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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {265}

By DANIEL DE LEON

[SCENE: A street in Pittsburg, Pa.]

BROTHER JONATHAN—Glad I meet you; I want you to come along.

UNCLE SAM—Where to?

B.J.—To a meeting of the Wire Company's employees—men and boys.

U.S.—What's up?

B.J.—Haven't you heard about it?

U.S.—No.

B.J.—Well, our wages were low enough; but we managed to get along. Now, however, a machine has been introduced in the shop that's going to play havoc with us all. It is going to displace a lot of our boys, the "hooker boys," and the loss of their jobs alone, to say nothing of the resultant reduction of wages of those of them who will remain at work, will amount to a loss to them of \$19,461.30; and it is going to displace a lot of us men, the "rollers," and the loss of our jobs alone, to say nothing of the resultant reduction of the wages of us men who will remain at work, will amount to a loss to us of \$16,353.33. We can't stand it!

U.S.—You have got these figures down fine.

B.J.—Yes; I was on the Committee to look into the matter and report to this meeting.

U.S.—And is your report ready? It surely is not enough to find out how much all of you are going to lose, and to say you can't stand it. Your report should recommend some action. Does it?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—No. And that's why I'd like to have a talk with you, and confer upon what action our Committee should recommend.

U.S.—Have you considered any action?

B.J.—I have considered several, but have not yet made up my mind which to give the preference to.

U.S.—Which is the first one you considered?

B.J.—The first is to pick out a dozen resolute men and charge them with smashing the new machine; if necessary, to blow up the whole mill. What do you say to that?

U.S.—That's very bad for two reasons:

In the first place, a machine that can displace so much labor must be a machine that can produce a large increase of wealth with less work. Such a machine is a promoter of civilization. The trend of civilization is to increase the available wealth and to decrease the amount of work needed to produce it. The more wealth there is available and the less work there is needed to produce it, all the more leisure man has to develop his moral and intellectual parts, the burden of toil for the necessities of life is proportionally lightened, and civilization is proportionally drawn nearer. The more machinery and the more perfect the machine the nearer the race is to civilization, that is to say, to the full enjoyment of human life, and the recognition of human rights and duties. To smash the machine is, therefore, to place yourselves in opposition to, at war with PROGRESS. In that battle you are bound to go under: PROGRESS is irresistible.

B.J.—But—

U.S.—One moment. In the second place, to smash the machine, to blow up the mill, is an exercise of physical force.

B.J.—What of it?—

U.S.—Wait. Now, physical force is not necessarily improper, any more than taking a case to the Court of Appeals is improper, provided it be taken there in due time. A case is not properly before the Court of Appeals before it has been tried in the lower Courts; only when Justice is denied there, does a case properly come before the Court of Appeals. So with the appeal to physical force. Physical force is all right, but in its place, at the right time. It is recognized by all thinkers as an element that makes for progress, provided, however, all other remedies have first been exhausted. If tried before that, it is

stripped of its dignity and becomes mere rowdyism, with failure, total failure, as the result. Now, then, have you exhausted your other remedies?

B.J.—Yes; we have; we have appointed Committees to remonstrate with the firm—

U.S.—Ridiculous! That only goes to emphasize the fact that you have not exhausted your other remedies, that you have even totally ignored them.

B.J.—And what remedies are they?

U.S.—The peaceful remedy of the ballot. You have not only not voted in favor of the political and economic principles of your own class, you have voted against them by voting for the political and economic principles of the capitalist class, Democratic or Republican. The political and economic principles of these require the machine, which is big with blessings for all, to redound to the benefit of the capitalist class only, that owns it because it stole it from the workers, and to redound to a curse only to you workers, as you are finding out. Your, the working class' political and economic principles require the machine to be placed into your hands collectively, so that the increased wealth it produces may fall to you, and the decreased work it requires may be taken off your shoulders. But having thus neglected to use your ballot in your own favor, and having used it in favor of capitalist principles, to now resort to violence so as to avoid the result of your own wrong-doing is the act of fools; you would only be heaping up one wrong on top of another, with the result that you will be crushed.

