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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {216}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN (with a cute twinkle in his eye)—Do you know, I think I have caught on to a trick of these capitalistic papers?

UNCLE SAM—It is about time you did.

B.J.—I see through this Klondyke game of theirs.

U.S.—What do you see?

B.J.—They are booming it up for all it is worth.

U.S.—Hey?!

B.J.—Don't you think they are?

U.S.—No.

B.J.—Well, I think so.

U.S.—What makes you think so?

B.J.—Why, what I read in the papers.

U.S.—You do? And why should they?

B.J.—“Why should they?” What a question. That's just the rub, the point I've caught on to. I'll tell you. (Whispering) Those fellows have got up mining companies, they have stock in them; and now they are booming the Klondyke for all it is worth to make workingmen think that if they only go there they will become rich; and when the workingmen are there, they will find they can't get anything, and will be glad to work for starvation wages in the Klondyke mines. Don't you see how these foxy capitalists can get fine hot chestnuts out of that Klondyke frying pan with the workers for cats'-paws? And the cuteness of the scheme to make the workers pay their own fare to the frying pan, too. It beats anything I ever saw!



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S. looks at him.

B.J.—Don't you agree?

U.S.—No. Your notion is quite clever in one way, but it falls because it so happens that these capitalist papers are not now doing any booming of the Klondyke; just the reverse.

B.J.—They ain't?!

U.S.—No. They are now trying to frighten the workers away. They are talking of “Starvation in the Klondyke,” “Suffering in the Klondyke,” “Famine in the Klondyke,” “Distressing Stories of Parties going to the Klondyke,” “Anxious Miners' Expedition by Water, Boat Capsizes, Four Drowned”—and so forth. Now, do you imagine that all this is exactly true, is not highly colored, and is given only for the sake of the news?

B.J.—What else should it be for?

U.S.—Why, to keep the workers here.

B.J.—Keep them away from working the Klondyke mines that the capitalists are gobbling up?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—And let those mines rot?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J. (impatiently)—You are crazy.

U.S.—If you have a mine here right under your own thumb and the thumbs of your soldiers and judges, etc., that is yielding you untold wealth, and you get a mine away off, far from your own thumb and the thumbs of your soldiers, your judges, and your other political heelers, where your workingmen could have very much their own way and keep what they produce without fear of being enjoined out of sight or shot down—would you like them to leave the nearby mine, and go to the far off one?

B.J.—Not exactly.

U.S.—You would not {at} all.

B.J.—But there are more workingmen lying around than I need. Those who are engaged here won't go; it is only those who are not at work who would go; in that way the capitalists can keep all they now have and utilize the workers whom they have no chance to fleece, because out of work.

U.S.—There is where you are again mistaken.

B.J.—In this too?

U.S.—Yes; you are caught by another cog in the capitalist wheel.

B.J.—Which?

U.S.—It isn't only the workingman at work who supports the capitalist fabric. The workingman out of work performs a very important role in the mechanism of capital.

First—If there are no workingmen out of work, the wages of those at work would be higher and steadier; the supply would not exceed the demand. The more workingmen there are out of work the larger is the excess of the supply over the demand, consequently the lower is the price of labor, or wages. The pure and simple union has an inkling of this fact, but not seeing it in all its bearings, it sought to counteract it by trying to “organize the whole trade.” But the machine, with its rapid development in all trades, and consequent wholesale displacement of labor, knocked the bottom from that “pure and simple” notion.

Second—The capitalist must have idle men at hand. If there are none he can't increase his production at the demand of the market. With a goodly number of unemployed, he can, when orders are plentiful, fill them; when they slack up he can dismiss his hands, and if he knows that they are there he will scurry for more orders.

The capitalist system would be hampered if it were not for the unemployed. This blot upon humanity, the starving unemployed, is one of the necessities of the capitalist system, of the Christian, noble “eternal” capitalist system.

B.J. looks pensive.

U.S.—Don't you make any mistake about it. You are not wanted in the Klondyke by the capitalists. Whether you are at work or not, they want you and all their sheep right here.

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

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