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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {159}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I am tired of all these political discussions that are going on. It makes my head swim to see them in the papers. It is row, row, row. “Gold standard,” “double standard,” “protection,” “Socialism,” “Populism,” heavens know what all. I used to read up on all that and take an interest in the political issues. But I won’t any more. I am going to drop it all and mind my own business.

UNCLE SAM—That might not be a bad idea, provided the political issues too dropped you and did not interfere in your “business.”

B.J.—Well, I won’t let them interfere.

U.S.—What is your “business”?

B.J.—I have a little grocery store.

U.S.—And you imagine you could run that uninterfered with, if you interfere with nobody?

B.J.—Why, of course!

U.S.—Can you get along without customers?

B.J.—How foolish you talk! Of course I need customers.

U.S.—Now, suppose that the employers of your customers reduce their wages, will they have as much to expend in groceries as before?

B.J. (with an angry look that tells “I have been there”)—No, won’t have as much.

U.S.—Can you prevent it?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—No!

U.S.—Consequently the loss of revenue of the men will interfere with your business, eh?

B.J. bites his lips.

U.S.—You know that the machine displaces workmen, don't you?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Every new machine puts out workmen, and every improvement puts out some more, eh?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Now suppose the employers of your customers get new machines, what becomes of the others? Will they have any money to buy groceries from you?

B.J. (angrier still)—No, they won't!

U.S.—Consequently the conduct of the employers interferes with your business, eh?

B.J. grows quite red in the face.

U.S.—But that's not all. Have you not heard of the "Department stores"?

B.J. (walking backwards and forwards impatiently)—Have I HEARD of them? HEARD of them? By Jericho! I've HEARD of them and FELT them, too.

U.S.—These large capitalist concerns are more attractive than the little ones, eh?

B.J.—If that were all! They can afford to sell so much cheaper; and they take our customers right from under our noses.

U.S.—Just so. These large concentrations of capital interfere, will ye nil ye, with your business?

B.J.—Yes, yes, yes!

U.S.—Whether you will or no?

B.J.—Yes, will I or nil I.

U.S.—Thus you see, my good man, that there is no such thing as running away from, or dropping the political issues of the day, or turning your back upon them. They won't drop YOU. They will hold you fast. What good does it do you to run away, if they can and do overtake you?

B.J.—Now what is a man to do?

U.S.—Even a rat pursued turns to bay, and shall man do less?

B.J.—What good will turning to bay do?

U.S.—The good that fighting always does. It settles the question. No question is ever settled until it is settled right. The fight will and must continue until the right cause prevails.

B.J.—But who is to tell which is right?

U.S.—The prevailing, finally prevailing one always is the right cause.

B.J.—And in the meantime?

U.S.—Everyone should fight as hard as he knows how for what he considers the right thing.

B.J.—Well, I for one don't know which of all these is right.

U.S.—And yet it is as easy as rolling off a log to know what course a man should take.

B.J.—I find it damned hard.

U.S.—Look you here. Is it to your interest to live or to starve?

B.J.—Why, of course, to live.

U.S.—Is life becoming easier or harder?

B.J.—Harder, by thunder.

U.S.—What makes it harder for you?

B.J.—The inability of people to buy as much as before.

U.S.—And what makes that harder?

B.J.—I'm stumped!

U.S.—Did you not realize that the machine pauperized your customers, and the large stores underscored {undersold?} you?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Does the machine cause less goods or more goods to be produced?

B.J.—More, immensely more.

U.S.—Stick a pin there. And, taking it as a whole, which is more sensible, a lot of small stores or a few large and well stocked ones.

B.J.—The large ones, but where would I come in?

U.S.—You realize that the machine produces infinitely more than hand work, hence you must realize that there is something wrong somewhere in that despite increased

production there is increased poverty. You realize that one large store is better than many picayune ones, hence there must be something wrong if, despite such advantage, there would be people who suffer by it—

B.J.—That's all right, but the remedy!

U.S.—Can a gold standard or a silver standard, or protection, or free trade remove these evils?

B.J.—Don't see how they could.

U.S.—Nor does anybody else. Now suppose that the machine, and the land and the factories were owned by the people and operated by them, would there be any idle capitalists to sponge up all the property of the people, reduce wages, throw men out of work and thereby make the whole community suffer?

B.J.—Guess not.

U.S.—That's all the milk there is in the cocoa-nut. And that is Socialism. And that is what you should fight for.

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

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