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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {238}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I want some information from you.

UNCLE SAM—What about?

B.J.—I want to know for our union what the law is upon the liability of employers for injuries done to their workmen by improper scaffolding. Have you the law books here?

U.S.—We don't need law books for that.

B.J.—Isn't there a law about it?

U.S.—I thought you wanted to know how the law stands.

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—Now my man, under this capitalist system, and all other systems that stand upon class distinctions, if you want to know how a law stands, the law itself is the last thing you should consult.

B.J.—What, then, should I consult?

U.S.—The make-up of the Court.

B.J.—I don't catch on.

U.S.—If you want me to tell you how a law stands, tell me, first of all, what economic class is vested with the power to interpret and enforce the law. I shall then be able to tell you how that law stands.

B.J.—I'm still less able to comprehend you.

U.S.—Don't you remember that there "is a law" whereby employees on railroads shall not be worked more than 10 hours a day?

B.J.—Yes.



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U.S.—And don't you remember what happened when the Buffalo switchmen had struck to enforce that law?

B.J.—The Governor sent the whole militia of the State to down the men and help the bosses break the law.

U.S.—Accordingly, to know at that time “how the law stood,” it was of no use to read the law; the important thing was to know what class had the interpretation and enforcement of the law in its keeping.

B.J.—That has nothing to do with “classes.” The Governor did what he did because he was a scampish Democrat. Flower did that.

U.S.—Indeed? Was that the reason? Then you don't remember what happened when the Brooklyn trolley-men struck to enforce the same law—

B.J.—I do; the militia was also let loose upon them.

U.S.—And who was Governor then? Was it the same or some other “scampish Democrat”?

B.J. (after reflecting a while)—No; that's so, by Jericho! It was a Republican Governor; 'twas Morton that time.

U.S.—“Scampish Democrat” or “Saintly Republican,” it is all one, eh?

B.J.—Seems so.

U.S.—Do you see? If the same result is seen under different conditions, it follows that the “different conditions” must have something essential common to both. Democrat and Republican did the same thing. Consequently, there must be something common to both. That essential thing that is common to both is their class interests. Democrats and Republicans represent the capitalist class interests. Consequently they will interpret the laws through the spectacles of those interests, and enforce them accordingly. That's why I ask to know what economic class it is that has the power to interpret the law that you ask about. But you don't need to tell me. I know it. Thanks to the working class' ballot, the capitalist class has the power to interpret the law. That law will be interpreted against you so long as you vote into power the capitalist platform. The day you vote into power the working class or Socialist platform, that day, and not before, you will have your rights secured.

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

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