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DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {94-95}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**B**ROTHER JONATHAN—If the size of a smile denotes the quantity of enjoyment, you must be having huge fun.

UNCLE SAM—So I am. I am just reading a single-tax tract.

B.J.—But last time you read one of them I saw you sigh.

U.S.—Sometimes these tracts are sigh promoting; other times they promote mirth.

B.J.—What is there funny in this one?

U.S.—It is intended to answer a Socialist criticism.

B.J. draws closer and becomes interested.

U.S.—You see, some Socialist writer, it seems, argued that the application of the single tax to-day would not do the poor, the working people, any good. He showed that it now requires stacks of “social opportunity” (capital) to operate “natural opportunities” (land); consequently, that even if the single tax were to set land “free,” the land would not be “free” to any but to those who now hold the capital, or “social opportunity”—i.e., the capitalists—while to the working class, who are wholly stripped of capital, the land would remain as utterly inaccessible as it is to-day.

B.J.—Why, there are no flies on that argument.

U.S.—None indeed; it stands our clear as a pike. Now, then, the tract tries to meet that by arguing that the inequalities under which the rich and the poor would start would be eventually wiped out, because capital is perishable. It claims that, rather than



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be ruined, the capitalist would feel constrained to allow labor all the capital it wanted.

B.J.—W—h—a—t ? ! ? !

U.S.—That is not yet the really funny part.

B.J. draws still nearer.

U.S.—The tract then goes on to pitch into the labor movement. It attacks strikes and boycotts. And what do you imagine it says: “The workingmen, whose pockets are empty, cannot stand it out against the capitalist, whose pockets are full. The contest between them is one of empty purses against full ones. The empty purses must surrender to the full purses.”

B.J.—That’s all right; the Socialists say so, too.

U.S.—Indeed they do. But don’t you catch on? Here is a fellow who claims that the inequality under which the rich and the poor would start under the single tax would be eventually wiped out, because “capital is perishable,” and, consequently, the capitalist would be constrained to yield; and then, turning a somersault back—

B.J.—He suddenly claims just the reverse, and tells the strikers that the inequality of purses between them and the capitalists is bound to force them to surrender. By Jericho, that’s funny!

U.S.—One moment “capital is perishable,” and therefore the poor can dictate laws under capitalism; the next moment that same “perishable” capital is admitted to be strong enough under capitalism to force the workers to surrender!

B.J. and U.S. break out in uproarious laughter.

U.S.—It is pleasant, at any rate, in these critical days, to have some one humorous enough to throw some fun into the otherwise too serious movement.

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BROTHER JONATHAN—It is painful to see how the working people refuse to adopt the methods of warfare which the bosses put so successfully into operation.

UNCLE SAM—Which, for instance?

B.J.—For instance, you won’t find any partisanship among the bosses. You find the Democratic and the Republican capitalists move smoothly along in business. Now, I think—

U.S.—I am afraid you again “think you think.”

B.J.—No; I am thinking indeed. I think the workers, too, should drop partisanship.

U.S.—I don't know what you mean by that, but your premises are, as usual, wrong.

B.J.—My premises!

U.S.—Yes; your premises. You conclude from the circumstance that “Democratic” and “Republican” bosses do business together that therefore they are not partisans. Now that is an error.

B.J.—How?

U.S.—The reason why they are not “partisans” among themselves is that they have both got the public powers in their own hands, and, consequently, they don't need to strive for that. Partisanship, intelligent partisanship, springs up either to acquire or to keep public powers. He who has the public powers needs no partisanship to acquire; but he will be a partisan in his desire to keep it. Do you imagine a “Republican” or “Democratic” boss could move smoothly outside of politics with a Socialist?

B.J.—Hem—er—haw—er.

U.S.—Such a capitalist boss would display a bitter partisanship against the Socialist—

B.J.—Very well; but among themselves they don't—

U.S.—That only goes to show that the political differences among them are more assumed than true. It goes to show that they are of the same political faith essentially. Do you imagine a Republican would display partisanship toward another Republican or a Democrat toward another? Not much!

B.J. looks pensive.

U.S.—Workers who are attracted to the Republican-Democratic combine are bound to feel partisanship toward those who are Socialists, and vice versa. This anti-partisan talk is one of those “pure and simple” unmeaning phrases, intended to confuse; you had better drop it.

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

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