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DIALOGUE

## UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {153}

By DANIEL DE LEON

**U**NCLE SAM—You seem to be in a great hurry; where are you going?

**BROTHER JONATHAN**—I am going to my union. I am a little behind. I want to square up and withdraw.

U.S.—Withdraw?

B.J.—Yes. What's the use in being in a union? Every sensible man should get out and save his money.

U.S.—Are you gone daft?

B.J.—No. I'm grown wise. I have noticed that the strike and the boycott are played out. They were good enough when the bosses were cockroach bosses. But just as soon as the bosses combine into larger concerns we might as well try to spit at the moon as to beat them with the boycott or the strike. They'll wallop us every time. And that's what's happening now. I haven't money to throw away.

U.S.—And for that reason you would have the unions disband?

B.J.—For that and for other reasons.

U.S.—Which other?

B.J.—As the union cannot win any more with its old and only weapons, it falls into the hands of fakirs who trade upon it, and sell it out, and use it as a footstool to step on and advertise themselves to the politicians.

U.S.—Have you any other reasons?

B.J.—No. Are they not enough?

U.S.—Decidedly not.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

B.J.—What sense is there in paying dues to keep a fakir in a job?

U.S.—In the first place, as far as the fakir question is concerned, the usefulness or uselessness of unionism cannot be settled by it. The fakir is not a fixture. He can be snuffed out. And if the worse were to come to the worse, if the fakir has entrenched himself in such a way, as the so-called officers of the now extinct K. of L. have done, that they can use your own dues to beat you down and flourish in fakirism, you can pull out the bulk of the intelligent men, leave the fakirs to starve high and dry, and start a good, bona fide union. I admit that a thing controlled by fakirs will do labor no good, and will even hurt the workers; and that, even if such a thing dignifies itself with the name of “union,” it should be smashed.

B.J.—And suppose you do, and build up a bona fide, honest organization, what good will that do? The boycott and the strike are played out.

U.S.—Suppose they are: let’s leave that part of the question aside for the present. Do you imagine that the organization of labor by trades has no other good purpose?

B.J.—None that I can see.

U.S.—You have heard of a man called Bismarck, haven’t you?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Pretty powerful man he was at one time, eh?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Well, powerful though he was, and willing and anxious to boot, to squelch the Socialist movement in Germany, and hang every Socialist delegate, did he do that?

B.J.—What, hang them?

U.S.—Yes.

B.J.—No, he didn’t.

U.S.—Why, being so powerful?

B.J.—Guess he didn’t dare to.

U.S.—That’s just it. Even the most powerful and the most willing to do a wrong feel to-day curbed by public opinion. Now, then, vicious though a boss may be, and anxious to do a wrong to one of his workmen, he will feel curbed in his desire if he knows that his men are organized, that they will all resent his action, strike and thereby make public his act. Is that clear?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Thus organization can do some good as a shield, provided, of course, it is in the hands of honest and intelligent leaders, not fakirs.

B.J.—Well, would that alone be worth the dues we pay and the time we spend on the union?

U.S.—I think so. But that is not all. The union answers other good purposes. Are you so sure that the working class won't have to fight physically for their rights? Are you quite sure that the capitalists, ousted at the ballot box by the workers, will not do what the slave holders of the South did—throw to the wind their pretences of being law-abiding, and take up arms to thwart the fiat of the suffrage?

B.J.—Well, no; I'm not quite sure they won't.

U.S.—The union of the workers, always on the alert to fight the boss at opportune moments, and honestly and intelligently conducted, preserves among the workers the proper spirit of resistance. Such unions may some day need the discipline there acquired. They will be found to be brigades ready at hand for final action and final disposal of capitalism.

B.J.—That's quite so. But anyhow, strikes and boycotts must be abandoned.

U.S.—Yes and no. Upon this subject let me read a passage from the proclamation issued by the New Trade Unionist national organization of the country—the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. (Producing the paper and reading.) It is this:

“The Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance of the United States and Canada stands upon the basis of facts, and therefore promises nothing impossible. It knows that the final victory it promises is possible, aye, is assured. IN THE MEANTIME, WHILE THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM LASTS, WE AIM TO USE THE ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS, WHICH WE HAVE ESTABLISHED AND WILL EXTEND, TO WRING SUCH TEMPORARY ADVANTAGES FROM THE CAPITALISTS AS CONDITIONS WILL ALLOW. WE DO NOT SAY THAT THE WORKERS MUST NOT STRIKE OR BOYCOTT. WE KNOW THAT OFTEN THE BRUTALITY OF CAPITAL DRIVES THE WORKERS TO DESPAIR. WE KNOW THAT SOMETIMES THE CAPITALISTS ARE SO SITUATED AS TO AFFORD A CHANCE FOR AN EFFECTIVE CONTEST. On all such occasions we will fight with more vigor and persistence than the old-style organizations ever could, because our ranks are held together by the true spirit of solidarity which grows out of the consciousness of the common

interest of all wage workers in the overthrow of capitalist class rule. Whether these unavoidable contests are carried to victorious results, depends largely upon economic conditions which we cannot control; we make no promise as to that. We need not promise. Defeats will not disconcert us, because these contests will be considered by us merely as skirmishes preceding the great battle of emancipation. But this we can safely promise, that our warfare will not only be more effective than that of the old-style labor organization, but it is the only industrial policy that can bring results. While the old-style organizations, disgraced by corrupt leadership, weakened by ignorance of the right and might of the working class, demoralized by every failure in their blind conflicts with capital, become objects of contempt for friend and foe alike, the determined phalanxes of our New Trade Unionism, marching boldly upon the very citadel of capitalism (its control of the industrial and political machinery), will earn the confidence of the workers and inspire the capitalists with fear, if not with respect. While the old-style organizations, weighed down by the hopelessness of their course, cannot be kept in fighting trim for even those opportunities that business conditions sometimes offer for successful economic struggles against capital, our army, trained for a fight to the finish, and drawing from our growing success at the ballot box ever new assurance of final triumph, will be ever ready for timely aggression and necessary defense. While the old-style organization degraded to the function of herd-camps for the drovers of voting cattle for the capitalist parties, gain nothing but to be kicked with injunctions, clubs and bayonets into greater helplessness, our New Trade Unionism will derive from every advance made in the political class struggle material assistance for the economic efforts, following the example of our fellow-workers in France, whose Socialist representatives vote large contributions in the municipal councils, plead the cause of labor in the halls of parliament and support it with their prestige on the field of battle whenever a strike occurs.”

B.J.—Guess I'll stay in.

U.S.—By all means. You were judging the union by its impotence when in the hands of fakirs. There all dues are pure waste. In the properly conducted union, the union that moves hand in hand with the S.L.P., even the old weapons of the strike and boycott may serve some good purpose; and such a union is a valuable weapon of offense and defense to the workers. Bring all your fellow-craftsmen into it. Get all others to do likewise. The Socialist fights both on the economic and the political line.

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

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