

Lincoln As A Progressive

Review of his Speeches Disclosed He Stood for Rights of Labor, for Equal Suffrage and Other Economic Reforms Still Before the Nation

By FRED L. HOLMES

IF Abraham Lincoln were to return to the United States today he would quickly identify himself with the great body of progressives.

Looking down through the centuries, like a seer, he saw the great issues which were to confront the people. No man of the century has had a clearer vision. No man has offered a better solution to these latter day problems which stand four square than the plans and program offered by Abraham Lincoln. Reforms always come from the common people—oftimes oppressed—and those who represent them. The aristocratic and wealthy classes only urge changes which will result in greater opportunities to plunder and pillage the masses. Lincoln spoke for the plain people.

With the cycle sweep of years, men are becoming better acquainted with Lincoln's homely ideals. Born of the people, sinew of the people, he stands as the truly great representative of progressive popular government. His battle under purgatorial fire against the evils of slavery, his undying devotion to the Union, have so haloed and over-shadowed his other views that the public mind thinks of but one side of the principles enunciated by the saintly president.

But Lincoln was not a one-sided man. His other views on public questions when brought to light, mark him as truly a progressive leader today as he was in 1861. Walking in the shadows of despair the leaders of today in the progressive ranks can take solace in the thought that they are standing shoulder to shoulder embracing the ideals of Abraham Lincoln. He was no reactionary. Truly it was said of him:

"Wealth could not purchase, power could not awe this divine, this loving man. He knew no fear except the fear of doing wrong."

And so the American commonwealths from coast to coast have made his birthday, February 12, an anniversary, that men may seek to reconsecrate themselves by study and devotion to Lincoln's principles.

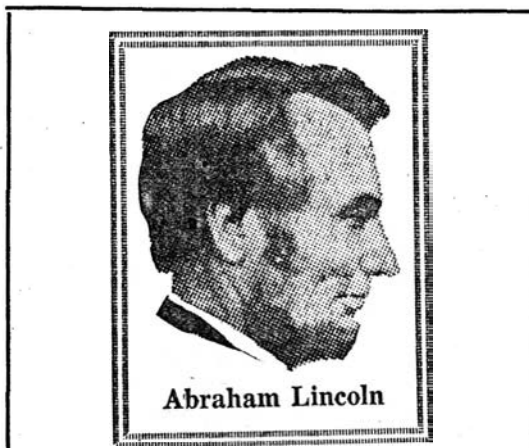
Were Lincoln a leader in the political life of the United States today he would stand for:

- The rights of labor.
- The union of working people.
- The right of labor to strike for better conditions.
- For one day's rest in seven.
- For freedom of speech.
- Against the spirit of mob rule.
- For the rule of the people; the supremacy of ballots not bullets.
- For amnesty of political prisoners.
- For woman's suffrage.
- For broader education.
- For good roads.
- For the curbing of corporate rule.

Rights of Labor.

THE past year has witnessed a spirit of unrest in the country. There has been antagonism between capital and labor. While enormous profits have been made by some corporations, labor in many instances has been living on starvation wages. A recent national conclave of public spirited men enunciated "that the moral right to a living wage was superior to the right of the interest on capital." Surely this is a progressive doctrine. How would Abraham Lincoln view it? In his annual message to Congress, December 3, 1861, Mr. Lincoln said:

"Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. There is not, of necessity, any such thing as the free hired laborer being fixed in that condition of life. No men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty—none less inclined to take or touch aught which they have not honestly earned. Let them beware of surrendering a political power which they already possess, and which, if surrendered, will surely be used to close the door of advancement against such as they and to fix new dis-



Abraham Lincoln

LINCOLN'S DESCRIPTION OF HIMSELF

"IF ANY personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am in height six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on an average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse, black hair and gray eyes—no other marks or brands recollected."

abilities and burdens upon them, till all of liberty shall be lost."

