

Critique of Capitalism for Kidz!

Volume 3: The Great Financial Meltdown of 2008



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Published by Blue Highway Publishing

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The Great Financial Meltdown of 2008

Once upon a time there was a sad clown.

He answered an ad in the newspaper: "Clowns wanted. Become part of our team!"

He was hired.

So were a bunch of other clowns.

They all boarded a bus. The driver happened to be the very same clown who had hired them and organized the trip. He wore a top hat and a dollar green jacket.



Clowns, Inc.

"I think the radiator has a leak," said the sad clown, who was sitting near the driver. "You probably ought to fix it. And if you aren't going to fix it, then you'd better at least top it off and bring some extra coolant along.

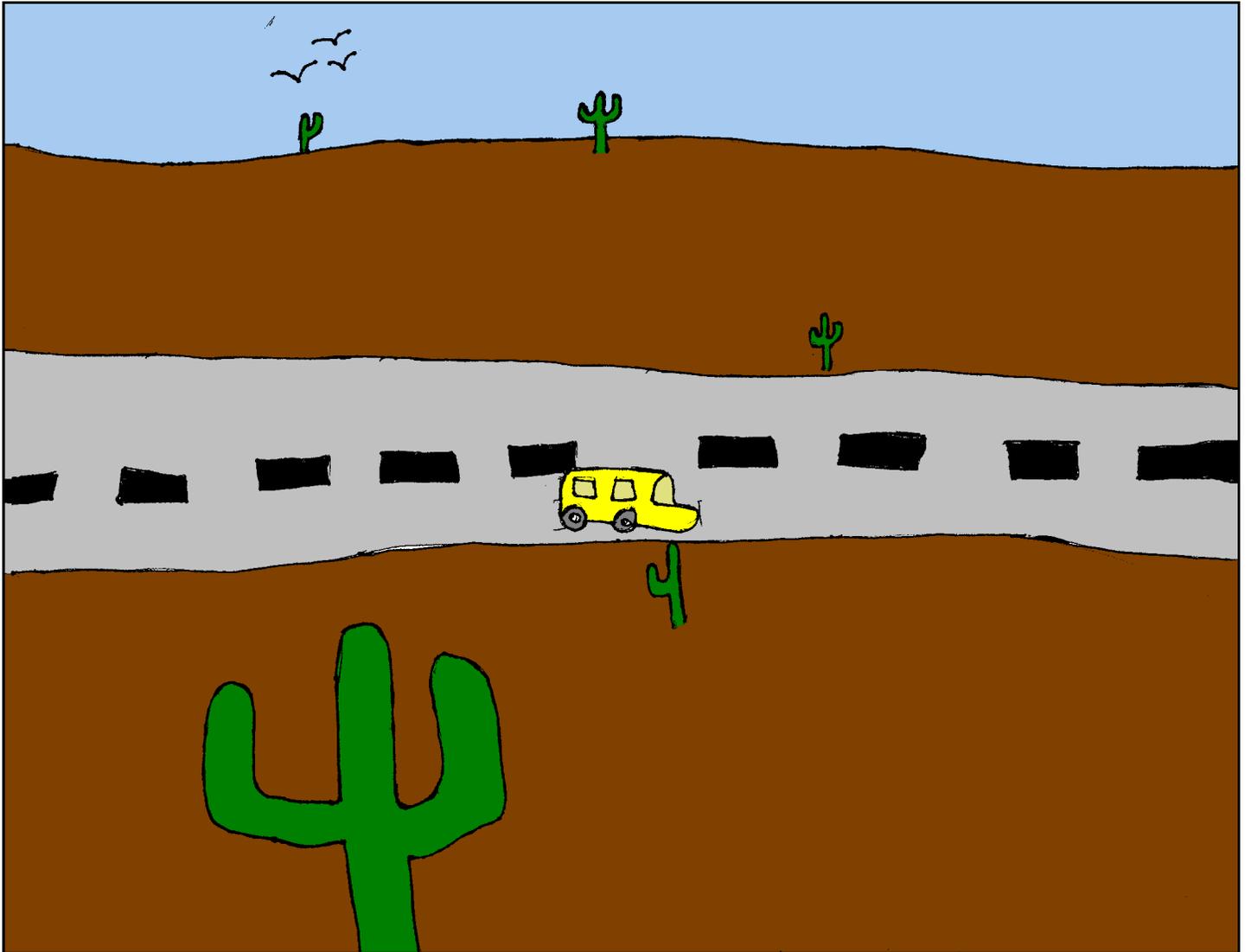
"I'm sorry," he added.

