



DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {145}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Listen. You Socialists are wont to call all capitalists parasites upon labor?

UNCLE SAM—We are.

B.J.—But you are wrong, dead wrong.

U.S.—Why so?

B.J.—Do not the capitalists take their risks? For instance, I know a capitalist, the larger part of whose workmen are not able to produce what is generally expected of them. Moreover, his capital is not large enough to fight the union of his employees, whereas the other capitalists in his trade can fight it successfully, having more money at their disposal. His workmen will work shorter hours, and their average output is below that of the entire trade. Is not he in danger of losing his invested capital? How can you call him a parasite?

U.S.—Yes. In the first place, thieves and desperadoes also run “risks.” Will you say that, therefore, they are not parasites?

B.J.—If you can knock me out in the “second place” as completely as you knocked me out with your “in the first place”—

U.S.—There wouldn’t be left a grease spot of your theory, eh?

B.J.—None.

U.S.—So, here goes “in the second place.” In the second place, thieves and desperadoes inflict less harm upon society than your capitalist, though the consequences of the manipulations of the latter are by far the worst.

B.J.—There you are wrong.



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U.S.—Let's see. His capital is small, and therefore let us suppose the best in his favor; let us suppose he saved it {out} of his former earnings. He invested his capital with the intention of making a profit thereon, by employing men to do the work for him. He must, in order to compete successfully, cut off from the products of their labor as much as he possibly can. He goes into the market for labor as he goes for machinery, which, in turn, is nothing else but crystallized human labor power. The market price of both is determined by the law of supply and demand. The workingman, unlike the capitalist, expects and gets pay only for what he produces; the capitalist is constantly engaged in killing him, by paying starvation wages, cutting off as much of surplus value as circumstances will permit. Do you believe that Shakespeare's Shylock was right when he said: "Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that; you take my house when you do take the prop that does sustain my house; you take my life, when you do take the means whereby I live."¹

B.J.—He was right.

U.S.—And was Shylock the less a "Shylock" because he was right in these facts?

B.J. (begins to look as if he was losing ground)—No, he was and remained a "Shylock."

U.S.—Now, then, to the extent that the capitalist cuts off the means whereby his workmen live, he cuts off their lives. It is a thousand times more cruel to take a man's life gradually, by way of starvation, than it is to kill him outright. A thief will rob you once or twice in your life; a murderer can take your life but once; the capitalist robs and starves his employees and their families as long as they remain wage slaves; death is the only salvation for the poor, miserable wretches.

B.J. looks meditative.

U.S.—Knocked out again or not?

B.J.—Yes, knocked out clean. Henceforth I shall work for the party of the "Uplifted Arm and Hammer," its principles are sound as an apple.

U.S.—And there are no flies on it either.

C.P.²

¹ [William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*.]

² [The initials appear to credit another author, believed to be Carl Pankopf.]

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

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