

DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {377}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Are you ready to take up again that passage by James Logan from the *North American Review*?

UNCLE SAM—Quite so.

B.J.—Go ahead.

U.S.—You read it once more.

B.J. (unfolds the clipping and reads):

“There must always be competition. To stamp it out, were such a thing possible, would mean stagnation and death. It would mean that there was to be no further progress. If there were to be no prizes obtained, men would cease to put forth the effort which makes for progress and growth. If there were no larger prizes ahead for a young man than simply a day laborer’s wages, the likelihood is that a good many would not put forth the effort to become anything more than a day laborer. We need competition if we would grow, but it ought to be honest and intelligent competition. Men need the stimulus of competition to do their best.”



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—Ah, “prizes!” There it says that without prizes ahead for a young man he would not put forth—

B.J.—Now that does sound sensible. Suppose you and I were to set our boys to run a race. They are spirited boys. But for all that, don’t you imagine a prize ahead would prick them to put forth their best efforts?

U.S.—Would you get up a revolver as the “prize” and say to the winner: “You shall have this revolver to keep the loser in slavery by threatening his life?”

B.J.—Why, no; I wouldn’t call that a “prize.”

U.S.—No more would I; nor does the Socialist; nor would any sensible or humane man. But that is the sort of thing that the capitalist class calls a “prize.”

B.J.—A revolver to shoot others down!

U.S.—The “prize” in capitalism is, what?

B.J.—Lots of money.

U.S.—For the purpose of the winner working with it?

B.J. scratches his head.

U.S.—Is it not for the purpose of the winner stopping to work?

B.J.—Oh, yes.

U.S.—And make others work for him?

B.J. scratches his head again.

U.S.—That’s the size of it. The thing capitalism calls a “prize” is a reward that can be enjoyed only, like a pistol is enjoyed, at the cost of some one else.

B.J.—How! how!!

U.S.—Capital is a “prize” to its winner only when it enables him to accomplish the double purpose of rendering impossible the competition of people (the middle class) who have some capital but not enough, of rendering impossible the acquisition of it by other people (the working class). Capital thereby ruins the former, throws them into the ranks of the latter, and thus forces the workingman to sell himself in wage slavery to the fellow who won the “prize.”

B.J.—The devil, you say!

U.S.—The capitalist Social System, accordingly, is a social system where the reward or “prize” of the winner consists in a power, not for good, but for evil. It is a power to tyrannize; it is not a power to elevate—

B.J.—But—

U.S.—Does the “prize” held by any monopolist you know of do ought but spread ruin?

B.J.—I must say that’s all it does.

U.S.—Is the existence of such a “prize” ahead a promoter of good efforts?

B.J.—I’ll be hanged if it is.

U.S.—That the “prize” in capitalism is what it is rather damns the system, and is a reason to put an end to that sort of a “prize.” Man needs no such spur to exert

himself. Capitalism brutalizes man by forcing him to compete for such a “prize.”

B.J.—Surely such a thing can’t be called a “prize.”

U.S.—John Stuart Mill pointed out well what that “prize” amounted to by describing its obverse. Said he: “To give a prize to the winner in a race may be all right; but to decree that the loser shall be whipped to death is all wrong.” The “prize” in capitalism is the power on the part of the winner to whip society till it bleeds.

B.J. starts to tear up the clipping of James Logan.

U.S.—What are you doing?

B.J.—Tearing this worthless clipping to pieces.

U.S.—Don’t! I have some more falls to take out of it.

B.J.—What, more? Is there anything left of it?

U.S.—Why, I have not begun yet.

B.J. carefully folds up the clipping for next week.

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