
The New Republic

by Eugene V. Debs

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Bellamy's *New Nation* we have from time to time contemplated with sensations of special pleasure. It is to come as day emerges from the night. First the arrows of light, pencilled drawings betokening the coming of the god of day, steadily growing and glowing in effulgence, shadows flee away and finally the source of life and light and heat coming into full view and rising grandly to meridian glory. Then the winter of man's discontent, made glorious summer by the sun Nationalism, comes no more upon the earth. Poverty takes everlasting flight and the millennium, so long prayed for, appears and comes to stay. We have long ago fallen in love with Bellamy's picture. As a work of art, it is divine; it is to the last degree creditable to Bellamy's imagination, and we sign for its realization.

Go wing your flight from star to star —
From world, to luminous world, as far
As the universe spreads its flaming walls.¹

And you will find hung upon those "walls" nothing more beautiful than Bellamy's *New Nation*. It is to come without war. No bugle blast is to call to arms. It is to come as does the garniture of fields and forests, at the bidding of the sun and rain, the emerald grass, the wild flowers, and all the varied beauties which nature spreads out with lavish hand to adorn the world. Who so cold, so stolid, so deaf and blind as not to wish for the coming of the *New Nation*? Who so inert and passionless as not to listen for the sounding symphonies of the merry stars and the shouts of the sons of God at the birth of the *New Nation*?

¹ Snippet from "Paradise and the Peri," by Thomas Moore (1779-1852).

But there is another scheme on foot. It is to have a “New Republic.” The scheme owes its origin to Mr. Thomas Lake Harris, of Santa Rosa, California.² Bellamy’s *New Nation* devotes considerable space to Mr. Harris’ scheme and we are indebted to the *New Nation* for what we know of the matter. The “New Republic” is to come as comes the earthquake, the thunderbolt, the tornado; it is to be preceded by calamities, and all the portents are now in the air. Hear Mr. Harris — he says:

The war of strikes and boycotts threatens always to become a war of public insurrection. Pinkerton’s police, state militia, the sheriff’s posse are powerful; but so are the massed toilers; their roused and maddened wifehood and motherhood; so is dynamite. A mortgaged agricultural state, ruined by failing crops, 10 percent interest, onerous rates of railway transportation, tariff taxes, prices of farm products reduced below the cost of production by the system of cornerage — what is this but a state on the edge of revolution or secession? It is easy to conceive of a possible situation, in which the farming states, as independent sovereignties in the union, may array their governing authorities, legislature, courts, citizen soldiery, against the federal powers. It is easy to look on to the birth of a new confederacy; our Union is not a band of invulnerable steel, it is a glass globe; we feel already the jar of the concussions; its atoms may fly apart, it may shiver into fragments.

Paradise is in the air; the atmosphere of our social hope is impregnated by diffused elysium. This utterance proceeds in that promise; but there is also an air of terror. The toiling masses of the people can be led through miseries, disappointments, ruinous calamities; on a certain point they must be driven by their task-masters like cattle toward the shambles. Starvation of the body, starvation of the mind, heart, and hope, starvation that with spectral shadowing extinguishes the fire of the hearth and slays the comfort of the bed, that smites the babe upon its mother’s bosom, and shrouds at last that mother for the grave — this in its long approaches is endured, but in the last extreme it loosens the passion of revenge, the desperation of ruin that is latent in the naturality of man; it leads forth a storm of mania that is the opposite of the evolutionary whirl.

² **Thomas Lake Harris** (1823-1906) was an English-born Universalist minister turned Swedenborgian spiritualist who founded a series of collective living communities in New York and California based around his charismatic personality and highly unorthodox millennialist ideas.

When the cry is heard, "Bread or blood!" the plutocratic rulers may well tremble. This is not so far off, by the law of the alternative, but that quickening senses may now feel it tingling toward them. If all the promise of the past is latent in our nation for the evolution of its social humanhood, the savagisms, the barbarisms of all that past lie latent in its animalized cupidities. Coiled like gigantic serpents they wait, if roused and unfettered, to whirl forth upon the land in all the power and deadliness of wrath that is implied in such enormous heredities. Then reason is nowhere, the instinct of self-preservation is lost, is swallowed up in the final instinct of destruction. The wise of old have written: "It is dangerous to trifle with the avenging fates."

Now there is here a body of toilers, men and women, numbered by millions, to whom every outrage offered to the fellow is felt as a personal indignity, a dart that quivers and rankles in their own flesh. In this common multitude, made one by the sympathy and sensitiveness of the common outrage, this latent mania exists in full force, but is held hitherto in the consensus of repression. It struggles and is forced down; it heaves again and again, made by each new indignity less patient, more determined, more terrible — loosening by little and little the accustomed restraints that held it in subjection.

"Bread or blood!" — at any hour when the cry lifts wide and persists the mania may emerge. There is not here to meet it, as in Europe, the obedient force of millions of soldiery. Our government does not rest on force. It is based on popular consent. These thousands of millions of dollars of the people's earned wealth, these hundreds of thousands of square miles of the people's heritage are appropriated by the capitalistic few, whose title holds only by pen and ink that has no binding force, excepting for so far and so long as the people is acquiescent.

Let a whirl of mania forestall the final outlet of the whirl of evolution, and the insurrectionary explosion may flash across the continent, from seaboard to seaboard, between the rise and set of sun. Then the rule of the prudent wise of the multitude is lost in the reign of terror. mania, the infernal goddess whose hand brandishes the torch, may show by it the road to the guillotine. For the last quarter of a century we have filled up the land with the discontented myriads of the Old World; they came expecting freedom, but have found new servitudes; they came led on by hope, they sit down brooding and sullen with despair. The skies do not brighten to them, they darken and darken on.

Social nationalism and the kindred preparatory movements, by instilling hope and patience into the oppressed masses, hold in suppression the explosive forces. But these forces are ap-

proaching terribly near the surface, the limits of the safety-line are very nearly overpassed.

Man have a curious habit of shutting the mental eyes to what they dislike or are afraid to see. Another habit, when successful, is that of thinking in their phrase, that "old Mr. Luck will always be good to them." This habit holds possession of the average American mind. "No nation was eve so successful as ours; therefore it must always be successful." They forget: this nation has been in rapid motion. A thousand years of result have been whirled into one century. Living so fast, it has lived almost to its end. Its tomorrow is with death. It may rise again, a new and glorious republic, socialized humanely to the resurrection of the just; but, as to its present form, movement, custom, and environment, it must first die.

The New Nation says Mr. Harris is what is termed a "socialist nationalist," but without reference to what he calls himself, or is called, he sees frightful things, and he sees them, or thinks he sees them, with terrible distinctness. To him everything looks red or blue. He hears terrific sounds, the earth trembles beneath his feet, and the atmosphere is charged with lightening, dynamite is lying around loose everywhere; the United States is one great powder magazine. Men are preparing to lay hold upon the pillars of the States and shake down the superstructure. The imagination of Mr. Harris is awfully lurid, and like the old German, who, in early times camped near the Hot Springs in Arkansas, he thinks hell is not more than half a mile distant. Mr. Bellamy should labor to change the character of Mr. Harris' reflections. As matters stand, we feel like repeating the old darkey's inquiry:

What yo' gwine to do
When de world's on fire?

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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