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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {331}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—I'm awfully puzzled.

UNCLE SAM—What about?

B.J.—I'm terribly puzzled!

U.S.—What over?

B.J. (scratching the back of both his ears)—You see, it is this way:

U.S. (looks about)—Which?

B.J.—If I vote for McKinley, I know I would be voting for the glory of the flag; (scratching the back of his ears some more), but then I'd be voting against Bryan, and that would be voting for the damned Trust.

U.S. looks B.J. over like one does a stray June-bug in October.

B.J. (scratching still harder)—If, on the other hand, I vote for Bryan, I would be voting for humanity and to stop the effusion of blood in the Philippines; but (scratching himself all over the head) but, if I do that, I'd be voting against McKinley, and that would be voting against the gold standard. I tell you this is a puzzling campaign!

U.S.—Can you conceive of a strong, healthy man standing between two coffins—one of maple-wood and one of rosewood—and wearing himself out, and scratching himself down to a bone, over the question in which of the two coffins he would prefer to be buried forthwith?

B.J.—Yes, I can conceive that, but the fellow must be an idiot, a born idiot.

U.S.—And for what reason would you consider such a fellow an idiot?

B.J.—For the very simple reason that the fellow should kick both coffins to splinters, and decide not to be buried at all! Who but an idiot would get excited over the



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style of his burial when he has it in his power to live?

U.S.—That’s very well said. And in describing that idiot, you have described yourself to perfection.

B.J.—Me!!!

U.S.—Yes, you! You are in poverty?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Your earnings are going down?

B.J.—Fast!

U.S.—Why?

B.J.—Because there are ever more and more men competing for jobs in the labor market.

U.S.—And how does that come about?

B.J.—It comes about by improved machinery. Every new or improved machine enables the employer to produce more with fewer men than he did before with more men. Thus these machines displace Labor, overstock the Labor market, and necessarily reduce the earnings of the working class. Why, you know all that!

U.S.—So I do. But now, suppose that new machine belonged to the working class, suppose it were public property, would it then displace Labor?

B.J.—Why, certainly not!

U.S.—Why not?

B.J.—Because the working class would not be the fools, if they owned the machine, not to profit by it themselves, instead of allowing it to knock them down.

U.S.—And how would they profit by it?

B.J.—Very easily. If, with a certain machine, 50 men can, with 10 hours’ work apiece, produce as much as 100 men working 10 hours, we would not throw 50 men out of work. We would knock off 5 hours’ work apiece. In that way our well-being would be increased.

U.S.—And why don’t you do that now?

B.J.—Because we don’t own the machine.

U.S.—Accordingly, the life or death question for the workingman turns—

B.J.—It turns around the question of owning or not owning the machinery of production.

U.S.—Does McKinley stand on the principle of the public ownership of the

machinery of production?

B.J.—The divvil a bit he does!

U.S.—Does Bryan, perchance, stand on that, to the workingmen, life-giving platform?

B.J.—Not much he does!

U.S.—Consequently, the tacit platform on which both stand is “Death to the Workingmen,” eh?

B.J. (mops the perspiration off his bald pate)—That’s about the size of it.

U.S.—And there you are! One ticket there is,—the Socialist Labor Party’s ticket, with Malloney and Rimmel for President and Vice-President—, that demands “Life for the Workingmen,” and that ticket you ignore. There are two other tickets—McKinley’s and Bryan’s—which stand for the reverse, and offer you a Gold Standard or an Anti-Expansion coffin to bury you in, and you are bothering about THEM. What else are you doing but the idiot’s act?

B.J. (kicks himself all over)—I was an idiot! I’m one no longer. I care not to be buried, whether in a McKinley or a Bryan coffin. I don’t want to be buried at all. I want to live. Malloney and Rimmel for me!

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