LITTLE SERMONS IN SOCIALISM

BY

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Culled and Commented On

BY

BURKE McCARTY

Published in The Chicago Daily Socialist in 1910

This pamphlet should be in the library of every Socialist speaker and agitator.

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We do not claim that Abraham Lincoln was a Socialist, for the word had not been coined in his day. We do not claim that he would, if he had lived, be a Socialist today, for we do not know this.

We claim, and know, however, that Abraham Lincoln was in spirit, to the hour of his death, a class-conscious working man, that his sympathies were with that class, that he voiced the great principles of the modern constructive Socialism of today, and that had he lived and been loyal and consistent with these principles which he always professed, he would be found within the ranks of the Socialist Party.

BURKE McCARTY



"We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction"

(1 Timothy 6:7-9)

I.

In 1847 Abraham Lincoln uttered the following revolutionary language:

In the early days of our race the Almighty said to the first of our race, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." And since then, if we except the light and air of heaven, no good thing has been or can be enjoyed by us without having first cost labor. And inasmuch as most good things are produced by labor, it follows that all such things of right belong to those whose labor has produced them.

But it has so happened, in all ages of the world, that some have labored, and others have without labor enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits.

This is wrong, and should not continue. To secure each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a worthy object of any good government. (See Lincoln's Complete Works, Nicolay & Hay, vol. 1, p. 92).

It is notable that in 1847, around the time Marx and Engels were printing the Manifesto in Europe, Abraham Lincoln, an obscure, self-educated lawyer in Illinois, expressed this central concept of Socialism.

It is striking that the "Grand Old Party," which frequently invokes the name of Lincoln but rarely quotes his words, has ignored this, the greatest thought of Lincoln—THE RIGHT OF THE LABORER TO THE WHOLE PRODUCT OF HIS LABOR.

Republicans are challenged to respond, not to us, but to Abraham Lincoln.

"For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself""

(Galatians 5:14)

II.

Capitalist newspapers persistently fan international and racial quarrels and urge nations to arm themselves.

Socialists urge the workers of the world to unite.

Lincoln's stance is clear. In an address to a working men's association, November 21, 1864, he said:

"The strongest bond of human sympathy outside the family relation should be one uniting all working people of all nations, tongues, and kindreds." (See Life of Lincoln by Coffin, p. 395).

When the workers of the world follow this advice of Lincoln and the Socialists, wars will cease, for war is nothing more than one set of working men killing another to protect corporate interests.

How many wars would occur if capitalists had to fight?

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs"

(1 Timothy 6:10)

III.

Socialists are condemned for voicing sentiments Abraham Lincoln expressed in his annual message, July 5, 1861:

I desire to preserve this government that it may be administered for all as it was administered by the men who made it. On the side of the Union it is a struggle to maintain in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men, lift artificial burdens from all shoulders, and clear the paths of laudable pursuits for all; to afford all an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life. This is the leading object of the government for which we contend. (See Life of Lincoln by Barrett, p. 266).

No Socialist could state our position more forcibly than Lincoln does here. TO AFFORD ALL AN UNFETTERED START AND A FAIR CHANCE IN THE RACE OF LIFE. That is our demand, and we will accept nothing less.

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

(1 John 3:17)

IV.

On June 13, 1836, announcing his political views, Lincoln supported woman suffrage, stating:

I go for all sharing the privilege 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. (See Coffin, p. 89).

In an interview at Springfield, Illinois, he said:

I am opposed to the limitation or lessening of the right of suffrage. If anything, I am in favor of its extension or enlargement. I want to lift men up—to broaden, rather than contract their privileges. (See Herndon, p. 625).

This was stated when the question of negro slavery was heating the country. Abraham Lincoln never wavered when it was a question of human justice. He was always with the people.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God"

(Matthew 19:24)

V.

Abraham Lincoln strongly voiced the Socialist position when he said:

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 disabilities and burdens upon them, till all of liberty shall be lost. (See Annual Message, December 3, 1861).

Capitalism constantly seeks to subordinate labor. Capital preaches, and many working men believe, that the social system would collapse without capitalists, the "men of brains." As long as the working class holds this view, they will remain enslaved.

How many railroads would be built, deserts made to blossom, skyscrapers erected, coal mined, or manufacturing done if labor stepped down and out?

If labor does all these things, why should it surrender its political power to its enemy?

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me'"

(Matthew 25:34-36)

VI.

At Cincinnati, Ohio, September 17, 1859, Lincoln said:

I hold that if there is any one thing that can be proved to be the will of Heaven by external nature around us, without reference to revelation, it is the proposition that whatever any one man earns with his hands and by the sweat of his brow, he shall enjoy in peace.