Speaking on the same subject, when Lincoln foresaw an attempt by capital to enslave labor, the martyred president said:

"Labor is the great source from which nearly all, if not all, human comforts, and necessities are drawn. There is a difference in opinion about the elements of labor in society. Some men assume that there is a necessary connection between capital and labor, and that connection draws within it the whole of the labor of the community. They assume that nobody works unless capital excites them to work. They begin next to consider what is the best way. They say there are but two ways,—one is to hire men and to allure them to labor by their consent; the other is to buy the men, and drive them to it, and that is slavery. Having assumed that, they proceed to discuss the question of whether the laborers themselves are better off in the condition of slaves or of hired laborers, and they usually decide that they are better off in the condition of slaves."

Germ of Collective Bargaining.

THE germ of the idea of collective bargaining was in the mind of Abraham Lincoln in 1861. The era of industrial revolution had only begun. But he foresaw that only by the union of working men might their rights be secured, and he declared:

"The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations and tongues, and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property, or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

The right of labor to strike for better conditions was also enunciated by Abraham Lincoln. Speaking at New Haven, Conn., March 1860, he declared:

"I am glad to see that a system of labor prevails in New England under which laborers can strike when they want to, where they are not obliged to work under all circumstances, and are not tied down and obliged to labor whether you pay them or not. I like the system which lets a man quit when he wants to, and wish it might prevail everywhere."

One Day's Rest in Seven.

THE doctrine of one day's rest in seven is not a new one in legislative annals. For the past fifty years every state legislature has been be-

sieged by working people on moral and economic ground to grant it. Abraham Lincoln believed in this doctrine and declared:

"The importance for man and beast of the prescribed weekly rest, the sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, as becoming deference to the best sentiment of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine will demand that Sunday labor in the army and navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity."

Lincoln believed in freedom of speech. Several southern slave states enacted laws which contained the following:

"If any free person, by speaking or by writing, assert or maintain that persons have not the right to hold slaves in this territory, or shall introduce into this territory, print, publish, write, circulate, or cause to be circulated, in this territory, any book, paper, magazine, pamphlet, or circular, containing any denial of the right of persons to hold slaves in this territory, such person shall be deemed guilty of felony, and punished by imprisonment for a term of not less than two years."

Such enactments were denounced by Abraham Lincoln in a speech at Bloomington, Ill., May 29, 1865. Lincoln said:

"Did you ever, my friends, seriously reflect upon the speech with which we are tending downwards? Within the memory of men now present the leading statesmen of Virginia could make genuine red-hot abolitionist speeches in old Virginia! And, as I have said, now even in 'free Kansas' it is a crime to declare that it is 'free Kansas.' The very sentiments that I and others have just uttered, would entitle us, and each of us, to the ignominy and seclusion of a dungeon; and yet I suppose that, like Paul, we were 'free born.' But if this thing is allowed to continue, it will be but one step further to impress the same rule in Illinois. * * * We must make this a land of liberty in fact, as it is in name."

But how would Lincoln face the spirit of mob rule? During the world war, and since, a spirit of violence has been rampant in this country. Men have been threatened, tarred and feathered for voicing their opinions. So acute did the situation become that President Wilson was compelled to issue a proclamation asking all good citizens to sustain law and order. Mob law is a return of barbarism. It is the rule of the jungle. Lincoln denounced it, declaring:

"When men take it in their heads to-day to hang gamblers or burn murderers, they should recollect that in the confusion usually attending such transactions they will be as likely to hang or burn some one who is neither a gambler nor a murderer as one who is, and that, acting upon the example they set, the mob of tomorrow may, and probably will, hang or burn some of them by the very same mistake."

