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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {311}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—This is going too far! This is awful! These labor unions must be smashed!

UNCLE SAM—Hem!

B.J.—Do you believe in Trades Unions?

U.S.—I do in some; I don't in others.

B.J.—Do you believe in Unions that establish regulations which deprive their members of the freedom to enter into whatever agreement they please?

U.S.—There can be no sensible objection to that.

B.J.—Well, I have a sensible objection to it. We call this a free country; and so it is. True freedom means that men shall be allowed to enter into any agreement, unrestricted and unmolested. To do what the Unions do is a violation of freedom. Smash the Union.

U.S.—Tut, tut, tut.

B.J.—No “tut, tut, tut,” about it; I say the Unions are treasonable, they violate the land's fundamental principle of freedom. Smash them, I say.

U.S.—“Smash them” on the ground that they restrict their membership from absolute liberty to do as they please?

B.J.—Just so!

U.S.—Suppose you feel like selling your vote to me on election day—

B.J.—I couldn't!

U.S.—Not if you wanted to!

B.J.—Not if I wanted to!



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—Because I am forbidden by law from so doing.

U.S.—The law restricts your freedom to enter into such an agreement unrestricted and unmolested?

B.J.—It does.

U.S. (*with a satirical smile*)—“Smash the Law!” Would you?

B.J.—No! But—

U.S.—What, then, becomes of your rigmarole about smashing the Unions on the ground of their restricting their members from doing just as they please?

B.J. (*visibly at sea*)—I must admit that I have lost my foothold. But let me tell you that what I said, and the argument that I held, I read in the papers from the decision of the Chancellor in New Jersey, who issued an injunction restricting the strikers from picketing, and the like. That was no argument. The fellow must be a jackass.

U.S.—No, he is not a jackass; he is simply a hired man of the capitalist class, put there by the capitalist class of labor fleecers to twist the Law so as to get Labor always on the hip, and to blind its eyes with the dust of freedom.

B.J.—In what way?

U.S.—You will admit that to prevent a man from selling his vote is a restriction of his freedom?

B.J.—That it is.

U.S.—And you will admit that it is proper to put that restriction upon him, lest the suffrage be utterly demoralized?

B.J.—I see that.

U.S.—Accordingly, a “restriction of freedom” is not in itself wrong. It may be perfectly right. If by such restriction the welfare of the commonwealth is preserved the restriction is beneficial.

B.J.—I see that.

U.S.—Accordingly, the question to be considered in each case is not the abstract question of freedom or slavery, but the concrete question, whether a specific action is good or bad. If it is good, then to restrict it is wrong, is to interfere with freedom; if it is bad, then the restriction of it is right, because freedom aims at the happiness of the masses, no act that would interfere with that promotes freedom.

B.J. *nods assent.*

U.S.—Now, then, test the action of the Trades Unions by that principle. Do you not

see that if one man is willing to work for lower wages than others he thereby lowers the happiness of all. If that one man chooses to cut off his own {nose} no one might interfere. But if the cutting of his own nose would compel others to do likewise, then his operation ceases to be his private business, and becomes the business of all others. Ain't it?

B.J.—Yes, by Jove! But why, then, is that Chancellor so dead set against it?

U.S.—For the reason that I have already given you. He is not deciding an abstract question of freedom. He pretends to; but that is only swindle. What he is deciding is a concrete question of happiness.

B.J.—Why, then he should not be against it, but for it.

U.S.—Not so. He is a capitalist official. He therefore interprets things from the standpoint of capitalist interests. The actions of these Unions would cause them to receive higher wages. Now where do wages come from?

B.J.—They come from the product of labor.

U.S.—And where do the profits of the capitalist come from?

B.J.—Also from the product of labor.

U.S.—Does it not, then, follow that the higher the wages of the working people, the lower must be the profits of the idle capitalist class.

B.J. (*striking his forehead*)—That's so!

U.S.—Now you will understand why that Chancellor decides as he does. He is deciding in the interest of the class that he represents—the capitalist class. The interests of that class are to demoralize the working class so as to keep from them ever larger slices of the workers' product. Hence he declares that the conduct of these Unions is repugnant to freedom; and so it is—to the freedom of his fleecing class of capitalists.

B.J.—But that's horrible.

U.S.—So it is; and won't be otherwise until the workingmen kick these capitalists out of the public offices, and elect the Socialist Labor Party. Then freedom will be interpreted the other way. The right way.

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

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