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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {140}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—What's that you got in your pocket that makes it bulge? Apples?

BROTHER JONATHAN—No, I almost wish it were apples. I'm hungry enough to eat some.

U.S.—Well, what is it?

B.J.—You will wonder when I tell you it is money—

U.S.—I would certainly wonder!

B.J.—And you will wonder all the more how little it is.

U.S.—Little, and all that bunch?

B.J.—It is \$15 in quarters, dimes and nickels. I have been saving them up for the last six months. I am now going to the savings bank to deposit them.

U.S.—Help! Fire! Help!

B.J. (clasps his money and looks about in alarm)—Where is the fire?

U.S.—Right here; you are on fire; at least there must be heat enough in your head, judging by your insanity, to set you on fire and burn you up as a crisp.

B.J. looks at U.S. in blank amazement.

U.S.—Jonathan, you must be raving mad!

B.J.—Why?

U.S.—Because you have been pinching yourself; depriving yourself of the necessities of life; sapping your health by privation; drying up your marrow and committing slow suicide by this "saving"; and then, not satisfied with that, you propose to bestow the net product of your starvation in a way that will knock out of



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

your hands the little wages you now get, and leave you utterly stranded, kill you right out. Is not a man, who does that, burning up with a high fever?

B.J.—I'll eat my head if I understand you.

U.S.—You will presently.

B.J.—Do; explain yourself!

U.S.—You said just now that you were hungry.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Is not to deprive yourself of food equal to undermining your health?

B.J.—Yes, but—

U.S.—Is this the first time you have felt hungry during these last six months?

B.J.—No, but—

U.S.—All this time you were underfeeding yourself, and laying away a few pennies?

B.J.—Yes, but—

U.S.—Do you call that taking care of yourself?

B.J.—No, but—

U.S.—Did you not need thin clothing in summer, and did you not deprive yourself of that, and, by so much, hurt yourself?

B.J.—Yes, but—

U.S.—And now that the winter is on, have you provided yourself with clothing sufficiently warm?

B.J.—No, but—

U.S.—The upshot of all your “yes, buts” and “no, buts” is this: For the sake of saving up a few dollars you have underfed and underclothed yourself and family; underfeeding and underclothing is harmful to health; consequently, you have been deliberately inviting the doctor, the druggist, the undertaker into your house. And that is insanity enough for one man.

B.J.—Yes, but—

U.S.—What is your “but”?

B.J.—It is this: You are right, righter than I at first could imagine, that this saving is at the expense of our very life blood; it is not saving on superfluities, it is saving out of our bone and marrow; it is slow suicide and all that (wiping a tear from his eye) committed upon ourselves and our little ones. But—here is my

“but”—is not slow suicide preferable to rapid death? By slow suicide you give life a chance; something may turn up to improve things; and if it does turn up then there is always life as a groundwork to start on with—

U.S.—Granted.

B.J.—If, however, we lay ourselves open to rapid death, then no chance is given to life even if a favorable turn of affairs lies in the future.

U.S.—Granted; what of it?

B.J.—Now, then; we are all exposed at a moment’s notice to be thrown out of work. Don’t you see that if we have not laid up a little saving, even if it be at the expense of health, we would starve outright then and there? That’s why this slow-suicidal saving is so necessary.

U.S.—Certainly, old boy, and it is exactly by reason of the danger there is of our being thrown out of work that it is topping insanity with insanity to first pinch yourself and then place your “pinchings” in the hands of the capitalist to give him increased opportunities to throw you out of work.

B.J.—I am at a loss to understand you.

U.S.—Does not the capitalist want to make ever larger profits?

B.J.—He does.

U.S.—Don’t his profits all come from the product of the workers?

B.J.—Entirely.

U.S.—Does it not follow that the less he gives out in wages, the larger are his profits?

B.J.—Certainly.

U.S.—And if he has 100 employees, and he can produce as much with 75, would not the throwing away of 25 save him so much wages and thereby increase his profits proportionally?

B.J.—Most assuredly.

U.S.—Is it not mainly by the introduction of machinery that the capitalist is thus enabled to reduce his pay-roll?

B.J.—It is mainly that way.

U.S.—Must he not purchase the machine if he wants to reduce the number of his hands?

B.J.—Guess so.

U.S.—Now then, listen, turn all ears: The savings banks are all owned by big capitalists; there is hardly a manufacturing town without the bosses setting up a savings bank “for their employees.” The money these deposit there is used by the capitalists to purchase machinery that displaces workers!

B.J. (jumping in the air)—Thunder and lightning!

U.S.—Guess I don’t need to explain much more. The savings you have pinched yourself of are, if you deposit them in one of those banks, used to-morrow by your boss to fetch into the shop a machine that will knock you out of work. What you do, then, amounts to this: Kill yourself by inches through saving and then carry your savings to the boss so that he may invest in machinery that will throw you on the street.

B.J. smites himself in the head.

U.S.—If you want to lay up something you already sufficiently hurt yourself; but if you feel that way, bury it under ground; don’t let your savings be the means to knock you clean out of bread.

B.J. pulls out his money and looks it over.

U.S.—My advice to you is to do as I do. We have so little that we need it all. Let us put it into our marrows, into the marrows of our wives and children; then we will be all the more vigorous to contend with the exploiter and overthrow him, and resume possession of our own.

B.J.—I shall straightways get some warm underclothing for Polly, my wife, for myself and the boys and girls—as far as this will go. Uncle Sam, this capitalist system is a wonderful pea and thimble game. No wonder we workers are caught napping and made to cut our own throats.

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