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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {165}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—Look at the holy show the capitalist parties are making of themselves. Can any decent man stay with them and refrain from joining the labor party?

BROTHER JONATHAN—That the capitalist parties are in a bad plight no intelligent man will dispute. So far I agree with you. But I can't follow you when you throw your lot among the workingmen. The capitalist class may be, no doubt is, bad enough; but the workingmen are worse yet.

U.S.—Worse?

B.J.—Certainly. They are despicable; they are vulgar, corrupt, stupid; in a word, they are rotten.

U.S.—That's strong language, and, what's worse, unjust.

B.J.—I know you think differently of them. But, if you knew them as I do, you would think differently.

U.S.—I do know them.

B.J.—No, you don't. You know them only theoretically. If you were a manufacturer, like myself, having to deal directly with, and in that way having a practical knowledge of them, you would think of them as I do.

U.S.—Do you mean to say that you come directly in contact with your workingmen and that your practical knowledge of them justifies your opinion of their being a rotten lot? Do you really come in such direct contact with your employees. From all that I know you don't.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—Well, I don't know every employee—

U.S.—Do you meet any?

B.J.—I meet the officers they send to me.

U.S.—Are there any of your employees among them?

B.J. (after a pause)—No.

U.S.—Accordingly, you are not in direct touch with your workingmen, and surely cannot form an opinion as to their being a “rotten lot” or not.

B.J.—But I have enough to do with their representatives. Am I not justified to judge of the men by the class of people they choose to represent them before me?

U.S.—It is these representatives, then, that you consider rotten.

B.J.—Yes, they are. You know nothing of them. Let me tell you. These fellows, the officers, set the men on to strike and then they come to me with proposals to “settle.” Some times I yield for the sake of peace and give these officers the bribe they hint at; other times I don't. But is not such conduct corrupt?

U.S.—Certainly.

B.J.—Then, again, these officers come as committees making certain demands. They start to bluff and bully, show such crass ignorance and viciousness that you feel like kicking them out at first; but all you have to do is to humor them a little; they are easily flattered; and before you know it they give up their demands. What do you call that?

U.S.—Rotten, no doubt.

B.J.—That's what I meant.

U.S.—Now, Jonathan, you make the mistake of your life when you judge your employees, the rank and file of the working class, by these officers. These fellows are as corrupt as hell, as ignorant as blocks, as dull, vicious and perverse as it is possible for men to be. That is all true as to them, but it is all false as to the rank and file.

B.J.—But they elect these corrupt and rotten officers.

U.S.—Yes, but not in endorsement of their rottenness. They do so out of misplaced confidence. Your opinion is a justification of the policy of war that Socialism and New Trades Unionism pursue against these officers. They are the labor fakirs. Among the evil{s} they have done, that of placing the working class in such bad light is not the least. The rank and file is pure and decent. When it

becomes known and asserts itself the enemy will respect it, and that is one point gained in such a battle as this. Right you are about the leaders; try and become acquainted with the rank and file. You will soon have to do with them; they are kicking their rotten leaders out fast. Woe to you if you allow yourself to be lulled into security by the knowledge you have of and your contempt for the fakirs.

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

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