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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {77}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I hope that after all these troubles people will act sensibly.

UNCLE SAM—Amen.

B.J.—This is just the time to enforce the idea of arbitration.

U.S.—What?

B.J.—I mean compulsory arbitration.

U.S.—Worse yet.

B.J.—Would you have employers and employes fall together by the ears eternally and keep the whole country in commotion?

U.S.—Not I.

B.J.—Why, then, not arbitrate?

U.S.—Because there is nothing to arbitrate; and if there were, arbitration would be no good.

B.J. (impatiently)—Do you mean to side with Wickes and Pullman?

U.S.—Not I.

B.J.—Are they not grasping, grinding reprobates?

U.S.—Most assuredly.

B.J.—Then there is something to arbitrate.

U.S.—Who produces all wealth?

B.J.—Labor.

U.S.—Has either Pullman or Wickes done a stroke of useful work for the last eleven years, at least?



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B.J.—Not a stroke.

U.S.—And yet millions upon millions are in their possession?

B.J.—Wrongfully, for that reason we should have arbitration.

U.S.—Are they entitled to anything?

B.J.—To not a thing.

U.S.—Who is entitled to it all?

B.J.—Why, the workers, of course.

U.S.—And yet you think there is something to arbitrate? Is there anything to arbitrate between a footpad and the robbed?

B.J.—N-o.

U.S.—To offer arbitration is to condone crime. There is either justice in robbery or there is none. Either an employer may skin his workers all he can, or skinning must be stopped altogether. There is no middle way.

B.J.—Granted; but even so, would not arbitration relieve the situation some?

U.S.—Not a bit.

B.J.—Would it not prevent excessive skinning?

U.S.—Not a particle.

B.J.—Suppose the Board of Arbitrators finds that a company is doing good business, and that the reason it gives for reducing wages is false—

U.S.—What then?

B.J.—Then—

U.S.—Yes, then—

B.J.—(Hesitates long.)

U.S.—You seem to have struck a snag.

B.J.—Then the board would give its decision and condemn the company—

U.S.—And the company might order the decision framed over the motto: “Words, words, words.”

B.J.—Would it mean nothing else?

U.S.—Nothing else. The board could not compel the company to operate its plant. If the company wanted, it could shut down and starve its workers into submission; and then they would come back and sue for work, and the company would

triumph—condemnation by the board or no condemnation.

B.J.—Is there no way of enforcing the decision of the board?

U.S.—None whatever against the company or capitalist; possibly they might enforce a decision against the workers; the Government has the military and courts; these might be used to aggravate the situation of the toiler, but they will not be used against the employer, and could not be used without upsetting the system of private property in the means of production.

B.J.—Then upset the system!

U.S.—That is the only thing to do.

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

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