
An Era of Bloodhoundism

by Eugene V. Debs

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“Down South,” when a “nigger” commits a crime and runs away, the first thought is to put bloodhounds upon his track. Some “niggers” evade the hounds. The hounds lose the “scent,” and the “nigger” goes free, at least for a time. “Up North” things are transpiring which suggest the bloodhound tactics in vogue “down South.” When workmen arouse the ire of the railroad magnates by resisting oppression, spoliation and degradation, having no faith in the ordinary methods of repressing wrong, the magnates fly to the federal courts, which promptly issue “injunctions, which in every essential particular are as arbitrary and as despotic as ever emanated from a tsar or a sultan, and to compel obedience, selections are made from the rabble and criminal element to play the rule of deputy marshals, and armed with pistols, they are put upon the track of workingmen, *a la* bloodhounds hunting “niggers,” to capture or to kill as their brutal instincts may dictate, and when these official hounds do not suffice, these federal officials, paid from revenues created by labor, “touch the button,” and the land swarms with troops, ordered out by state and federal authorities, and then the plutocratic class and their lickspittles, the press vermin, that riot in the hair and intestines of corporations, applaud such bloodhoundism.

Rev. John Snyder, in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, in the list of “Timely Topics,” which he discusses, refers to the act of President Cleveland in sending federal troops to Chicago, an act which has been uproariously endorsed by both houses of congress. Mr. Snyder professes to have “unbounded confidence in Mr. Cleveland’s honesty and patriotism and large admiration for his wisdom and statesman-like qualities;” nevertheless, he believes that Governor Altgeld, of Illinois, in his acts and protests, “is nearer the spirit and purpose of the constitution than the President.” He offers a lame apology for the course pursued by the President, and adds:

But history shows that nations have seen their rights gradually melt away under just such pleas of pressing necessity. Besides, there is no evidence that such an emergency had arisen as the President seemed to assume. The state of Illinois was abundantly able to cope with the conditions, even though the moving or detention of the United States mail was a question at issue. The danger has already passed, and as serious as it was, it never assumed such proportions as justified the denial of the clearly implied right of the state of Illinois to protect the interest of its citizens without federal interference; and a bad precedent has been established. The very heart and core of our governmental system is found in state autonomy. Take that away and we become simply and unwieldy and inelastic mass which will slowly drift into a centralized and bureaucratic despotism. We fought the war of 1861 to destroy the notion that this union could be legally dismembered: not to cancel or obscure the plain, constitutional right of state sovereignty. Mr. Altgeld may be an anarchist and a blatherskite, but I solemnly believe that when this hour of natural human passion has passed away his protest to the President's action will be regarded as sound in logic and strong in its adherence to the spirit of constitutional law.

In analyzing the foregoing, it is easy to see that the writer believes President Cleveland to be a usurper, who has violated the constitution and has established a dangerous and an alarming precedent, which has only to be followed and re-enacted as often as the creatures of federal preference may demand it, to ultimately establish a despotism upon the ruins of the Republic. That their executive outrages are perpetrated in the interest of the rich is shown in every stage of the proceedings. In the name of law and order law is struck down, the will of a despot is substituted, and though quiet may be established by bullets and bayonets it is not *order*, but oppression, submission *par* necessity, with a proviso, to be thrown off when conditions promise a glimmering chance for the downtrodden to break their yokes and chains — a policy fruitful of protests and inflammatory appeals, calling always for more troops and other equipments to maintain a government which was once the government, by, of, and for the people, which found its support, strength and glory in the intelligence, prosperity and sympathy of the masses, but which now in its legislative, judicial and military departments is a government by, of, and for the plutocratic class, from which the masses are turning with loathing.

This condition of things is treated with levity and scorn. The courts issue decrees and fine and imprison men without trial, and when men protest, chief executives, with the vengeance of savages, institute bloodhound tactics and hunt down those who dare resist, as bloodhounds pursue “niggers” “down South,” and this is done beneath the starry folds of the national flag, and men are expected to sing —

Long may it wave.

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.¹

No sane man can contemplate present conditions with composure. The whole country is volcanic. There is a hot breath of discontent rising from the throats of millions of oppressed men, like smoke from active volcanoes, and the country is in the grasp of alarms, and federal and state bloodhoundism will not make things better.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport

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¹ “The Star Spangled Banner” (1814), by **Francis Scott Key** (1779-1843) was originally written with four verses. The penultimate line of the second verse reads: “*Tis the star spangled banner, long may it wave.*”