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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {266}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—Where are you going in such a hurry?

BROTHER JONATHAN—I'm a picket; our shop is on strike; I have to do picket duty.

U.S.—And what is all the trouble about?

B.J.—Our wages have been lowered.

U.S.—Any ground given for that?

B.J.—It is just the “ground given” that makes us hot in the collar. What do you imagine that blasted employer has the cheek of giving as the “ground” for the cut-down?

U.S.—Well, what is that ground?

B.J.—That there is now a larger supply of labor than before, and he can get labor cheaper than what he pays us.

U.S.—You don't suppose I love employers, do you?

B.J.—I know you don't.

U.S.—You don't suppose I am anxious to take their part, do you?

B.J.—I know you aren't; you have fought them too long for that.

U.S.—As you know me well enough for that I shall be all the freer to tell you, that it is not your employer that has “cheek,” but YOU.

B.J.—Do you mean to say that we should have our wages reduced?

U.S.—Indeed, not!

B.J.—Did you not always claim that the capitalist robs us workers of three-quarters of what we produce?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—That’s just what I have always claimed, and proved.

B.J. (very angry)—Then, how on earth can you say we are “cheeky” for striking against a reduction?

U.S.—I’ll tell you. What was the price of wheat some fourteen months ago?

B.J.—I think, 30 cents a bushel.

U.S.—Yes. And what is it now?

B.J.—Something like a dollar.

U.S.—Correct. When it was 30 cents a bushel could the farmer get a dollar for it?

B.J.—No.

U.S.—But he can now?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Why now, and not then?

B.J.—Why, you know. A year ago the supply of wheat was plentiful, it was away above the demand; since then, owing to the failures of the crops on large foreign fields, the supply has gone down, it is now away below the demand. That’s the “Why.”

U.S.—Now, suppose a bushel of wheat, at the time it was at 30 cents, to have “struck” against being sold so low. Suppose, when a purchaser offered 30 cents for it, it had said: “You have a cheek, to think you could get me so cheap!”

B.J.—The bushel would have been supremely ridiculous.

U.S.—Why?

B.J. (sententiously)—It is a merchandise; and the price of merchandise is governed by the relation there is between the supply of and the demand for it. The lower the supply and the higher the demand, the higher the price; the higher the supply and the lower the demand, the lower the price. That’s the “Why.”

U.S.—Jonathan, you are almost fit to be a professor of political economy.

B.J.—But we, workingmen, are not merchandise, see?

U.S.—You now confirm my belief that you are fit for a professorship. You have got hold of just enough truth and have not let go of such vast areas of nonsense, as to qualify you for a seat in any of our capitalist universities. The workingman IS a merchandise under this capitalist system. That is just one of the leading features of the system. Our wages range like the price of any other merchandise. Machinery, owned as private

property by the capitalist, who steals it from us, displaces labor; that renders the supply of labor ever larger than the demand; and that lowers, must steadily lower, our wages.

B.J.—Then we might as well commit suicide and be done with it.

U.S.—That certainly would be much more sensible than to go on as you do now. Now you vote with the Democrats one year, with the Republicans an other, which means that you vote regularly every year for the capitalist system, for the system that lowers you to the level of a merchandise. By upholding that system you fetter yourself down to the laws that govern the price of merchandise and that are bound to lower your price steadily. When in one breath you uphold capitalism, and in another you try to resist it you act like a simpleton. Now, stop fooling; turn Socialist; vote the Socialist ticket straight: it demands the overthrow of the system that makes you a merchandise; then, indeed, you would strike to a purpose.

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

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