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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {92}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Did I not understand you to say on one occasion that the day of the “pure and simple” union was gone, and that owing to the large increase of the unemployed the economic organization alone of the workers was bound to have less and less influence on the fate of the toiling people?

UNCLE SAM—That is just about it.

B.J.—But here I have an article by Adolf Strasser, the late president of the cigarmakers—

U.S.—Telling a different tale?

B.J.—Yes. Look you here. Here is the article. He argues that the labor unions are becoming more and more powerful and will eventually, as pure and simple organizations, rule the land.

U.S.—That is the old chestnut.

B.J.—Nay, nay, it is brand new. His theory is that in 1877 there were only 40,000 organized workers; that these grew; then came a crisis; that these figures went down, but not below 40,000; that the crisis, once over, they started again to grow and reached a larger figure than when the last crisis struck them—

U.S.—This is getting funny.

B.J.—That then another crisis struck them—

U.S.—And then, again, they went down?

B.J.—Yes, but not as low as at the previous crisis; and that it has been going on at this rate, always losing during crises, but always rising after that higher than before,



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until they now are more than ten times stronger than in 1877. How is this?

U.S.—I am only surprised that, having started to prove a theory regardless of all facts, he did not make a stronger case.

B.J.—How do you mean that?

U.S.—I, in his place, wanting to talk big, would have started with the claim that in 1877 there were only 1,000 organized workmen—

B.J.—And—

U.S.—And I would have gone through that cycle of crises in business, raising the figures to suit my own convenience until I had brought the number in 1894 to 20,000,000. I would have then turned a somersault in the air, and landing on my feet, would have shouted: “Here you have it, the pure and simple trade union is on the eve of imperial sway; it numbered only 1,000 men in ’77 and now it is twenty million times stronger!

B.J.—Then his figures are wrong?

U.S.—As wrong as if he had burned a hole in his shirt. Facts are, there were nearer to 300,000 workmen organized in ’77 than 40,000, while now the number of organized is barely 350,000. In other words, during this interval of seventeen years our population increased at a much larger ratio than the unions. At this rate the union pure and simple is steadily decreasing in influence, its ratio to the population is a declining one.

B.J.—Well, well, all his labored figures are no good.

U.S.—Oh, no! His object was not to show that the pure and simple union was a growing thing; his object was simply to cheer up the “pure and simple” labor misleaders—

B.J.—They need cheering.

U.S.—Yes, poor duckies. Their occupation is going fast. As the ground is slipping from under them, Strasser comes with the comfort that after all the “pure and simple” union is not going quite as fast as it might look. He thereby notifies the labor misleaders that they need not fear, and that their source of revenue and the material on which they can trade with the capitalist politicians will outlast them.

B.J.—Well, well; that’s a roundabout way of getting at it!

Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan walk off arm in arm roaring.

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

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