

THE NEED FOR A FEDERAL ELECTIONS LAW

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Speech in Congress on the Elections Bill

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Mr. MILLER. Mr. Chairman, it is late in the day and in the session, but some things are being said to which I should like to reply. To hold office is a precious gift, and the race to which I belong are desirous of it, but there are gifts superior to office. Gentlemen talk about the North and about its not giving negroes representation on their tickets. That is not the thing we are suffering most from in the South.

There are other things of more importance to us. First is the infernal lynch law. That is the thing we most complain of. It is a question whether when we go to work we will return or not. Second, they have little petty systems of justices who rob us of our daily toil, and we can not get redress before the higher tribunals. Third, we work for our task-masters, and they pay us if they please, for the courts are so constructed that negroes have no rights if those rights wind up in dollars and cents to be paid by the white task-masters.

They speak about pure elections and call the election law a force law. Do not gentlemen from the South boast here in their speeches that it is the white man's right to rule and to control elections, and if they can not control them by a majority vote they will control them by force or fraud? Take the speech delivered by my colleague from South Carolina [Mr. HEMPHILL], and you will see his brazen-faced boast that it is his right to remain here even without votes; and then when we have an appropriation bill the North is to be taunted with not giving negroes representation upon their tickets.

Yes, gentlemen, we want office; but the first and dearest rights the negro of the South wants are the right to pay for his labor, his right of trial by jury, his right to his home, his right to know that the man who lynches him will not the next day be elected by the State to a high and honorable trust; his right to know that murderers shall be convicted and not be elected

to high office, and sent abroad in the land as grand representatives of the toiling and deserving people.

These are rights that we want; and we call upon you gentlemen of the North to speak for us and ask the Chamber over yonder to give us an election law—not a force law—a national law, Mr. Chairman, that will compel the people of the South to register the votes of the negro and the white man alike, and count them as they are cast, and let the wishes of those people in this American country be expressed here by duly elected Representatives of their States. [Applause on the Republican side.]

The sickly sentiment about not giving negroes positions in the North! The negroes of the North have their schoolhouses. Taxes are levied and schoolhouses supported. What do we find in South Carolina, where the Democrats rule? First, the newly elected governor, who claims to stand upon the platform of Jefferson's principles, denies that all men are born free and equal and endowed with equal rights by their Creator. In his annual message to the Legislature he asks for the annihilation of the public-school system which is bringing South Carolina out of the bog of ignorance that she is in to-day and fast placing her along in the phalanx of other States in prosperity.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CUTCHEON. I yield the gentleman five minutes more of my time.

Mr. MILLER. Why, Mr. Chairman, the governor in his annual message, to re-establish ignorance, desires to close the schoolhouse door against the poor children by creating class schools. Yes; that is the way. What does he recommend? He recommends that the constitutional guaranty of a 2-mill tax be abolished; that communities be left to themselves to levy school taxes; and to the community shall also be left the right to say whether the education of the rich man's son or the education of the poor man's son shall be supported by the taxes levied. How do they seek to do it? The largest taxpayers are those people generally who have not many children; and as they are compelled by the State law to pay a tax, it is to be left to them whether it shall be used to educate the poor man's child or whether it shall be used to educate their children. It amounts to having no educational system at all and is

the destruction of the school system down there. Then they come North and speak about the bitterness of sectionalism, while right there in our Southland country, for want of experience, the governor of South Carolina recommends the destruction of the school system, which has been erected upon the promise of universal education.

What else does he do? He recommends the abolishment of two colleges established, by my assistance, to educate the white young men that they may know how to lead the old State up out of poverty and ignorance. Ah, gentlemen, what we need in this land is not so many offices. Offices are only emblems of what we need and what we ought to have. We need protection at home in our rights, the chiefest of which is the right to live. First, the right to live, and next the right to own property and not have it taken from us by the trial justices. I will read you an illustrative chapter, if gentlemen will allow me the time. A Democratic lawyer from my State, Mr. Monteith, speaking about the trial-justice system as sustained by the Democratic party of that State, says that under it no man is secure in his rights, and he gives a picture like this.

I hope gentlemen will listen. A negro was employed to plow for a white man for \$10 a month. This man had a game hen. The hen was lost, and simply because the negro was plowing there he was assumed to be guilty of stealing her, was tried and sentenced to imprisonment, and they chained him by his hands to the plow, but before the thirty days of his sentence expired the good old game hen, with fourteen chicks, came out from under the barn where she had been "setting." [Laughter and applause.] The same gentleman gives another illustration which will bring the blush of shame to the face of every white man. A negro woman, in the absence of her husband, got into a dispute with a white neighbor concerning a boundary line, a question which the trial justices have no right to settle; but they take such a question when it comes before them and whip it around and whip it around until they manage to work it into a criminal case. They put this woman on trial in his absence, and, although her attorney pleaded that she was in a condition in which women can not go to court, she was tried, convicted, and sentenced; and a white constable went to her house, two hours after she had become a mother, dragged her from a sick

bed and carried her 15 long miles, to the very seat and center of the intelligence of our State, old Columbia. There, to the honor of the jailer and his white wife, they called together several women, white and black, and they ran that inhuman constable away from the jail and took the poor woman and made her an object of charity.

These are some of the outrages that are inflicted upon my people in the Southland which this "force" bill, as you call it, will protect them from; because, if we get it, instead of seeing South Carolina represented as she has been in this Congress by seven Democrats, you will find six or seven Republicans here. The offices will not go around among the Democrats, and then the spirit of fight that made them secede will make them break up the Democratic party and we shall have peace. [Applause on the Republican side.]