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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {243}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I don't know what I am going to do!

UNCLE SAM—In bad luck again?

B.J.—I should say so! Just think of it! The wages in my shop are to be reduced once more.

U.S.—That's pretty tough. And what are you going to do about it?

B.J.—There is nothing to be done about it. Times are hard, the manufacturer can't compete with his competitors, and of course he must reduce expenses.

U.S.—Do you know what struck me while you were just speaking? I'll tell you. It struck me that you should formulate the reason for your cut-down this wise: "I, and all others like me, are sheep for the capitalist to shear; we have been sheared pretty close to the skin; but there being still some little wool left and the capitalist wants it, we shall meekly bow down and let him; although in the shearing some of our skin may go and we shall bleed; but the capitalist needs that to keep warm, and he must have it."

B.J.—That's not what I said!

U.S.—It is what your words amounted to. If you did not feel like a helpless, ignorant sheep before the capitalist you would not talk about the way the competitors of your employer drive him; and, shrugging your shoulders, admit he must "reduce expenses."

B.J.—Can he compete if he sells dearer than his competitors?

U.S.—No.

B.J.—To compete with them he must sell as cheap as they.



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U.S.—Granted.

B.J.—What else is there for him to do but reduce expenses?

U.S.—REDUCE PROFITS.

B.J.—What?

U.S.—REDUCE PROFITS.

B.J.—I don't catch on.

U.S.—Your employer formerly sold a bale of goods for \$100, and it cost him \$90—

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—On that bale he made \$10.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—First of all, what do these \$10 represent?

B.J.—They are the employer's profits.

U.S.—Who produced that?

B.J.—Who? Why, hem; who?

U.S.—Yes, who? Your very doubt shows how much of a sheep you are. Who produced it, why, YOU, and he stole it, stole it from you.

B.J. looks amazed.

U.S.—Now, let's proceed. The \$10 your employer made on the bale of goods that he formerly sold for \$100 is wool clipped from you, is wealth produced by you, and kept by him. Now, his competitors manage somehow or other to produce such a bale of goods at the expense of \$80, and they offer it for sale at \$90, thereby making \$10 as before—

B.J.—I think you understand the situation—

U.S.—Just wait. Your employer cannot sell at \$100 as before—

B.J.—That's it—

U.S.—No one will buy from him for \$100 if the stuff can be got for \$90—

B.J.—You begin to understand me—

U.S.—Your employer will have to reduce his price to \$90—

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—But if his expenses are \$90—

B.J.—He can't compete—

U.S.—If his expenses are \$90, you sheep, he can't MAKE PROFITS. That's the

point.

B.J.—What point?

U.S.—The point I am trying to make you understand. In order to make profits he must “reduce expenses.” But is it at all necessary for you to submit to being sheared? Tell me. Do you imagine that a purchaser would refuse to pay \$90 for a bale of goods if it cost that much to produce it, but would gladly pay \$90 if it cost only \$80?

B.J.—Why, no!

U.S.—Then the whole question solves {resolves?} itself into this: If the employer sells for \$90, he will make profits or he will not.

He will make no profits if he expends \$90 in production.

He will make \$10 profits if he expends only \$80 in production.

To make \$10 profits he must reduce your wages.

But why reduce your wages and make profits instead of reducing the quantity of accumulated profits that he has stolen from you? Answer.

B.J.—But he won't do that.

U.S.—And because he will not pare off from his huge stealings, therefore you must allow him to pare of some more slices from the little pittance that is left you?

B.J.—But what is there for me to do?

U.S.—There is this: To understand that in the competitive warfare of capitalists, the workingman is the one from whom more and more is taken. The workingman is placed in the alternative of either submitting to be skinned more and more, or of having the capitalist shell out more and more. The capitalist won't shell out. While the capitalist system is in power he is going to do the skinning. To keep up the capitalist system is to keep up the skinning system. Consequently you should seek to overthrow this system instead of keeping it up and bending before its dread effect. If you don't realize that the increasing profit on which the capitalist class lives is wealth stolen from you, you will bend and uphold the capitalist system, and, like sheep, you will consider it inevitable that {you} should fare off worse and worse; if you do understand, though, that the working class produces all wealth, and that the capitalist class steals more and more of that, thanks to the capitalist system, then you will not consider it necessary that the employer should reduce expenses, but you will bend all your efforts to overthrow the

capitalist system.

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

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