The driver ignored him.

"It's a long ride," said the sad clown. And he sighed.

"I'm the driver," said the driver, starting the engine. "And I say there's no problem with the radiator."

They drove for hours. The bus broke down in the middle of the desert.

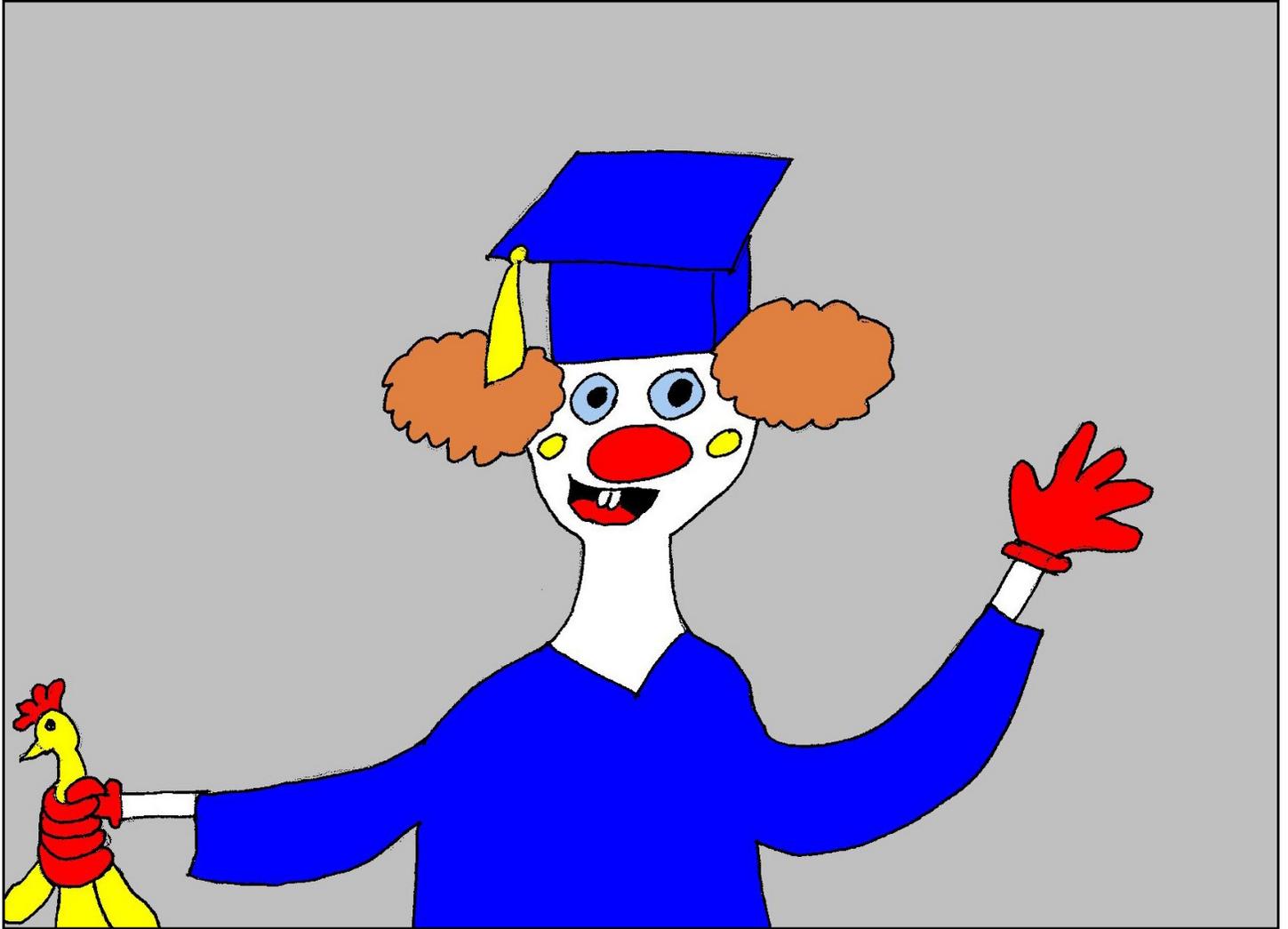


"What are we going to do?" the sad clown asked.

"I'll tell you what we're going to do," said the driver, standing up. "We're going to impose austerity measures on you clowns."

"On us?" the sad clown asked. "But you're the one who drove us all into the middle of the desert with a leaky radiator. How about we impose austerity measures on you?"

"No, we can't do that," the driver said with dignified resignation. "You see, I am the best and the brightest. You can tell because I'm the boss, and you're not; because I'm rich, and you're not. And you just can't impose austerity measures on the best and the brightest. That would be counterproductive."

