DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {333}

By DANIEL DE LEON

U NCLE SAM—What is that button you got on the lapel of your coat?

BROTHER JONATHAN—Which lapel?

U.S.—Heavens! Right you are! You have a different political button on each one. You have McKinley and Roosevelt on one side, Bryan and Stevenson on the other. Man, are you crazy?

B.J. (with complete composure)—No, I'm not crazy. When I'm among Democrats I turn the McKinley lapel down; when I'm among Republicans I turn the Bryan lapel down.

U.S.—Then you haven't yet made up your mind which of the two you are going to vote for?

B.J.—Oh, yes. I'll vote for Bryan.

U.S. looks puzzled.

B.J.—I'll tell you. I may yet decide to vote for McKinley. But I'm not wasting any time on politics this year. I'm putting in most of my time in getting my Union in a temper to strike for higher wages right after election.

U.S.—Aha! And how are you doing it?

B.J.—I follow the only sensible policy. If I meet one of my Union men who enthuses for Bryan, I straightway turn down the McKinley lapel, hold up to him the Bryan lapel and get his sympathy in favor of my strike plan.

U.S.—And when you meet one who enthuses for McKinley, you do the other thing, eh?

B.J.—Just so! In this way no animosities are incurred, and we shall all be in a

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humor towards one another to pull together in a strike for higher wages.

U.S.—Idiot!

B.J.—Don't we STAND united, but FALL divided?

U.S.—A truce with your pasteboard phrases! United we stand, and divided we fall. True! But grains of sand are not "united" by being thrown together. Now, see here. The workingman who votes for McKinley or Bryan puts his foot straight into his mouth if the next day he strikes for higher wages.

B.J.—I'd like to know how!

U.S.—What does a vote for Bryan or McKinley mean?

B.J.—Nothing particular, that I know of!

U.S.—"Nothing particular"? It means the support of the capitalist system; it means the support of the system of wage slavery; it means the support of the social system that degrades the workingman down to the condition of a merchandise and keeps him there.

B.J.—I don't see it!

U.S.—What do all people live by?

B.J.—By selling their merchandise.

U.S.—The butcher lives by selling—

B.J.—Beef.

U.S.—The leather dealer lives—

B.J.—By selling leather.

U.S.—And the workingman, by the sale of what does he live?

B.J.—By the sale of his merchandise, labor.

U.S.—Yes. The workingman's merchandise is labor-power. By the sale of that only can he live.

B.J.—That's so!

U.S.—Does the price that the butcher gets {for} his beef depend upon his sweet pleasure?

B.J.—Well—yes—NO! It don't!

U.S.—Indeed, it don't. The price that the butcher gets for his beef depends upon the supply. The more plentiful the supply, the lower will be the price; the shorter the supply, the higher will be the price.

B.J.—That's so.

U.S.—And does the price that the leather dealer gets for his leather depend upon his will?

B.J.—No, it depends upon the plentifulness or shortness of the supply of leather.

U.S.—The more plentiful the supply—

B.J.—The lower the price.

U.S.—And the shorter the supply of leather turned out—

B.J.—The higher will be the price.

U.S.—Accordingly, what is it that will govern the price of our merchandise of labor-power?

B.J. (beginning to look concerned)—Why, its supply!

U.S.—The shorter the supply—

B.J.—The higher would be the price we get, the higher would be our wages.

U.S.—And the ampler the supply—

B.J.—Of course, the lower would be our wages. But what are you driving at?

U.S.—You will see soon enough! Stick a pin there; our wages depend upon the supply of labor-power. Is that so?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Now does the supply of our merchandise labor-power decrease or does it increase?

B.J.—It increases stupendously, to judge by the number of unemployed looking for jobs and unable to get any.

U.S.—Is it because we procreate so fast?

B.J.—It can't be that. We may or may not procreate numerously; but, owing to our poverty, our children die like flies. It can't be our procreation that increases the supply so damnably.

U.S.—You are right.

B.J.—What, then, is the cause of this overwhelming increase of the supply of labor-power?

U.S.—Say I'm a capitalist, and I employ 100 men.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—I get a machine that enables fifty men to produce as much as the previous 100—

B.J.—I see. The machine displaces labor, that is to say it increases the supply of labor-power.

U.S.—The supply under these circumstances has gone up 100 per cent. The supply is 100; the demand is fifty; accordingly the price of the workingman's merchandise is bound to go down.

B.J.—Heavens! We are hopelessly in the soup!

U.S.—Not so fast! Do you imagine that in case a machine is built whereby fifty men working ten hours could produce as much as or more than 100 without the machine, do you imagine that we, workingmen, would throw out one half of our brothers and let the other half continue to drudge at long hours and a lower pay, if WE owned the machine?

B.J.—The divil, we would!

U.S.—What do you think we would do?

B.J.—The sensible thing, of course, all the 100 would remain at work but we would throw out one half the work hours. We would work five hours a day instead of ten.

U.S.—We can't do that now, can we?

B.J.—No!

U.S.—Why?

B.J.—Because we don't own the machine.

U.S.—Does either Bryan or McKinley propose to place that machine in the hands of the people collectively?

B.J.—I don't know that they do.

U.S.—No they don't! The issues that they bring forth don't touch this point at all. They both stand upon the principle of the private ownership of the machinery of production, and that means—

B.J.—That the supply of labor is bound to increase;—

U.S.—And that, in turn, means—

B.J.—That the price of labor-power or wages is bound to decline.

U.S.—Just so, my man. Now, to return to where we started from; a vote for Bryan or McKinley is a vote for the capitalist system.

B.J.—And that means a vote for the continuance of private property in the machinery of production—

U.S.—And does not that mean a vote for the continuance of a system under which the supply of our merchandise labor-power is bound to go up?

B.J.—Yes; which, again, means that it is a system under which the price of that merchandise, our wages, is bound to go down! You are right!

U.S.—Now, do you see the idiocy of a man first voting for a system under which his wages can not choose but go down and then turning around and striking for a raise of wages? Is not that putting his foot into his mouth?

B.J. (after long pondering)—"Idiocy" is no word for it! But, yet—

U.S.—"Yet" what?

B.J.—What shall we do? Does not a drowning man catch at a straw? Would you blame us if in this fix that you have shown we are in, we catch at a straw?

U.S.—A drowning man catches at a straw when there is nothing else in sight. But if there is a good strong raft, your drowning man would catch at that and p.d.q. too. He would not be the idiot to catch at a floating straw.

B.J.—Is there a raft in sight?

U.S.—Yes, man; a mighty one. The Socialist Labor Party, whose ticket is headed by Malloney and Remmel for President and Vice-President. For ten years that raft has been afloat. It demands the unconditional surrender of CAPITALISM, which means the total overthrow of the system under which the workingmen's earnings are bound to decline, and the establishment of the Socialist Republic under which he who works shall live in the amplitude that a civilized man is entitled to. Vote the Socialist Labor Party ticket straight. And then if you strike for higher wages you bring that power into your strike that only a consistent and intelligent action can bring. Otherwise, the idiocy of your conduct renders you hopelessly weak and secures your crushing defeat.

B.J.—I have learned what I never learned before. I now perceive the imbecility of the pure and simple or British style of unionism. Malloney and Remmel is the only battle cry of Labor this year.