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EDITORIAL

TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MR. William Jennings Bryan has returned home. Like another much-traveled Odysseus, he is supposed to have gathered much information, and to have greatly undergone the process of mind-ripening. The opportunity to prove expectation true was given him without delay. Hardly back to Lincoln, Neb., when a banquet is tendered him by 700 Democrats. It was a banquet incidental, a Bryan re-debut in fact. And Mr. Bryan spoke. Mr. Bryan, with ruthless hand uncovered and with matchless tongue exposed the rampant corruption of the day, the arrogance of power, the cravenness of the ruled, and then he moved unto the remedy. He said:

“What is the remedy? There is only one remedy—an appeal to the moral sense of the country, an awakening of public conscience.”

This is by far too much, or too little. “Moral sense” is an article of varied significance, to varied people, at varied times. Place two men on a wreck, the material conditions that surround them will turn them cannibals, each will seek to eat up the other. Drop a man, who is not an idiot, in a woolly Western mining camp, and however peaceful his disposition, he will turn himself into an arsenal, self-preservation demands it. To draw nearer still to Mr. Bryan himself, the silver mine baron, as a limb of capitalist society, must produce his silver ingots at the cheapest price possible: the price of his goods depends upon the cost of production: the cost of production depends upon the price of the material consumed in production. As labor is one of these materials, the silver mine baron’s “moral sense” drives him to shoot his merchandise miners if they seek to raise their price, and he considers it a matter of “public conscience” to persecute whoever stands in his way. And so forth and so on. He who says “awaken the moral and public sense” and stops there says nothing.

In that sense Mr. Bryan uttered twenty-three unmeaning words—and that is too much.

If, however, Mr. Bryan meant more than he said; if, as is being rumored, he carries, as the editor of the Hearst St. Louis paper that is soon to make its appearance, concealed in his sleeves some “radical and socialistic” economics, to be promulgated only then—then he said too little. A broken off sentence gives no cue to a man’s thoughts.

To judge Mr. Bryan by what he did say, he wasted his traveling money, at least in so far as it was meant to enlighten him. He is the same reactionist of yore, who can only bring strength to the arm of capitalism.

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

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