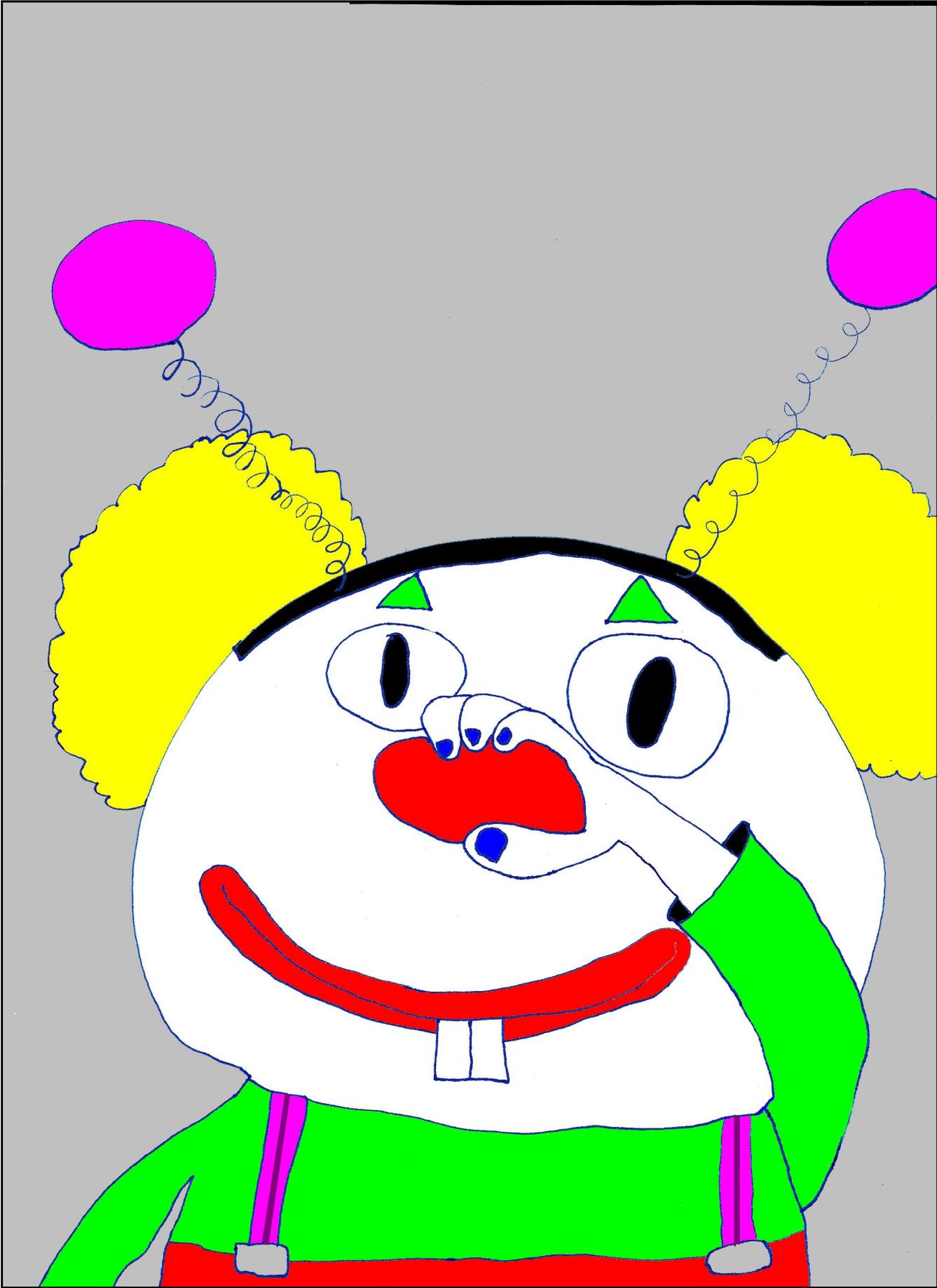


An unemployed philosopher clown interrupted, saying, "Being a rich boss only proves you're the best and brightest if you start by defining rich bosses as the best and the brightest. It's a rhetorical tautology."

"Don't try to muddle the issue with fancy language," said the driver.

"Maybe you're just greedy and bossy," the sad clown offered.

"That's a terrible thing to say," replied the driver, in an aggrieved tone. "And you ought to be ashamed of yourself."



Then, slowly, like an indulgent parent explaining something to a child, he told them all, "Everyone wants to be a rich boss because we are all rational pleasure seekers. And the best and the brightest are the ones who succeed at business and become rich bosses. The cream rises to the top. Everyone knows that."

"But we are not a bucket of milk. We're a busload of clowns," shouted a clown from the back.

Several clowns honked their noses in agreement.

"I'm only semi-rational," the sad clown admitted. And he sighed. "And I'm afraid I don't like telling other people what to do."