Innocent Often Victims

AND not only so; the innocent, those who have ever set their faces against violations of law in every shape, alike with the guilty fall victims to the ravages of mob law; and thus it goes on, step by step, till all the walls erected for the defense of persons and property of individuals are trodden down and disregarded. But all this, even, is not the full extent of the evil. By such examples, by instances of the perpetrators of such acts going unpunished, the lawless in spirit are encouraged to become lawless in practice; and having been used to no restraint by dread of punishment, they thus become absolutely unrestrained, having ever regarded government as their deadliest operations, and pray for nothing so much as its total annihilation. While, on the other hand, good men, men who love tranquility, who desire to abide by the laws and enjoy their benefits, who would gladly spill their blood in the defense of their country, seeing their property destroyed, their families insulted, and their lives endangered, their persons injured, and seeing nothing in prospect that forebodes a change for the better, become tired and disgusted with a government that offers them no protection, and are not much averse to a change in which they imagine they

have nothing to lose. Thus, then, by the operation of this mobocratic spirit which all must admit is now abroad in the land, the strongest bulwark of any government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may effectually be broken down and destroyed—I mean the attachment of the people.

"Whenever this effect shall be produced among us; whenever the vicious portion of (our) population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision stores, throw printing-presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure and with impunity, depend upon it, this government cannot last. By such things the feelings of the best citizens will become more or less alienated from it, and thus it will be left without friends, or with too few, and those few too weak to make their friendship effectual. At such a time, and under such circumstances, men of sufficient talent and ambition will not be wanting to seize the opportunity, strike the blow, and overturn that fair fabric which for the last half century has been the fondest hope of the lovers of freedom throughout the world."

* * *

"As the patriots of seventy-six died to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and the laws let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; let every man remember that to violate the law is to trample on the blood of his father, and tear the charter of his own and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap. Let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges. Let it be written in primers, spelling books, and in almanacs. Let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation."

Rule of the People.

AFTER all, the strength of Abraham Lincoln lies in the fact that he had supreme confidence in the will of the people. He voiced their mandate. Their verdict at the ballot box became to him the guiding compass. Lincoln declared:

"It is now for them to demonstrate to the world that those who can fairly carry an election can also suppress a rebellion; that ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly and constitutionally decided, there can be no successful appeal back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal, except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections. Such will be a great lesson of peace; teaching men that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take by a war, teaching all the folly of being the beginners of a war."

The release of political prisoners is a problem of today. Although the world war has been over a year, every movement to secure amnesty for political prisoners has been blocked in this country. England, France, and other countries have long since granted amnesty. Not the United States. That Lincoln believed in amnesty to political prisoners was shown before the end of the Civil war when through Secretary Stanton it was announced:

"The insurrection is believed to have culmin-

CHOICE AND DESTINY

By F. M. Bristol

IT WAS the commonest kind of a life this young Lincoln was living on the frontier of civilization, but out of that commonest kind of living came the uncommonest kind of character of these modern years, the sublimest liberative power in the history of freedom. Lincoln felt there, as a great awkward boy, that God and history had something for him to do. He dreamed his destiny. He chose to champion the cause of the oppressed. He vowed that when the chance came he would deal slavery a hard blow. When he came to his high office, he came with a character which had been fitting itself for its grave responsibilities. He had been making wise choices on the great questions of human rights, of national union, of constitutional freedom, of universal brotherhood.

FEALTY TO A JUST CAUSE

By Abraham Lincoln

THE probability that we may fall in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just. It shall not deter me. If ever I feel the soul within me elevate and expand to those dimensions not wholly unworthy of its Almighty Architect, it is when I contemplate the cause of my country deserted by all the world beside, and I standing up, boldly, alone, hurling defiance at her victorious oppressors. Here, without contemplating consequences before Heaven and in face of the world, I swear eternal fealty to the just cause, as I deem it, of the land of my life, my liberty and my love. And who that thinks with me will not fearlessly adopt the oath that I take? Let none falter who thinks he is right, and we may succeed. But if, after all, we shall fail, be it so; we still shall have the proud consolation of saying to our consciences and to the departed shade of our country's freedom, that the cause approved of our judgment and adored of our hearts, in disaster, in chains, in torture, in death, we never faltered in defending.

ated and to be declining. The President, in view of these facts, and anxious to favor a return to the normal course of the administration, as far as regard for public welfare will allow, directs that all political prisoners or state prisoners now held in military custody be released on their subscribing to a parole engaging them to render no aid or comfort to the enemies in hostility to the United States."

