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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {24}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—This quarrel between employers and employees tires me. Why should they not get along nicely together? Now here is a man who expresses my views exactly. Joseph D. Weeks says: “The true relation of employer and employed is that of independent equals, uniting their efforts to a given end, each with the power, within certain limits, to determine his own rights, but not to prescribe the duties of the other.” Now that is what I call sound common sense.



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

UNCLE SAM—I call it arrant nonsense.

B.J.—Would you prefer either to prescribe the duties of the other?

U.S.—Not at all!

B.J.—Would it not be better if they, as independent equals, united their efforts to a common end?

U.S.—Yes, by far.

B.J.—Then my Weeks is right.

U.S.—Your Weeks is a jackass. See here, Brother Jonathan, supposing you wished this moment to go to Chicago, were it not fine if you could find yourself there just as soon as you wanted, without having to go through the trouble of traveling?

B.J.—Yes, indeed.

U.S.—But would your wishing the thing change the fact that it was impossible?

B.J.—Not a bit.

U.S.—Well, it is just so upon the subject of wishing for friendly relations between Capital and Labor, and wishing that the two should treat as independent beings.

B.J.—But why?

U.S.—When does one become an employee?

B.J.—When he has no capital to be his own employer.

U.S.—Exactly. Furthermore, without capital a man must starve to-day, unless he works for another. It follows that when you say “Employee” you say “Dependent Man.” How idiotic, then, to speak of an “Independent Dependent Man!”

B.J.—It is, by Jove!

U.S.—For that reason I say your Weeks and those who babble like him are jackasses. The man who takes employment from a capitalist is that capitalist’s slave, he cannot treat and be treated by him as an independent man; and the capitalist will every time exercise his superiority and “prescribe” to that man.

B.J.—But what is to be done?

U.S.—Make the workman actually independent. This can be only when he owns the capital necessary for production. That he can’t do unless the capital is owned by the whole people. Capital is a social institution, it must be owned by society. The private capitalist must go. In his place must be put the public capitalist or the Co-operative Commonwealth. All other attempts at a solution of the problem are silly patch-work, and look like holding a horse back by tugging at his tail.

B.J.—Well, Weeks is a jackass, true enough.

U.S.—And so is his whole tribe of kid glove reformers.

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

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