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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {372}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Socialism is silly!

UNCLE SAM—Hey!?

B.J.—Yes, wholly impracticable. One question will puncture the bubble.

U.S.—Out with it!

B.J.—Who will do the dirty or risky work under Socialism? Who will do pick work in a mine, such risky and dirty work, instead of making cigars? There, now!

U.S.—Did you ever hear of “supply and demand” in labor?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—The larger the supply in a trade—

B.J.—The lower are the wages.

U.S.—The lower the supply—

B.J.—The higher the wages.

U.S.—“Supply and demand,” accordingly, regulate wages.

B.J.—Just so.

U.S.—Is it not a fact that the final workings of this economic law, coupled with others, is that the riskier and dirtier the work, the larger is the supply as a rule?

B.J. (ponders a while).—Well, yes; that’s a fact, on the whole.

U.S.—Accordingly, the way things are to-day, under capitalism, the law of supply and demand works unjustly?

B.J.—Granted. But what are you going to do about it?



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U.S.—Wipe out such injustice with Socialism.

B.J.—How?

U.S.—You are clear upon this point, that, under capitalism, the result on Labor of “supply and demand” is injustice?

B.J.—Yes; perfectly clear.

U.S.—Now, then, that identical law of supply and demand would, under Socialism, work out justice.

B.J.—The devil you say!

U.S.—What occupation do you imagine would draw the larger number of applicants, the dirty or the clean, the risky or the safe?

B.J.—The clean and safe, of course!

U.S.—Let’s come down to two occupations—coal mining and cigar rolling—which of the two do you imagine will have the larger number of applicants?

B.J.—Cigar rolling, no doubt! Hardly any would apply for a miner’s dirty and risky job.

U.S.—Which means to say that the supply of cigarmakers will be above and the supply of miners below the demand? Now, what do you imagine lies at the bottom of this manifestation?

B.J. scratches his head.

U.S.—Is it not that there is an infinitely greater consumption of life-tissue in mining than in cigar-making?

B.J. (brightening up)—That’s it!

U.S.—The value to society of the material things that it wants is measured by the amount of life-tissue absorbed in their production.

B.J.—Granted.

U.S.—Length of time, devoted in such production, is, accordingly, an important factor in determining the quantity of life-tissue that a worker expends?

B.J. puckers up his brow.

U.S.—I’ll explain. It means that 8 hours, employed in coal mining, implies a greater consumption of life-tissue than 8 hours employed in cigar-making.

B.J.—Oh, yes!

U.S.—Accordingly, the returns that a miner is entitled to for 8 hours’ work

should be more than the returns of a cigarmaker for 8 hours' work?

B.J. nods his head approvingly.

U.S.—How much more?

B.J.—There we are stuck, and your Socialism suffers shipwreck!

U.S.—You are stuck, and you are stuck merely because you forget all about what you admitted a minute ago. Let me refresh your memory. You admitted that the supply of miners would be below and the supply of cigarmakers above, the demand.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Would you be “stuck” if you tried to ascertain the number of applicants for each of the two occupations?

B.J.—No; that's easy as rolling off a log; a simple case of addition.

U.S.—And would you be “stuck” if asked how much larger the supply was in the one than in the other?

B.J.—No; that would be simply a case of subtraction.

U.S.—And you admitted, did you not, that the reason for the difference in the supply between the two was the difference between the two in the consumption of life-tissue, there being more life-tissue consumed in mining than in cigar-making?

B.J.—Yes, I did. It's so.

U.S.—And you admitted, did you not, that for all these reasons the returns a miner is entitled to for 8 hours' work, should be more than a cigarmaker's for the same time?

B.J.—I did; and so it is.

U.S.—Now are you still stuck when I ask how much more?

B.J. (smites his forehead)—Right you are! I see it now; the difference between the supply of miners and the supply of cigar-makers, will tell exactly how much more the miner should get.

U.S.—You are now out of the woods, the rest is plain sailing. If there are twice as many applicants for cigar-making as for mining, it means that 4 hours' mining should have the same returns as 8 hours' cigar-making. And so all along the line, whatever the differences in figures may be. The Legislature in the Socialist Republic would have hardly any but “statistical legislation” to enact. The facts and

figures would be all before it, to enable it to arrive at the correct conclusions. It could fix with justice the length of time that in any one industry shall be equivalent to the length of time in any other.

The balance between the dirty or risky occupations and the pleasant and safe ones would be established by the longer hours in the latter and the shorter hours in the former. In the Socialist Republic, where none is being exploited, and leisure for the cultivation of the esthetic and intellectual part of man is craved after, “dirty and risky” occupations, a few hours of work at which would give an equal share in the ample stores of the co-operative commonwealth, would not remain without applicants. There is much more to be said on the subject.

B.J.—Enough, I’m knocked out.

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