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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM AND BROTHER JONATHAN. {359}

By DANIEL DE LEON

BROTHER JONATHAN—What a great pity that is about merchant marine!

UNCLE SAM—A great pity it is: so it is.

B.J.—To think that these dago and English ships are wiping us off the seas.

U.S.—Pretty bad, isn't it? And what shall we do about it?

B.J.—The first thing we should do about it is to muzzle all these croakers against the ship-subsidy bill now in Congress.

U.S.—Why would you muzzle them?

B.J.—Because they are hindering Congress from doing that which will restore us to our rightful place on the seas.

U.S.—I'm all seas. What is the proposition?

B.J.—It is a proposition for subsidies—

U.S.—To whom?

B.J.—To the shipping companies.

U.S.—Oho!

B.J.—What is there to "oho" about?

U.S.—If you are growing thinner every day because I am shipping you, and some one wants you to improve, would it be sensible for him to stand by me?

B.J.—No; he should stand by me.

U.S.—Just so! I "ohoed" because the subsidy is proposed for the wrong man. Our merchant marine is going down. The reason of it is that American sailors are hard to get;



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the reason of that is that the shipping companies are hard on the sailors. Now, then, if our merchant marine is to be helped we must stand by the sailor. That's the long and short of the story.

B.J.—I can well imagine that our sailors are not treated any too well. But the workingmen ashore have nothing to brag about. And yet the applications for jobs ashore are more numerous than the jobs.

U.S.—You are only partially right.

B.J.—Wherein am I wrong?

U.S.—Our workingmen ashore are treated badly—

B.J.—That's just what I said.

U.S.—But the sailor is treated infinitely worse.

B.J.—How so?

U.S.—Suppose you want to quit work—

B.J.—I quit it.

U.S.—What is the worst that could happen to you?

B.J.—O I might forfeit my last day's earnings.

U.S.—Could you be arrested?

B.J.—No!

U.S.—Could you be locked up?

B.J.—No!

U.S.—Could you be thrown into irons in the shop and made to work?

B.J.—Not much!

U.S.—Now all these things can be and are done to the sailor.

B.J.—Nonsense!

U.S.—No “nonsense” about it. A shipping company may cancel its contract with the sailor any time. Not so the sailor with the company. He can be arrested, locked up, brought back to the vessel and thrown in irons.

B.J.—You don't say!

U.S.—Similar was the position of the workingman ashore at one time. Those were the conditions under the laws of Edward II. With the workingman ashore, that has changed. With the workingman aboard, the sailor, that has not changed. The sailor is substantially governed by the old vassal laws of the times of Edward II. Do you wonder

that the American can not be had as a sailor?

B.J.—I'm stumped! What's to do?

U.S.—The thing to do is to “subsidize” at the right end. The present bill before Congress proposes to subsidize at the wrong end. The thing to do is to assert the sailor's rights. The thing to do is to hold the club of Government over the heads of these companies that are squeezing the sailor even worse than the land employers squeeze their employees.

B.J.—But then these employers could not possibly compete with foreign employers.

U.S.—We now face the problem. There are two ways of enabling our employers to compete:

One way is to bully and browbeat our American sailors down to the dago and English level;

Another is to force these dago and English shipping companies up to the American shipping standard.

B.J.—How?

U.S.—First, raise the wages and improve the treatment of the American sailor; and then place heavy discriminating duties against every ship whose crew is not treated up to the American standard!

B.J.—By Juhilican! That would fetch it! That would do it!

U.S.—All else that Congress is proposing is mere swindle. The plan I mention alone will stand. It would be a step IN the RIGHT DIRECTION, the direction of the emancipation of the working class; the step would also come FROM the right direction: It is America that will have to bring the Jubilee to the Proletariat of the world.

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