I say that, whereas God Almighty has given every man one mouth to be fed and one pair of hands adapted to furnish food for that mouth, if anything can be proved to be the will of Heaven, it is that mouth is to be fed by those hands, without being interfered with by any other man who also has his mouth to feed and his hands to labor with.

I hold that if the Almighty had ever made a set of men that should do all of the eating and none of the work, He would have made them with mouths only and no hands; and if He had ever made another class that He intended should do all the work and none of the eating, He would have made them without mouths and with hands.

Inasmuch as He has not chosen to make man in that way, if anything is proved, it is that those hands and mouths are to be cooperative through life and not to be interfered with. (See Howell's, p. 255).

Here Lincoln voices the Socialist position in the inherent right of every man to the product of his labor, without handing over to any other man all of it except what is necessary to sustain his miserable existence.

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide yourselves with purses that do not wear out, with a treasure in heaven that does not decrease, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys"

(Luke 12:33)

VII.

Lincoln's words rebuke those advocating a centralized government led by a few:

If the majority should not rule, who would be the judge? We shall be bound by the majority of the American people; if not, then the minority must control. Would that be right? Would it be just or generous? Assuredly not. I reiterate that the majority should rule.

We are ruled by a small oligarchy of money despots, any three of whom could halt industry in forty-eight hours. Ninety million people who perform all useful work are controlled by a handful of capitalists.

This is a flawed system.

“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”

(James 5:4)

VIII.

In his annual message of July 2, 1861, Lincoln expressed the Socialist position:

Whatever concerns the whole should be confided to the whole—the general government. (See Life of Lincoln by Raymond, p. 186).

Socialism means that everything used in common should be owned in common. Socialism means that all the tools of industry should be owned and operated by the working class.

Socialism demands, with Lincoln, that the necessities of life, mines, forests, fisheries, railroads, vessels, telegraphs, streetcars, cables, telephones—all public utilities—shall be owned and operated by all the people.

"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages."

(Jeremiah 22:13)

IX.

In Milwaukee, over fifty years ago, Abraham Lincoln delivered what was likely the city's first lesson in international sympathy, cooperation, and brotherhood. The teacher was not a foreign radical or a Socialist like Marx or Engels, but an American, Abraham Lincoln, who said in a speech:

To correct evils great and small, which spring from want of sympathy and from positive enmity among strangers, as nations or individuals, is one of the highest functions of civilization. (See Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 576).

Socialism is the principle uniting the working class of every nation, advocating the cooperative sympathy Lincoln championed.

“Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

(Proverbs 14:31)

X.

In the same Milwaukee speech, Lincoln satirized the class-conscious exploiters of labor:

By the 'mud-sill' theory, it is assumed that labor and education are incompatible, and any practical combination of them is impossible. According to that theory, a blind horse upon a treadmill is a perfect illustration of what a laborer should be—all the better for being blind, that he could not kick understandingly.

According to that theory, the education of laborers is not only useless but pernicious and dangerous. In fact, it is deemed a misfortune that laborers should have heads at all. Those same heads are regarded as explosive materials, only to be safely kept in damp places, as far as possible from that peculiar sort of fire which ignites them.

A Yankee who could invent a strong-handed man without a head would receive the everlasting gratitude of the mud-sill advocates.

Capitalist newspapers, prelates, and others serving the money power, who advise workers to be obedient, faithful, religious, and restrained, were active in Lincoln's day. Lincoln, a keen, class-conscious working man, understood and criticized them sharply.

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates.”

Deuteronomy 24:14

XI.

In 1860, addressing striking shoemakers in New Haven, Connecticut, Lincoln stood on Socialistic ground:

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. When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition; he knows that there is no fixed condition of labor for his whole life.

I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago, I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flatboat—just what might happen to any poor man's son.

I want every man to have the chance—and I believe the black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition.

This utterance is the ethical basis of the strike and the goal of Socialists: a system allowing every boy and girl an equal chance to rise and improve their condition.

“Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.
This too is meaningless.”

(Ecclesiastes 5:10)

XII.

In Alton, Illinois, in 1858, Lincoln voiced a Socialist principle:

That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world.

They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time and will ever continue to struggle.

The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit which says, 'You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it.'

No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle. (Debates, p. 234).

If Lincoln spoke these words from a soapbox today, he would likely be arrested, as many Socialist speakers are for preaching these same precepts.

“John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

(Luke 3:11)

XIII.

In 1837, in a speech to the Illinois Legislature, Lincoln addressed the brazenness of capitalists:

These capitalists generally act harmoniously and in concert to fleece the people, and now that they have got into a quarrel with themselves, we are called upon to appropriate the people's money to settle the quarrel. (See Tarbell, 2 vol., p. 28).

