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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {128}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—Do you notice how many able-bodied men approach me nowadays, and ask for help?

UNCLE SAM—Indeed, I do.

B.J.—’Tis their own fault. The old proverb says: “He who breakfasts at a banquet sups with a crust.” Guess those men have been improvident. They spent too much one day, and now have too little and starve.

U.S.—That may have been the case with some; it certainly is not the case with all. With the large majority it is a fast all the way through, only that at such times as these the fasting is intenser.

B.J.—But what makes you think so?

U.S.—The statistical figures. They show us that the working class gets only one-fourth of their products.

B.J.—Is that all?

U.S.—That’s about all; if you take the whole working class into consideration it is less than that.

B.J. (*astonished*)—You don’t say so!

U.S.—Yes; the employer fleeces his employees in round figures of a round half of their product—

B.J.—You now mix me all up.

U.S.—How so?

B.J.—You say the employer fleeces his employees of one-half their product and just



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before you claimed these got only one-quarter of their product; how is that?

U.S.—You don't quote me correctly. I said the employer fleeces his employees of one-half what they produce, and that the working class is robbed of three-quarters of its products by the capitalist class. These are two different things, and no contradiction.

B.J.—I don't see it!

U.S.—I'll show you. Employer Hiram Sneakem has one hundred employees; they turn out four hundred shirts a day, i.e., four shirts a man or woman; Hiram Sneakem sells these shirts wholesale to a retailer for \$200, i.e., 400 shirts at fifty cents a piece; and he turns around and gives his men in payment for their day's work \$1 each. How much does he get out of them?

B.J.—\$1 for every two.

U.S.—Just so. Or translating that into shirts: he gives them the value of two shirts for the value of every four shirts they turn out, eh?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—In this case you will agree that Hiram Sneakem, the capitalist or employer, skins his workers of one-half their product, does he not?

B.J.—Yes; they produce four shirts, for which they receive only two shirts' pay. That's just one-half of their product; but one-half is not one quarter; how do you make it out that Hiram Sneakem gets three-quarters of their product out of them?

U.S.—I did not say Hiram Sneakem got the three-quarters out of the product of the workers, I said the capitalist class, the whole class got that and a good deal more out of the working class. Sneakem is only one.

B.J.—Even so. The whole capitalist class consists of individual capitalists; if each individual capitalist skins his workers out of one-half their product, then the total skinnings can't be more than one-half the total product of labor. That's sound reasoning.

U.S.—Nay, good friend; that's not sound reasoning; that's metaphysical reasoning; it is a reasoning that ignores the facts in the case.

B.J.—I'd like to know how.

U.S.—I'll make it plain to you.

B.J.—Do. To me it looks as if you are trying that two are equal to four.

U.S.—Wait and see. You realize that the individual employer, the capitalist

Sneakem, skinned his workers of one-half what they produced?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—They produced four shirts and he returned to them the value of what?

B.J.—Of two shirts.

U.S.—The value of two shirts on the retail market or on the wholesale market?

B.J. looks blank.

U.S.—He sells the four hundred shirts to the retailer for \$200.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Will that be the price the retailer will retail them for?

B.J.—No! I see now.

U.S.—The retailer will have to get more than \$200 for the shirts he paid that amount for?

B.J.—Exactly.

U.S.—Consequently, the wages Sneakem pays his workers are calculated on the wholesale market price that he sells his goods for.

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—Now follow any one of those employees of Sneakem. They want shirts. Each has received as wages the price of two shirts at wholesale. Can they buy two shirts at wholesale prices?

B.J.—No, they must go to the retailer.

U.S.—The retailer sells those identical shirts at \$1 a piece, how many shirts can Sneakem's employees buy with their wages, with the \$1 which they received?

B.J.—Just one shirt!

U.S.—They produced how many?

B.J.—Four!

U.S.—They can buy back how many?

B.J.—One!!!

U.S.—Do they, in the end get one-half or one-quarter of their products?

B.J. (indignant)—By all the devils in the deepest pit of hell, they only get one-quarter!!! Where, in the name of Satan, are the other three shirts gone?

U.S.—Now watch: Four shirts were produced by these workers; two stick to the

fingers of their employer, and one sticks to the fingers of the other limbs of that Satan called capitalism. The middleman has to live, the landlord has to live, the money-lender has to live, all these parasites have to live and they collect toll on the worker. Thus, before the worker can come into the possession of his actual wages he is stripped of three-quarters of his products, not by the individual employer, but by the combined capitalist class.

B.J.—The robbers! The pirates!

U.S.—But this is not yet all. The capitalist class owns 71 per cent. of our wealth; the working class only four per cent. That's a good deal less than one-quarter of their product.

B.J.—Why, yes; where is that gone to?

U.S.—Right into the pockets of that same robber class.

B.J.—But how?

U.S.—The value of the two shirts paid as wages by Sneakem is paid to the men whom he actually employed; but owing to perfected machinery he has displaced a whole lot; accordingly there are thousands of unemployed belonging to that working class, anxious and ready to work, but deprived of an opportunity to do so. Occasionally, the capitalist takes more of them in, again less; he needs these unemployed; they answer a very useful purpose to him: they lower wages and they are always to be had whenever the employer chooses to expand production. It thus happens that when we look at the whole working class, we find it skinned of a good deal more than one-quarter of its own products.

B.J. mutters a string of oaths.

U.S.—Then we have this ladder of robbery:

First, one-half robbed by the individual employer;

Second, one-half of the remaining half robbed by the rest of the capitalist class, the landlord included.

Third, at the end of the song, the working class finds itself robbed of about nineteen times as much as it is allowed to keep.

B.J.—Such robbery must be put an end to!

U.S.—Now, do you still think the workers are poor because they are improvident?

B.J.—“Improvident,” no, not by a jugful! They are poor because they are mercilessly robbed!

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