Your machine-smashing, mill-up-blowing plan is wholly false. What next?

B.J.—Yes; I'll drop that; we must take up politics. I guess I'll recommend our voting for the gold standard. That will do it, won't it?

U.S.—The virtues of the gold standard are easily ascertained. A man may believe that stones put into plum-puddings may improve the plum-pudding; and so long as he don't try the experiment he may be blockish enough to believe in the theory. But how do you think he will feel about it after he has put his theory into practice, and loaded his plum-pudding with gravel?

B.J.—Guess he will drop it.

U.S.—So with that gold standard. Haven't we got it now?

B.J.—We have.

U.S.—And how do we fare?

B.J.—From bad to worse?

U.S.—Yes; ever newer and better machinery comes into operation; instead of our getting more wealth, our wages keep on tumbling, and more of us are thrown out of work; the promised gold standard prosperity has been a swindle, it is “stones in the pudding.”

B.J.—Guess I’ll recommend the bi-metallic standard and free coinage of silver.

U.S.—That’s no better. Why does not the gold standard help us?—Simply because it does not put into our hands the machinery of production, but leaves that in the hands of the capitalist class. Would the double standard do otherwise? It does not even pretend to. There may be more dollars coined, but so are now more wires turned out of your factory. Do you get the increase?

B.J.—No, by thunder!

U.S.—The capitalist gets the increased production of wires; so would the silver barons get the increased production of silver dollars. Drop that.

B.J.—Well, then, I’ll recommend free-trade; that, at least, would cheapen goods, and our wages would go further than they do now.

U.S.—Off again! By voting for free-trade you vote for cheaper goods, but at the same time you vote for the capitalist system of the private ownership of the machine. That system makes of our labor a mere merchandise; being a mere merchandise it is controlled by the law that determines the price of merchandise. Now, then, that law lowers the price of a merchandise the moment it lowers the price of what is needed to place that merchandise on the market. Our labor needs food and clothing to be placed on the labor market; lower the price of food and clothing, and you proportionally lower the price of our labor, which is our wages. Thus, by voting for free-trade you vote for cheaper goods, which means also cheaper wages and more profits for our fleecers, the capitalists. Drop that.

B.J.—I have only one more proposition left, it is the single tax. Would not that be at least a step in the right direction? It would give us the land.

U.S.—It won’t give us the land; but suppose it did. Say that you had all the fields around Pittsburg free, could you set up your own wire mill?

B.J.—Why, no!

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—Because, well—because—

U.S.—Because you haven't the capital to set up a mill that can compete with the one you are now employed in. The tremendous displacement of labor that its new machinery brings on tells of its gigantic stature. Even those with some, but inferior, capital will be driven to the wall; you would not have a chance even to start. Thus the land, promised by the single tax, is a snare and a delusion; it would be free only to those who have sufficient capital to avail themselves of the free land; to us working people it would be wholly shut off. Drop that too.

B.J.—What is there left to recommend?

U.S.—Have I been talking to the wind? The reason why gold or silver, protection or free-trade, single tax or many tax, are all plasters on wooden legs indicates, if you understood the reason, what is to be done. To be done is to recommend to the men that they recognize the economic law of the capitalist system. That law drives them down into ever deeper slave degradation. There is no palliative out of that fix. The one thing to do is to address ourselves to the task of repealing that capitalist law. It can not be repealed or even checked, without we overthrow the capitalist system itself, and establish the Socialist Co-operative System, where the land on, and the tool with which to produce shall be the people's property, operated for the people's use. To do that, we must conquer the public powers. And to do this we must consolidate ourselves into a class-conscious political party of our own class, that demands nothing short of the unconditional surrender of the capitalist class. Such a party is the Socialist Labor party, with its economic adjunct, the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance. Make that recommendation to the men; urge them to take that step; then you will square yourselves with the requirements of the times. Having placed yourselves on the side of Civilization in aims and in methods, you will have Civilization on your side. Man plus Civilization is unconquerable, he makes an absolute, an irresistible majority.

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