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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {111}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—What is all this commotion about capital and labor? In olden days you did not hear of such a thing as a strike.

UNCLE SAM—There was good reason for it.

B.J.—When a man wanted a job he applied for it. If the pay suited him he accepted it; if not, he would reject it and get another job.

U.S.—That's it. If one thing did not suit him he could drop it and was sure to find something that did suit him.

B.J.—If a man became dissatisfied and left one job for another, he did not care who took the place he vacated.

U.S.—Of course not.

B.J.—Now, I say it should be so now. If a man is dissatisfied with his job let him get another and don't mind who takes his. There should be no hard feelings on the part of either. What say you?

U.S.—I say that you are an improved edition of Rip Van Winkle. You have been sound asleep.

B.J.—Asleep? I have been wide awake.

U.S.—Not if you talk that way.

B.J.—Do you think all this wrangling is right?

U.S.—It is not a question of right or wrong, it is a question of whether it can be otherwise.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—And why couldn't it?

U.S.—Do you imagine that in olden days the man who dropped one job for another job did so for the fun of the thing?

B.J.—No; he did so to improve his condition.

U.S.—And do you imagine that he did not first try to get better wages at the job he had in hand?

B.J.—Of course not; he first tried that; but, failing, went to a better job.

U.S.—And do you imagine that, if no better jobs were to be found and he gave up the one he had, he would look pleasantly upon the fellow who took his place?

B.J.—Hem—er—

U.S.—Do you imagine that it is simply a case of the devil having now got into our people and that, while formerly they were good natured all around, now they are ill natured out of pure cussedness?

B.J.—Well—er—

U.S.—I said you were an improved edition of Rip Van Winkle. I am now ready to prove it to you.

B.J. (rubs his eyes)—Meseems I have been sleeping.

U.S.—If a man can get a better job than the one he fires up he won't care a straw who takes his old place or whether anybody takes it or not.

B.J.—Guess so.

U.S.—But if a man can't get a better job?

B.J.—Of course he—

U.S.—Then he will strike for higher wages on the job he has. Ain't it?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And if the boss refuses, what is that man's predicament?

B.J.—He is in a fix, because the wages he could get at another job are no better.

U.S.—And might be worse?

B.J.—Yes; that would only make his fix still worse.

U.S.—In that case what is that man's only hope?

B.J.—Don't know.

U.S.—Yes, you do. His only hope, short of overthrowing the system, is to compel the

boss to raise his wages.

B.J.—Oh, yes.

U.S.—Do you imagine he could succeed in that if the boss could find somebody else to work for the wages that he finds too low?

B.J.—Of course not.

U.S.—It, then, all comes down to this: In olden times there were fewer men asking for work than there were jobs; the bosses had to yield to the workers; since then things have changed; machinery, improved machinery, still more improved machinery, large concentrations of capital in syndicates and trusts—all that has lowered the relative number of hands wanted and has increased the absolute number of hands anxious for work—

B.J.—That’s just the way it has gone on.

U.S.—Consequently, when now a man drops his job because of poor pay it makes all the difference in the world to him whether anybody else will step into his place—

B.J.—If any one does, he is left without bread.

U.S.—It is, consequently, quite a natural result of the changed conditions in America that there should be “hard feelings” all around—

B.J.—It now strikes me that these fellows who want “America as she is” and who in the same breath want “the America of our daddies” are—

U.S.—Either rascals or fools.

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—“The America of our daddies” is gone; what we now have is, as far as popular misery is concerned, “the America, or, rather, the Europe our daddies fought against.” He who tells the workers they should behave as they did a hundred years ago and don’t first try to bring conditions back to the plane they were a hundred years ago in point of facilities to earn a living is purely and simply a bunco steerer. Get out of such company.

B.J. (takes out his handkerchief and dusts off his shoes)—Here they go. I wipe them off.

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

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