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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {378}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM.—Have you got that clipping from James Logan of the *North American Review* with you?

BROTHER JONATHAN.—Yes; why?

U.S.—I want you to read it again for me to get a third crack at it.

B.J. (reads):

“There must always be competition. To stamp it out, were such a thing possible, would mean stagnation and death. It would mean that there was to be no further progress. If there were to be no prizes obtained, men would cease to put forth the effort which makes for progress and growth. If there were no larger prizes ahead for a young man than simply a day laborer’s wages, the likelihood is that a good many would not put forth the effort to become anything more than a day laborer. We need competition if we would grow, but it ought to be honest and intelligent competition. Men need the stimulus of competition to do their best.”



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

What point are you going to make now?

U.S.—The gist of that tirade is that human nature is such that, without stimulus to exert oneself, people would stagnate.

B.J.—Yes; that’s the gist of it. Isn’t that right?

U.S.—I shall grant that.

B.J.—Then there is some sense in this clipping!

U.S.—Wait! And what is implied in the tirade is that the present, the Capitalist Social System, furnishes the needed stimulus.

B.J.—Yes; that's implied. Isn't that right?

U.S.—No! I shall show you that the Capitalist Social System, so far from providing a stimulus for the working class to exert itself, does the reverse, stamps out the stimulus, utterly disheartens the workers, and, if anything, stimulates them to exert themselves as little as possible.

B.J.—That would be tough!

U.S.—When does the workingman get work?

B.J.—When the capitalist has orders to fill.

U.S.—And when he has none?

B.J.—Then the workingman has no work.

U.S.—And starves?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is it, then, to the interest of the workingman to exert himself so as to produce as much as possible in a given time?

B.J.—No!! It is to his interest to produce as little as possible.

U.S. (looking incredulous)—Why, how do you make that out?

B.J.—Simple enough. The more he exerts himself, all the more he produces; the more he produces, all the sooner is the order filled; the sooner the order is filled, all the sooner is he thrown out of work; and—

U.S.—Then starves?

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—Now, tell me, if you can, where the stimulus, said to be given him by capitalism, comes in.

B.J.—Say! You ARE right. The divvil a stimulus there!

U.S.—And the stimulus to the workingman is the wrong way; it is to slack up and not to exert himself, eh?

B.J.—Just so!

U.S.—Under Socialism, the more effort the workers put forth, all the quicker is the requisite wealth produced; the quicker the requisite wealth is produced—

B.J.—All the sooner can the workers enjoy it in leisure—

U.S.—In intellectual and physical pleasures, eh? In the company of their wives and children, eh?

B.J. (swaying from one side to another)—This Logan is a confounded liar!

U.S.—Does capitalism promote one's exerting himself?

B.J.—Not a bit! It is Socialism that would do that. That's why I call the fellow a liar.

U.S.—It is not in this one particular only that Capitalism acts as a deadener of noble effort. It is in all others. Workingmen frequently perceive methods of improving work. If they put their invention into practice, they only throw themselves out of work all the quicker. If they get a patent out for it, and expect in that way to profit by their genius and exertion, the capitalist steals their patent, and the capitalist courts give judgment against the worker on the ground that it "would be wrong to place the employer at the mercy of his employee," as they actually said in the Dempsey case. And so on. Capitalism is a deadener of all stimulus, it is a deadener of all efforts for good.

Next week I'll show you some other beauty-spots in that clipping. Keep it.

B.J.—I will.

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