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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {39-40}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Prof. George Gunton . . .
UNCLE SAM—Prof. Who?

B.J.—George Gunton.

U.S.—You mean Prof. Green Goods.

B.J.—Is that his name?

U.S.—At least he is better known by that name.

B.J.—Why?

U.S.—I shall tell you presently; go on.

B.J.—Well, then, Prof. Green Goods says that no strike is ever lost . . .

U.S.—Right he is.

B.J.—And that out of each strike the strikers come with riper experience . . .

U.S.—I wish they did.

B.J.—And that the strikers are like a bird in a cage; each attempt it makes to get out weakens the bars, until the bars break down and the birdy flies away free.

U.S.—Do you now see why he earned the name of Prof. Green Goods?

B.J.—Not yet.

U.S.—His simile presupposes the capitalist, the fellow who put the bird into a cage, to stand by and look on at the birdy's wearing out the bars without ever strengthening them. Now does the capitalist do that?

B.J.—Well . . . hem . . .

U.S.—What happens every time after a strike? What does the capitalist do? Does he



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remain idle?

B.J.—No, I presume he mends his fences.

U.S.—Well put! Immediately after a strike the capitalist goes about to prepare against the next one. With this object in view he does a number of things looking to two purposes: First to strengthen the bars of the cage; and second to weaken the force of the darling birdy. Do you follow me?

B.J.—Yes; as to the first . . .

U.S.—As to the first, he draws closer to other capitalists, who, like himself are bent upon the same scheme, and they enter into a compact which is the start of the Trust; they agree to hold one another free of all damage in case the hands of any should strike; in that way, each is better able to resist the dashing of his bird against the bar{s}. That is what happened in this city with the street car men in 1886, and more recently in Danbury with the hatters. At first, these workers banged against the bars in a way to frighten the capitalists; but these soon combined; they agreed to proceed upon the principle that an injury to one was an injury to all; and they entered into a compact by which each agreed to share the loss of the other in the event of a strike. Were the bars stronger or weaker after that move?

B.J.—Why, decidedly stronger!

U.S.—But they go still further in that direction. Take for instance those very street car strikes of 1886. When the birdy flew against the bars, the bars showed a peculiar weakness. Their “police alloy” was so slight that it seemed to favor the birdy’s efforts. Just as soon as the capitalists found out that they strengthened the alloy. The right steps were taken, the right ropes and wires were pulled, and the government, as represented by police, courts and militias, backed up against the bars, holding these up and rendering them unbreakable. Wasn’t it so?

B.J.—Exactly. The bars were thus immensely strengthened. But I don’t understand what you mean by saying that the capitalists also try to weaken the bird.

U.S.—I was coming to that. At the same time that the capitalists strengthen the bars of the cage in the manner I showed you, they weaken the “bird” itself, first, by frequent and periodical “shut downs,” whereby employment becomes unsteady, and then by the introduction of labor saving machines whereby scores and hundreds of workers are

permanently thrown out of work. With thousands of hands out of work the flutterings of the “bird” in a strike against the bars of its cage become weaker and more impotent.

B.J.—Right you are.

U.S.—Only those workingmen who realize this fact come out of the strike with “riper experience,” and it is only in so far as each strike knocks the bottom more completely under the hoary headed delusion of “pure and simpledom” and points to the superior tactics of New Trade Unionism or Socialism, that the strike is not a dead loss of time, money and energy.

B.J.—Then this talk of this Professor, what-do-you-call-him . . .

U.S.—Green Goods.

B.J.—Of this Prof. Green Goods about Labor being ever stronger to strike is the darndest delusion and snare!

U.S.—A regular green goods affair.

B.J.—O, I see. That name fits him as the paper on the wall.

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BROTHER JONATHAN—Did you hear of the latest union?

UNCLE SAM—No; which is it?

B.J.—The “Out of a Job Labor News Hucksters’ Union,” Miscellaneous John, Impressario.

U.S. and B.J.—(Holding their sides.) Ha! He! Hi!

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

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