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DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {138}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**U**NCLE SAM—Are you coming to the meeting of our Union this evening?

BROTHER JONATHAN—No; I think not. Guess I'll go and play a rubber of cards instead.

U.S.—You had better come to the union.

B.J.—Anything up?

U.S.—Yes. I intended to offer a motion that every member be pledged to vote the same political ticket on election day, and if he don't he be drummed out as a scab.

B.J. (bristling up)—The devil you say! Well, I'll be there; and I'll fight you tooth and nail.

U.S.—I thought you would; that's why I gave you notice.

B.J. (swinging his arms wildly around)—I'll fight against that with my last breath. I want freedom, I do! I am a free American citizen! The right to vote as one pleases is guaranteed by the Constitution! I won't submit to dictation! My ancestors came over with the Plymouth Rock and landed in the town of May Flower, where they immediately unfurled the stars and stripes of liberty, sang Yankee Doodle, a tune composed by Daniel Webster, and swore to live as freemen or die in the attempt! No, sir; I shall preserve my political freedom, and vote as I damn please!

U.S. (whose face a smile has been suffusing during the outburst)—Are you out of your wind?

B.J. (doggedly)—I am.

U.S.—Then I'll put in my innings. Does the Constitution guarantee you the right to



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VOTE as you please any more than it does the right to WORK as you please?

B.J.—'Course not; the Constitution guarantees me full freedom all around; and I won't give up one tittle of any of my rights.

U.S.—You don't?

B.J.—I don't!

U.S.—And you don't "interfere" with any of these rights in other citizens?

B.J.—I don't! I allow as much freedom to all.

U.S.—You do?

B.J.—I do!

U.S. (poking B.J. in the ribs)—If that's so, will you kindly explain to me why you voted in our last meeting that the wages in our craft shall be \$2.50 a day?

B.J.—Hem!

U.S. (giving him another poke)—Did you not there surrender your right to work as you "damn please," to use your own language, and submit to "dictation"?

B.J.—Hem!

U.S. (administering a third poke)—And will you explain how you came two months ago to vote for a motion that our hours of work shall be only eight?

B.J. (shifting uneasily from one leg to the other)—Hem!

U.S. (poking two simultaneous pokes into B.J.'s ribs)—Did you not there again surrender that divine right of working as you "damn please," and submit to "dictation?"

B.J. (mopping his face with one hand, and with the other trying to ward off U.S.'s fingers that were getting ready to poke him again)—Hem, hem!

U.S. (administering ten simultaneous pokes with all his ten fingers)—And would you mind explaining to me, if you have recovered your voice, what you were doing last week at five in the morning at the corner of our factory?

B.J. (with manifest delight)—I was doing picket duty; I was keeping off a lot of damned scabs from taking our jobs for lower wages and longer hours! That's what I was doing!

U.S.—Ha! Ha! Just so! In other words, you were preventing others from working as they "damn pleased," you were interfering with their constitutional liberty!

B.J. (looks for a while as if he had been caught stealing sheep)—But wasn't I doing

right? Should we give up the union?

U.S.—Decidedly you were right. The freedom of civilized man is a different thing from the freedom of the savage. Civilized man knows that individualism fetters the development of man and prevents the full enjoyment of life; that to escape such fetters and enjoy the full capabilities of his kind man must co-operate; and that co-operation carries with it the surrender of the freedom of the savage. The weal of the individual is bound up in the weal of society. If an individual's act is harmful to society, it must be repressed. To work as one "damn pleases," for starvation wages and health-destroying hours is harmful to society; it is right to unite in unions, it is necessary for the sake of imparting to a higher principle greater strength both against the capitalist oppressor and against the oppressed fool.

B.J.—Then what are you kicking against?

U.S.—Against your false notion about freedom. You recognize that a man's freedom to work as he "damn pleases" deserves no recognition if he pleases to work for wages and hours that will pull us all down?

B.J.—I do.

U.S.—Accordingly, the question of "freedom" is not one of phrases, it resolves itself into the one of bread and butter?

B.J.—It does.

U.S.—Consequently, whether the union should order the men to vote a certain ticket and be justified in branding as scabs those who don't, must depend, not on "May Flowers," "Plymouth Rocks," "Yankee Doodles," etc., but upon the same point that determines whether the union should fix a rate of wages and of hours, and brand the violators as scabs. Ain't it?

B.J.—'Tis. But what has politics to do with wages?

U.S.—That's the issue, not "freedom." What have politics to do with wages? If the workers had voted unitedly for the Socialist Labor party, would there have been a Democratic Governor in Pennsylvania to lower their wages in Homestead with the militia?

B.J.—No!

U.S.—Would there have been a Republican President to lower their wages in the

Coeur d'Alene mines of Idaho?

B.J.—You are right!

U.S.—Would there have been a Democratic Governor in New York to extend their hours of work among the switchmen of Buffalo with the aid of the militia?

B.J.—Hang the rascal who did so!

U.S.—Would there, subsequently, have been a Republican Governor in New York to extend the hours of work of the trolley men of Brooklyn, as Morton did with the militia?

B.J.—I cave in!

U.S.—It is, then, a question of life, and not of freedom, this question of unity at the ballot box. For the same reason that we must enforce union wages and union hours, and union regulations, we must establish union politics.

B.J.—I see, I see.

U.S.—For the same reason that we seek to have the best wages and best hours, we must seek the best political party.

B.J.—'Tis so, I'll now eat my head if it isn't.

U.S.—For the same reason that we brand as a scab him who works for lower wages or longer hours, we must brand as a scab him who does not vote for the union party—the Socialist Labor party.

B.J.—My hand upon it.

U.S.—The union that does not include oneness of politics and economics is a tub without a bottom.

B.J.—By Jericho, that's all such unions are, except to the officer who gets a job from it.

U.S.—One thing more, Jonathan. You had better read up early American history. You got things pretty well mixed up—like all people do who shout “freedom” without knowing what they are talking about.

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

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