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EDITORIAL

BELLAMY'S COACH, OR WORSE, IN THE SENATE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE heated Senate session of June 22, when the hides and leather schedules were under debate, and the “free hidiers” and the “lower hidiers” and the “higher hidiers”—all “in the interest of American Labor”—were exhausted with long speeches and profound critical discussions of the country's condition, and just before the taking of the vote, Senator Robert L. Taylor of Tennessee, usually called “Bob” Taylor, took the floor and delivered a little speech of which the following typical passage is the key note.

“I have watched with deepest interest the storm which has been raging on the other side of this Chamber, not upon the question of whether high tariff is right or wrong, but upon how high a rate the American people will bear in these piping days of reform, so near to those other days before the last election when the Republican party was a walking petition and a living prayer, and when mellifluous streams of promises and pledges of revision poured from the lips of its orators like molasses from the bunghole of a barrel. [Laughter.]

“I have been silent not for lack of inclination to plunge into the discussion, but because I have been overawed by the fierceness of argument and by the keen flashes of repartee, which have thrilled me and filled me with fantastic terrors no mortal ever felt before. [Laughter.]

“I have sat speechless in my chair when the matchless Senator of Rhode Island [Aldrich] rose up, and, standing firm but a little stooped, with the industrial world upon his back, pleaded with suppressed emotion for the wage-earners of our country and demanded that they shall have their 1 per cent of the profits of protection, blissfully indifferent as to who gets the other 99 per cent. [Laughter.] I have dodged behind my desk in mute but

uncontrollable agitation as the thunderbolts of Jove rolled from the esophagus of the senior Senator from Idaho [Heyburn] in defence of the American hog. [Laughter.]

“I have been dumb with admiration as I watched the shepherd Senator from Wyoming [Warren] drive the wolves from the fold, with wool in their teeth, but without the loss of a single Wyoming sheep. [Laughter.] I have retreated to the cloakroom when the impetuous Senator from Utah [Smoot] flaunted his mercerized skirts in the face of the Senate and brandished his German razors in the air. [Laughter.]

“I have watched New York, New England, and Pennsylvania, re-enforced by Illinois and the Pacific slope, throw their battle lines and close in on the rebels of the Middle West, and crush the spirit of secession against high tariff, once more letting down the bars of opportunity, and joyously hugging the Goddess of Liberty, as the big fat calf of the East once more bounds forward to the flowing udder of the West, and walls his eyes and wiggles his tail in speechless bliss as he draws his daily tariff bounty. [Laughter.]

“All these storms have blown for the honor and glory of protection. All these battles have been fought to preserve the dignity of labor. O labor, labor, how many crimes have been committed in thy name! O protection, how often are thy garments made the cloak of greed!”

Such language may be witty, it was, however, strangely out of place considering the solemnity of the previous speeches and the important subject at issue:

Drawing a picture of modern conditions, especially of the relations of the rich and poor to one another, Edward Bellamy compared modern American society to a prodigious stage-coach which the masses of humanity are harnessed to draw toilsomely along a hilly and sandy road. The driver, Hunger, permits no lagging, though the pace is necessarily slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top is crowded with passengers who never get down even at the steepest ascents. These seats on the top are very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants can enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team. Naturally such places are in great demand, and the competition for them is keen, everyone seeking as the first

end in life to secure a seat on the coach for himself and to leave it to his child after him. By the rule of the coach a man can leave his seat to whom he wishes, but, on the other hand, there are many accidents by which the seat may at any time be lost. For all that they are so easy the seats are so insecure, that at every jolt of the coach persons are frequently slipped out of them and fall to the ground, where they are instantly compelled to take hold of the rope and help to drag the coach on which they had before ridden so comfortably. Etc.

The furthest Bellamy went in his description of the conduct of those who rode on top of the coach was that they “critically discussed the merits of the straining team.” He does not remotely indicate that there were any “Bob Taylors” there, who cracked jokes among themselves, upon themselves, and thereby upon the “straining team,” and a lot of other “Bob Taylors” who copied the jokes.

Has Bellamy’s coach taken on board some surgeons of the class that are said to crack jokes at the expense of the patient they are operating on?

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

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