This is enough to drive a man crazy. Protection is no good and Free Trade is no good. And there you stand as cool as a cucumber. What are we to do? Are we to lay ourselves down and die? Are we to become slaves? Is the day of judgment at hand and mankind about to go down in a wail of despair?

U.S.—I don't know about the day of Judgment; but I do know this{,} that if you and the rest of our people don't stop fooling p.d.q. this country will be turned back into a howling wilderness.

B.J.—What shall we do? Stop the machine? Smash it? Burn it? Throw it out?

U.S.—Not much! Without the machine we would be deprived of the capacity for freedom from arduous toil; the existence of the machine makes possible that freedom. No; we must not destroy the machine, but we must destroy the manner in which it is worked. Therein lies the evil.

B.J.—Go on; I gather hope.

U.S.—The reason why every new or perfected machine is hard on the working class is that it is owned by private individuals who run it for their private profit, and it is to their profit to squeeze the workers. The tariff question does not touch upon this. The machinery and the land needed by the people for production must be owned by all the people; they must build the Socialist or Co-operative Commonwealth. Then and not till then will the earnings of the workers jump up, their wives radiate in happiness and children's laughter fill the air.

B.J.—Then all this talk about tariff or no tariff is the merest deception on the working class.

U.S.—Just so! It amounts to telling the workers that they choose the kind of coffin they would like to be buried in. Under this capitalist system, the working class is sucked dry and then buried, anyhow!

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

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