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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {308}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN.—I heard a ridiculous man talk last evening.

UNCLE SAM.—What makes you think he was ridiculous?

B.J.—He was espousing the rights of the working class.

U.S.—Is that ridiculous?

B.J.—Why, certainly. It is ridiculous in view of the fact that the poverty of the working people and their so-called misery—

U.S.—So-called misery?

B.J.—Anyway, in view of the fact that their poverty and their misery are due in a large measure to their extravagance, their immorality and their aversion to work.

U.S.—You are quite sure of that?

B.J.—Why, certainly. A man, by economy, push and hard work can place himself in a position of comfort.

U.S.—That's all very beautiful. Now, what is it you want?

B.J.—I want you to agree that to espouse the rights of the working class is ridiculous.

U.S.—I want you first to agree with me that you are a Heathen Chinese.

B.J.—But I am not.

U.S.—Certainly you are. In view of the fact that your eyes slant downward, that you carry a pig-tail, and that you wear your shirt outside of your trousers, what else can you



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be but a Heathen Chinee?

B.J.—But my eyes don't slant downward; I don't carry a pig-tail; and as to my shirt, I don't wear it outside of my trousers. You are talking nonsense. You are off on your premises.

U.S.—But you will agree that, if my premises were right, my conclusion that you are a Heathen Chinee would be right too, won't you?

B.J.—Yes, it would; but they aren't.

U.S.—And so I would agree with you that, if your premises about the characteristics of the workingmen, and about the capacity of “push, hard work and economy” to place a man in comfort, were correct, I would agree with you that it is ridiculous to espouse the workingmen's cause. But these premises are as much “off” as the premises from which the conclusion followed that you are a Heathen Chinee.

B.J.—Well, let's look into my premises.

U.S.—Now you talk. When you started, you incurred the very ugly error of starting with a debatable proposition for your premises, and then trying to debate the conclusion. The real point to settle is that which you took for a “fact.” I deny your premises or “facts” in toto. Now prove them.

B.J.—Which fact do you deny?

U.S.—Every one of them. It is not true that the misery and the poverty of the working class is due in any measure to their extravagance, immorality or aversion to work. Each of these allegations is false. Neither is it true that economy, push and hard work are enough to put a man in comfort. Now, trot out your proofs. Begin with the “extravagance” of the workingman.

B.J.—Hem; well—hem—

U.S.—Stuck! Proceed on his “immorality.”

B.J.—Well—hem—well—

U.S.—Stuck again. Now take up his aversion to work.

B.J.—Hem, hem! Well—

U.S.—Stuck a third time. Now, see here. Even the lying census reports don't allow the average workingman over \$1 a day from year end to year end. What is there to economize on? If a man has to hire himself to a capitalist he can't get more pay than his market value, and that is determined by the supply of labor and the demand. If he gets a

job, the price is barely enough to get along with. In order to get along without hiring himself he must have capital enough to employ others. Where is he going to get that capital from? The poverty of the workingman is a result not of aversion to work or the like, but of the private ownership of the machinery to work with; he{,} not owning that, must sell himself in wage slavery and wage slavery allows no margin to rise from. If economy were a wealth-producer, then the workers would be millionaires, and the millionaires would be paupers. Just invest in some Labor News Company books: the reading of them will have upon your head the effect of a duster in a neglected house.

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