

EDITORIAL

## “NEGLIGIBLE DETAILS.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE Hon. William Jennings Bryan, who does not always talk nonsense, who, on the contrary, whenever he leaves political economy alone, can make very brilliant and exact size-ups, recently illustrated well his penetration in this line.

The recent and sudden bursting forth of the Cleveland boom caused Mr. Bryan to turn upon it the telescope of his knowledge of things. That the boom was called, and presented as, “a spontaneous popular outbreak of the Democratic rank and file,” did not affect his vision. He looked through it; saw that the “spontaneous popular outbreak” proceeded from the columns of certain newspapers; and when these newspapers began to be referred to as “Democratic,” Mr. Bryan laid down his telescope, and expressed the wish that the “names of the men who really dictate the editorial policy of these papers be disclosed.” The size-up was brilliant, it was exact, it was a bull’s-eye,—how much so may be judged from the howl it raised from these same representatives of the alleged “spontaneous popular outbreak.” One of these, the *New York Times*, felt so badly hit that it lost its little head, and declared such a matter—the names of the men who really dictate the editorial policy of these papers—a NEGLIGIBLE DETAIL.



WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN  
(1860–1925)

As well might the man, charged with stealing a diamond pin, found secreted in a secret pocket about him, pronounce the circumstance a “negligible detail.” It is a detail of importance enough to establish the psychology of theft. And so in this instance, the

“negligible detail” is of deep importance to the understanding of the psychology of the political chess game,—a chess game that, just now, is presenting thrilling combinations and situations.

Readers of THE PEOPLE will remember a recent article in these columns in which it was shown that the Presidential nominations of BOTH the two “great parties,” and frequently of several of the smaller ones, are dictated by one and the same small coterie of capitalist magnates, and that, with the extremely rare exceptions when national conventions take the bit in their own mouths and run off with it, these nominations are made so as to entertain the voting public, according as the political lay of the land may happen to be. It was shown that the nominees were all settled beforehand and at the same time, the one to be elected being predetermined. It was also shown that, at times, the political lay of the land is such as to give these “back-parlor conventions” many a good headache. Such an emergency is now on. The “negligible details” in the matter are especially instructive.

The present incumbent in the Presidential chair is capitalist up to the handle; as such there are no objections to him. But man is man; the personal equation is inseparable from him; even under the individuality-destroying capitalist system and among capitalists themselves, idiosyncrasies sometimes bid defiance to all personal interests. Such is the case with Mr. Roosevelt. He is altogether too “picturesque.” He is a bull in a china shop. As such he is a source of worry to the cool-headed, dispassionate coterie of capitalist magnates who dictate nominations. Hanna is their beau ideal. But can they knock down Roosevelt with him? If they could the coast would be clear. But it is doubtful that they can.

It is in view of this doubt that the Cleveland boom has been started. If Roosevelt can not be lurchd of the nomination, then the nomination of Cleveland “by” the Democratic party would save the situation. Roosevelt would be left in the lurch, he would make a campaign of hysterics, the Hanna coterie being underhanded wholly, financially and morally on Cleveland’s side. Cleveland is the haven of refuge of non-partisan capitalism from Rooseveltian “high jinks.”

But at this stage, and all athwart, there comes a third, and highly perturbing “negligible detail.” It is the Hearst boom. Hearst, as well as Hanna, is a genuine product of capitalism. But while the latter represents the solid, sober dollars-and-cents and get-

more-of-them spirit of capitalism, the former represents the reverse of the medal: the “prodigal son” element: the what-have-we-got-all-this-money-for-if-not-to-buy-all-we-like-with element. A Presidential chair is coveted by this element, as at other times it may covet a woman’s honor, or any other “gew-gaw.” This element is brilliant; it, of course, verges on the demagogic; what is more, it has the knack, which the Hanna element lacks, of absorbing whatever crude revolutionary electricity may be lying around loose in the atmosphere. This element can develop, occasionally, great strength. What strength it can develop, and what power for mischief is latent in it, the history of Rome is replete with illustrations on. The Hearst boom, then, comes athwart the calculations of the sober, “on all fours” Hanna capitalist element. Will Hearst snatch off the nomination in 1904 as Bryan did in 1896? That is the great question that is disturbing just now the sleep of the Hannas. If he does, then Roosevelt must be turned down and a safe, i.e., sober capitalist candidate set up by the Republican convention; if he does, and Roosevelt is not turned down, then, despite their will, the “on all fours” capitalists will have to wheel in line for Roosevelt and bleed hard out of their pockets,—a prospect not at all agreeable to them. The only salvation is the failure of Hearst and the nomination of Cleveland.

Are not these “negligible details” thrilling enough for yellow covers? And what else are they besides but so many “negligible” (?) thorns in the pillows of sober American capitalism?

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