

## “The Destruction of a Free Ballot”

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MR. SPEAKER, much has been said on this floor regarding the presence of soldiers at or near the polls on election day, and on the fact that Governor Chamberlain requested military protection from the National Government during the campaign preceding the election. If the military had interfered to suppress the exercise of free speech during the campaign or a free ballot at the polls on election day by the democrats, there would be some propriety and pertinency in these complaints; but when it is so notorious that the military only protected from violence the republicans in the exercise of their right of free speech and free ballot, which the democrats endeavored to suppress by violence and intimidation, these complaints become absurd and unreasonable. All these objections to the presence of troops, when the reasons on which these objections are founded are wholly wanting, have, to say the least, a refreshing coolness; and when in addition it is so well known that their presence prevented the party complaining from carrying out their nefarious designs of depriving the party protected by them from the exercise of their political rights, it presents the most remarkable spectacle of the exact reversal of a political axiom otherwise sound and excellent. In a word, the presence of troops when they prevent the exercise of free speech and a free ballot is decidedly objectionable, but when they interfere to protect its exercise by both or either parties there can be no objection except by the party that seeks to suppress or prevent them. It is urged that the presence of soldiers in the State prevented contestant from being returned elected, by protecting, I suppose, those who gave me the majority of the votes.

This fact aroused his virtuous indignation; but the gentleman has no indignation to spare against the State militia forces that were so largely employed to defeat my re-election in 1878. The presence of the military at the Sumter meeting of October 12, 1878, when the artillery from Columbia united their forces with

the infantry of Sumter County and loaded their cannon with bags of ten-penny nails to fire upon the unarmed republicans is now a matter of history. The conduct of the State military forces at this meeting was but a specimen of the manner in which they acted not only throughout my congressional district but in every other part of the State. From the above it is evident that the objection is not to a military force *per se*, but to the national arms. Where the State military force succeeds in accomplishing what the national force prevented, namely, suppression of free speech and free voting, there is no objection to their presence at election time. Can anything better prove the hollow mockery of these objections and the wisdom of Governor Chamberlain in asking for troops and of President Grant in sending them? What a contrast in 1876! We had comparatively a fair election, free from violence, but not free from democratic fraud. But in 1878 both fraud and violence united to crush out a legitimate republican majority in my district of about 6,000, and gave the democratic candidate a majority of 8,000. He could have been declared elected by a majority of 20,000 with as much legal propriety. I now come to the thought with which I desire to conclude these remarks.

It has been asserted and dwelt upon with force and emphasis on this floor that the corruption of the republican party was great. I have not denied that some pecuniary corruption existed during the first four years of republican rule in South Carolina, in the perpetration of which republicans and democrats were combined. Democrats outside the Legislature, who wanted special legislation enacted, were the first to corrupt the republicans. The briber, my moral philosophy teaches, is just as bad as the bribed. I notice there has been no word of condemnation for them, while the republicans have been assailed. The republican party in South Carolina was destroyed in 1876-77; not by desertion of thousands of them who went over to the democrats, as the gentleman from Louisiana asserted in the paragraph following:

By the middle of October, 1876, the fortunes of the republican leaders in South Carolina had grown desperate. The colored voters were deserting them by thousands. They were flocking to democratic meetings; they were riding in democratic processions; they were joining democratic clubs. On this point there can be no doubt—

but for the want of a simple guarantee of protection in the exercise of their acquired rights. The Government that had bestowed the gift failed to sustain and protect them in the enjoyment of the same. Up to this time the democratic party has been in possession of the State for two years, and an important election has taken place during that period.

Now, let us compare the two governments of these two parties during that period and see if the ills complained of have not been cured by the substitution of greater and more fundamental evils. Republicans ruled under Governor Chamberlain from 1874 to 1876, and in the first two years of democratic rule under Governor Hampton, say from 1876 to 1878, no corruption has been charged much less proven against the former's administration. As compared with Governor Hampton's doubtless it was more extravagant; that I concede for sake of argument. Now let us see if economy has not been purchased at much too dear a rate. The democrats have had control for two years; what are the fruits of that power? While no individual corruption has been charged against those in power, the State to-day is an acknowledged repudiator in the exchanges of the world. After solemn pledges that the bonded debt should be held inviolate she refuses to pay the principal and interest of her bonds, and her public credit has been utterly ruined thereby. One of her own native-born judges says with stinging sarcasm, in deciding in favor of the validity of the bonds that the Legislature has repudiated, "that the State should certainly return money she has received and used from the sale of bonds before she repudiates them." Her bonds that could have readily been sold when the democrats were inducted into power are now begging purchasers at any price; public schools are closed nine months in the year.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that are far more precious in the eye of the American citizen at least than all the wealth of the Indies, and those are human liberty and human rights. These are fundamental and much prized by my race; yes, sir, superior to all pecuniary consideration, as the soul is to the body. For their possession and their complete exercise men and nations have willingly laid down their lives in all ages. It is for this that even the uncivilized Zulus are fighting in Africa to-day. But to the point. Can the saving of a few thousand or hundreds

of thousands of dollars compensate for the loss of the political heritage of American citizens? Must the will of the majority to rule, the very foundation and corner-stone of this Republic, be supplanted, suppressed, or crushed by armed mobs of one party destroying the ballots of the other by violence and fraud? The destruction of a free ballot by the democrats is an evil of greater magnitude than the extravagance of the republicans. The one will eventually destroy the Republic by sapping the foundation of its sacred institutions, while the other is but a comparatively slight and temporary evil, which ill can easily be repaired.

This is but the record of the respective parties for the past four years. I cannot believe there is a true American citizen on this continent, with that instinctive love of liberty which should characterize all such, that would hesitate for an instant in preferring the republican administration of Governor Chamberlain, with all its alleged extravagance, to the present administration in South Carolina, with its fatal and pernicious destruction of the rights and privileges of republicans. I have only to say, in conclusion, sir, that I heartily reciprocate and appreciate the kind personal sentiment that has been expressed toward me by my colleague. Our personal and official intercourse has been most agreeable, notwithstanding our wide political difference, and I assure him I shall always cherish a pleasant recollection of it.

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