Lincoln was no militarist. He believed that the spirit of the people, the love of liberty, the security of rights, would forever protect the people against encroachments. Destroy this spirit he argued and you have planted the seed of despotism at your own door. Speaking at Edwardsville, Ill., in 1858, he said:

"What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling seacoasts, our army and our navy. These are not our reliance against tyranny. All of these may be turned against us without making us weaker for the struggle. Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in us. Our deference is in the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors. Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage and you prepare your own limbs to wear them. Accustomed to trample on the rights of others, you have lost the genius of your own independence and become the fit subjects of the first cunning tyrant who rises among you."

For Woman's Suffrage.

LINCOLN believed in woman's suffrage. In his letter published in the Sangamon "Journal" in June 1836, he said: "I go for all sharing the privileges of the government who assist in bearing its burdens; consequently I go for admitting all whites to the right of suffrage who pay taxes or bear arms, by no means excluding females."

Lincoln believed in a better education for all classes:

"Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we, as a people, can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions, appears to be an object of vital importance, even on this account alone, to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived from all being able to read the Scriptures and other works, both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves."

For Road Building.

LINCOLN was a pioneer in the movement for better roads which has become so important a subject within the last ten years. On this subject he said:

"Time and experience have verified to a demonstration the public utility of internal improvements. That the poorest and most thinly

populated countries would be greatly benefited by the opening of good roads and in the clearing of navigable streams within their limits, is what no person will deny. Yet it is folly to undertake works of this or any other kind, without first knowing that we are able to finish them—as half-finished work generally proves to be labor lost."

A modern world has come into being since the days of Abraham Lincoln. A great industrial era has taken place in this country. He foresaw the evil omens of corporation rule and voiced this clear-eyed prophecy against corporation control in this country:

"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As the result of the war, corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all the wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the republic is destroyed. I feel at this moment more anxiety for the safety of our country than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my forebodings may be groundless. Monarchy itself is sometimes hinted at as a refuge from the power of the people. In my present position I could raise a warning voice against the approach of returning despotism."

Doctrines of Progressives

THESE Lincolnian doctrines may still be found enunciated among the needed reforms asked by all progressive platforms. Abraham Lincoln was out-spoken in his views. He was no charlatan in political life. He voiced these principles, denounced slavery and disunion because there were right and eternal not because they were popular. For this reason he was condemned as was Washington. Ever in the world history the powers of pelf and privilege have attempted to brand and disgrace those men who have stood out for common rights, who fight greed and graft and selfishness. A vocabulary of vulgarity and wickedness was hurled at President Washington. A campaign of vituperation was waged against Abraham Lincoln. These two men have had their lives cruelly embittered by virulent expressions from the forces of hostile privilege. All have answered with silence. Only once did Abraham Lincoln break this silence when he said:

"If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so to the end. If the end brings me out alright, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."

Lincoln was not afraid of the passions of the hour. Both before and during the war with Mexico he condemned our cause as unjust. Lincoln sought the truth and condemned those who refused to search for it. He said:

"The man who will not investigate both sides is dishonest."

Devotion to principle, like a thread of gold, running through the political life of his time has marked Abraham Lincoln as one of the Immortals. The stone rejected by the builders in Illinois in the senatorial contest with Judge Douglas in 1858, became the keystone in the arch to save the republic two years later. The simple honesty, the fireside plainness, the lack of hate and bitterness, the passion for truth, which animated the heart of Abraham Lincoln make his words and deeds live forever in the hearts of men. He thought more of home and country than he did of political preferment. To him human glory was a mockery; a stand for truth and equity was supreme. Because he never forsook the rights of the common people, the world shall call him great.

"Ye winds that move over the mighty places of the west, chant his requiem. Ye people, behold a martyr whose blood as so many articulate words, plead for fidelity, for law and for liberty."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By Robert Ingersoll

NEARLY all the great historic characters are impossible monsters disproportioned by flattery, or by calumny deformed. We know nothing of their peculiarities, or nothing but their peculiarities.