

Society Must Reap What It Sows:
Interview with the *Terre Haute Gazette*
(July 11, 1903)

If Captain Dudley is correctly quoted, he is an ass.¹ As a matter of fact, not a single Socialist was connected, directly or indirectly, with the Evansville outrages.² The Socialists are the only ones who recognize not merely the political and economic equality of the negro, but his social equality as well. Among Socialists there is not the slightest trace of race prejudice and to charge that they instigated the riotous crusade against the negroes in Evansville is an infamous calumny.

Instead of the Socialists the fact is the rotten and vote-buying political party to which Dudley belongs is responsible for these crimes. In the late municipal election at Evansville hundreds of negroes were imported from Kentucky to help elect the present Republican mayor of that city.³ The negro whose murder of the policeman precipitated the conflict was one of these. He was a Republican, the policeman he murdered was a Republican, and the city officers for whom he acted as political plugger were also Republicans. After the election this negro felt that as one of the main props of the administration he could strut and swagger at will. This was the starting point of the present trouble which since then has been brewing and required only some spark to set it off. The whole troubles is the culmination of the negro as a factor in politics and, as is notoriously true, a corrupting factor, since he finds ready sale for his votes in the political market of Evansville.

The Socialists never purchased a negro vote nor imported a negro voter to debauch the politics and incite race war in Evansville. [Can] Will Dudley say the same for the party to which he belongs? In the light of these facts, the Socialists or they who seek by the cry of "stop thief!" to incriminate them in order to divert attention from the consequences of their own crimes?

Linton Affair Denounced.

“Have you any observations to make on the Linton affair?” asked the Gazette reporter.

Very definitely. I regard the conduct of the mob at Linton in driving the negro waiters of Alex Sanderson out of that town as cowardly and brutal beyond the power of language to express, and they who are responsible for it should themselves be driven to the jungles where they belong, for they are wholly unfit to live in a civilized community.⁴

What had these negroes done to merit such outrageous treatment? They were workingmen and were seeking simply to make an honest living. They went to Linton to do what they were employed to do and to molest or interfere with no one.

When the negro is idle and shiftless society has no patience with him and does not tolerate him. He is denounced and hunted down and lynched. When he seeks to make an honest living he is driven out by the mob.

How would the cowardly crowd at Linton like to be subjected to that sort of treatment? In their case it would be richly deserved, but this cannot be charged upon the negro, since his antecedents were stolen away from their native land, brought to these shores, enslaved, brutalized, and robbed for three centuries.

Even the negro pervert who is filled with an insane passion to commit a nameless crime is the spawn of the white man’s violation of nature’s law and the crimes that now horrify humanity are the fruit of Anglo-Saxon misdeeds.

The negroes of the South have been the victims of a thousand outrages in the name of our so-called civilization. They were kept in ignorance by design and brutalized under the forms of law while their daughters in their childhood became the prey of the white man’s lust. The carnal maniac is the offspring of lust. Society, like the individual, must reap what it sows.

Miners Must Repudiate.

It is generally understood that the mob at Linton was composed of union miners. I am not ready to believe this but whoever it consisted of they merit unqualified denunciation. I am opposed to all forms of violence, but do not hesitate to give my opinion that if, in the absence of any effort on the part of the state to protect them, the negroes massed their forces and marched into Linton to resent the outrages perpetrated upon their people,

they would be eminently justified in doing so. This, however, is not the way to proceed in such an extremity and the negroes do well to bear with patience and bide their time.

The miners' union cannot afford to bear the odium of such an outrage and they owe it to themselves to disavow all connection with or responsibility for it. They can scarcely do less in view of the fact that their organization is appealing to the negroes of Kentucky and West Virginia to help them fight their battles. At this very hour President Mitchell is in Kansas assuring the negroes that the miners' union is their friend and proposes to recognize them on terms of equality.

The Linton affair is an utter repudiation of the union's professions and if unrebuked the negroes will have no reason to regard the union in a friendly light.

When the miners have another strike, can they blame the negroes if they take their places? What claim have they on the negro when they refuse to allow him to make a living? In this country the negro has the same rights as the white man and if he can be driven from a community by a mob the Civil War was fought in vain and the boasted free institutions are a stupendous sham.

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¹ Debs was sought for comment on an interview with Capt. A.W. Dudley, Company B, Indiana National Guard published in the *Terre Haute Gazette* on July 10, 1903. In the interview Dudley laid the blame for race riots in Evansville, Indiana upon socialists.

² On July 3, 1903, a black man walking out on a bar debt was halted by a white policeman and the two exchanged gunfire, resulting in the death of the gut-shot police officer. During the night a lynch mob formed, but the arrested shooter was shuttled out of jail via a tunnel to an awaiting train to a neighboring town before the mob, consisting of several thousand people, broke into the jail using a telephone poll as a battering ram. A day of racial violence followed, with a dozen people killed by gunfire before Republican Governor Winfield T. Durbin declared martial law and locked down the city with a force of 300 members of the National Guard.

³ The Mayor of Evansville was Charles G. Covert (1863-1953), a former country sheriff who was later criticized for his tardiness in alerting the Governor to the emergency.

⁴ On July 6, 1903, Terre Haute caterer Alex Sanderson and eight black employees appeared in Linton, Indiana, to provide food service at a banquet opening a new Elks lodge in the town. A mob of several hundred miners formed and threatened to dynamite the hall, riotously chasing the food workers from town in a cab.