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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {41}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Did you ever hear of the Indianapolis *Labor Signal*?

UNCLE SAM—Some.

B.J.—And did you ever hear of one John Sexton?

U.S.—Less.

B.J.—This Sexton writes to the *Signal* a letter under the caption “The Jackass Voter.”

U.S.—Not a bad title for an article. Whom does he call “jackass voters”?

B.J.—Here is a passage from his letter: “The jackass voter is a stumbling-block. It is almost impossible to get him to vote for his own interest. And there is so many of him among workingmen. But Mr. Jackass takes great interest in politics. As soon as a campaign opens he is one of the first to join a club. It gives him a tin hat, a belt, and a red shirt, with the letters ‘J.C.’ across the breast. Thus uniformed, he proudly parades through the streets, on every little and big occasion, and yells himself hoarse when the Hon. Mr. Humbug tells him he is the salt of the earth, and the welfare of the nation depends upon how he casts his ballot. Now, what can you do with such an animal? If you tell him he is voting for men who will down him, he immediately wants to knock your head off. Some time afterward he may be injured at his work, and is much surprised that he cannot collect damages. He is told that he voted for men who downed the employer’s co-liability bill and other beneficent measures, but that doesn’t learn him anything. At the next election he votes for the same people again, because he belongs to the ‘party,’ you know. And so it goes. The only way to get at his brains is through his belly, and even that is not



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a sure road. If he were the only one to suffer for his asinine way of voting it would serve him right, but unfortunately it brings suffering on thousands of intelligent and worthy men. Perhaps in a few hundred years the jackass voter will evolve out of his present condition, but the outlook is gloomy now.”

U.S.—No doubt the people he speaks of there deserve the title he gives them of “jackasses.” But does he throw up the sponge and declare there is no balm in Gilead?

B.J.—Not exactly. He has a scheme of his own.

U.S.—Which is it?

B.J.—He does not seem to take any stock in the notion that politics must be kept out of the unions.

U.S.—Why, the man has some sense.

B.J.—And his plan is that unions should work on the same lines as the G.A.R.;¹ they should unitedly exercise pressure on both Republican and Democratic office holders, and then they would get all they want “just as the G.A.R.”

U.S.—“Just as the G.A.R.?”

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—Then he compares the unions to a G.A.R. affair?

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—I take it all back that our man Sexton has any sense.

B.J.—Why?

U.S.—The G.A.R. is not a permanent institution. In so far as it consists of bona fide veterans of previous wars, it must steadily decline in numbers; the veterans die out. The membership of the working class, on the contrary, is steadily on the increase.

Secondly, what politicians may be willing to do for a declining membership, they may not be able to do for an increasing one. Sops may do for a few thousand veterans, for the millions of workers something more substantial is needed.

And lastly, the G.A.R. does not need a revolution in the social system for the pensions, etc., it is after; the present system will do it. On the other hand the working class can not even maintain its present crumbs and will be thrust lower and lower under the present system. What it needs is a social revolution that shall place into the hands of

¹ [Grand Army of the Republic.]

the workers their machinery of production; and that the capitalist politicians will never grant the workers. To compare the G.A.R. with the intelligent organizations of labor is like comparing a hot-house plant with an oak tree; to imagine the same methods may apply to both is like imagining that a garden sprinkler will do for an oak tree. The man who falls into that notion shows he knows as much of the social movement as the other fellow would show that he knows of botany.

B.J.—According to that, when my John Sexton talks of “jackass voters” he acts like that proverbially imprudent man who lived in a glass-house and threw stones at his neighbors?

U.S.—You hit it exactly!

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