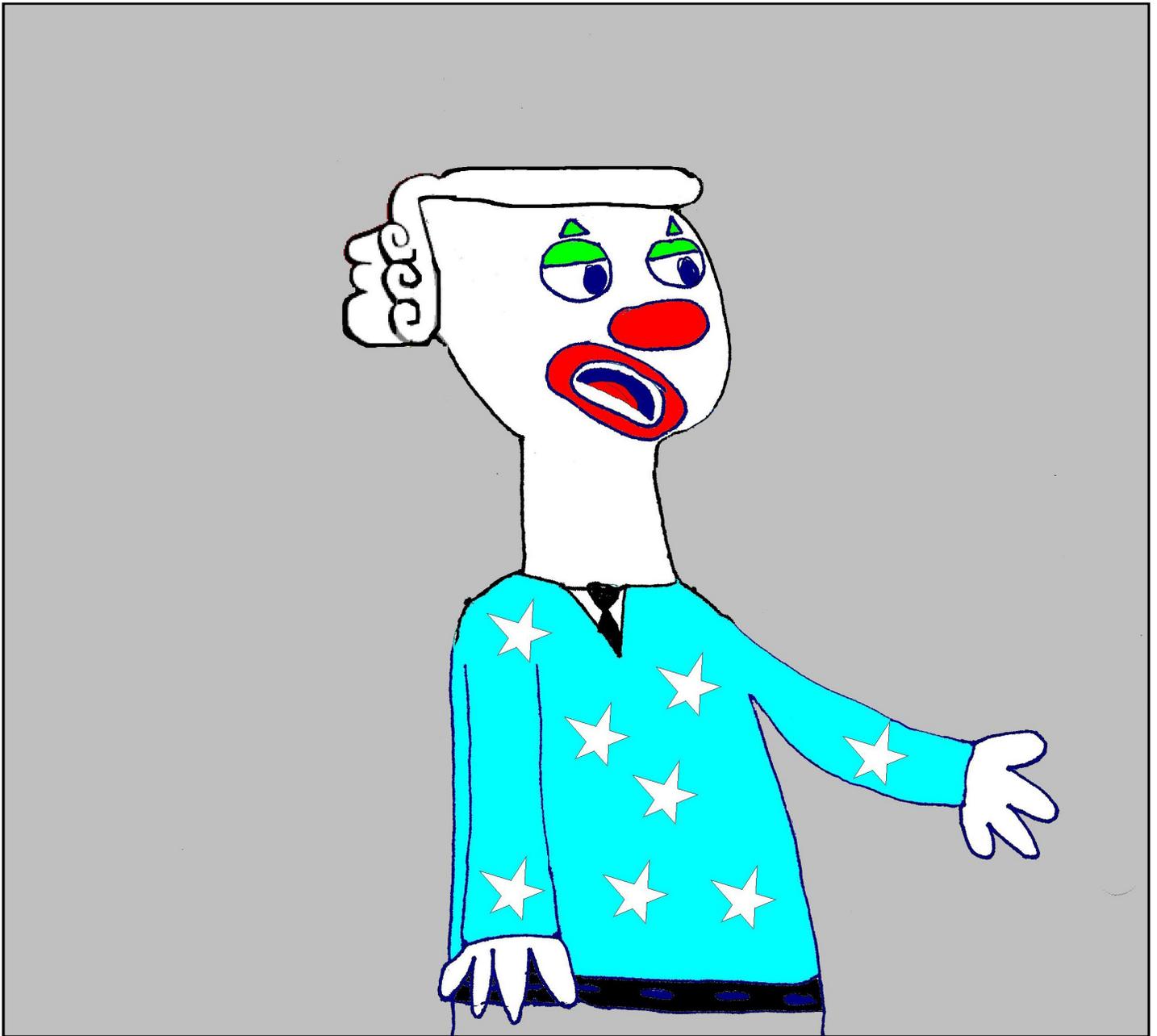
I'm sorry," he added.



"But even if you are the best and the brightest," the sad clown continued, "You are still the one who drove us all into the middle of the desert with a leaky radiator. Why should we pay to fix it? You're rich and we're not. And even if you pay for the repairs you'll still be rich and we still won't be. But if we pay, you'll be rich and we'll all be broke."

"Well, first of all, let me just say that it wasn't my fault," said the driver. "No one could have predicted it." This was said in the no-nonsense style of a courtroom judge.

"Second, it's no good looking backward and casting blame. We've got to look forward." This was said in the inspiring style of a motivational speaker.



"Third," said the driver, and he now spoke with the relaxed authority of the Very Serious People who appear on the Sunday talk shows, "If I were to pay for the repairs in order to benefit you clowns, it would simply be penalizing success. It would amount to a redistribution of wealth. It would be socialism. And I'd rather see you clowns die of thirst out here in the desert than to see you have to endure even a little bit of socialism. You see, I'm a patriot."

He backed that up by turning his jacket inside out. It was a reversible jacket, and the side now facing out was star spangled blue. He took off his top hat and revealed a long white wig.



"Finally," he said, and the clowns heard tough love in his voice, "It's time we face some economic realities: I've been too easy on you clowns. That's the real reason we're in trouble. For instance, you could be sitting on crates in the back of a stake-bed truck, instead of sitting on padded seats in an air conditioned bus. That would have saved a lot of money. That money could have been used for repairs."

Then he adopted the professional but compassionate tone of a doctor at someone's bedside. "I'm going to be honest with you. There are no painless solutions. It's time for people to pull together. It's time for some belt tightening."



"But let us not despair," he said, his voice suddenly soaring like a preacher's. "We've been through tough times before, and I know..." He paused to great effect. "We Can Do This!"

Well, the clowns were convinced, and emptied their pockets to pay for the repairs.

Once they were back on the road, the sad clown asked the driver, "What would you have done if we hadn't agreed?"

"Oh, I would have fired you all," he said. "And then called the police and had you jailed for vagrancy."

The sad clown sighed.

The End

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