Lincoln clearly understood the capitalist class's characteristics and had no sympathy for them. He was astounded by their audacity. How much more shocked would he have been to know that, sixty-three years later, "Lincoln Leaguers" like Senator William Lorimer and his conspirators would urge Illinois voters to oppose the Initiative, Referendum, and Recall.

Do not exploit the poor because they are poor

and do not crush the needy in court,

for the LORD will take up their case

and will exact life for life.

(Proverbs 22:22-23)

XIV.

In November 1864, Lincoln prophesied:

As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned, and 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 wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the Republic is destroyed.

I feel at this moment more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my suspicions may prove groundless. (See Shibley, p. 282).

Lincoln's clairvoyant vision saw the class struggle we face today, which saddened him. He planned to avert post-war financial depression by opening the West's mineral wealth to those who fought the rebellion. His last message, sent before leaving for Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865, as he bade Schuyler Colfax goodbye, was:

You are going to the Pacific coast. Do not forget to tell the people in the mining regions what I told you this morning about their development. Goodbye. (See Coffin, p. 515).

The message was: "Tell the miners for me that I shall promote their interest to the utmost of my ability, because their prosperity is the prosperity of the nation, and we shall prove in a few years that we are indeed the treasury of the world."

You levy a straw tax on the poor
and impose a tax on their grain.
Therefore, though you have built stone mansions,
you will not live in them;
though you have planted lush vineyards,
you will not drink their wine.
For I know how many are your offenses
and how great your sins.
There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes
and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
(Amos 5:11-12)

Marx's letter to Abraham Lincoln

Editor's Note

This address, drafted by Karl Marx for the International Workingmen's Association in November 1864, congratulates Abraham Lincoln on his re-election and frames the American Civil War as a pivotal struggle for the global working class. Presented to U.S. Ambassador Charles Francis Adams on January 28, 1865, it connects Lincoln's fight against slavery to the broader labor movement, reflecting themes of class solidarity and emancipation central to *Little Sermons in Socialism*. The inclusion of Ambassador Adams' reply underscores the international recognition of Lincoln's efforts. This document complements Burke McCarty's work by illustrating how European workers saw Lincoln's leadership as a beacon for labor's liberation, reinforcing his alignment with Socialist principles. Sourced from *The General Council of the First International 1864-1866* (Progress Publishers) and the Marx & Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org, 2000).

Address of the International Workingmen's Association to Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America

Presented to U.S. Ambassador Charles Francis Adams, January 28, 1865

Written: By Karl Marx between November 22 and 29, 1864, and included in the Minutes of the General Council on November 29, 1864
First Published: *The Bee-Hive Newspaper*, No. 169, January 7, 1865; in German translation in *Der Social-Demokrat*, December 30, 1864
Source: *The General Council of the First International 1864-1866*, Progress Publishers

Sir:

We congratulate the American people upon your re-election by a large majority. If resistance to the Slave Power was the watchword of your first election, the triumphant war cry of your re-election is Death to Slavery.

From the commencement of the titanic American strife, the workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class. The contest for the territories, which opened this dire epic, was to decide whether the virgin soil of immense tracts should be wedded to the labor of the emigrant or prostituted by the tramp of the slave driver.

When an oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, "slavery" on the banner of armed revolt, on the very spots where the idea of

one great Democratic Republic first sprang up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century; when on those very spots counterrevolution gloried in rescinding the ideas of the old Constitution, maintained slavery as a beneficent institution and the true solution to the problem of the relation of capital to labor, and cynically proclaimed property in man as the cornerstone of the new edifice—then the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the partisan support of the upper classes for the Confederacy gave its warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was a call for a general crusade of property against labor. For the men of labor, their hopes for the future and past conquests were at stake in this conflict across the Atlantic. Everywhere, they bore the hardships of the cotton crisis, opposed the proslavery interventions of their betters, and contributed their quota of blood to the cause.

While the workingmen, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their republic, boasting the prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his master, they were unable to attain true freedom of labor or support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation. This barrier has been swept away by the red sea of civil war.

The workingmen of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Antislavery War will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come that it fell to Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.

Signed on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association, the Central Council:

Longmaid, Worley, Whitlock, Fox, Blackmore, Hartwell, Pidgeon, Lucraft, Weston, Dell, Nieass, Shaw, Lake, Buckley, Osbourne, Howell, Carter, Wheeler, Stainsby, Morgan, Grossmith, Dick, Denoual, Jourdain, Morrissot, Leroux, Bordage, Bocquet, Talandier, Dupont, L. Wolff, Aldovrandi, Lama, Solustri, Nusperli, Eccarius, Wolff, Lessner, Pfander, Lochner, Kaub, Bolleter, Rybczinski, Hansen, Schantzenbach, Smales, Cornelius, Petersen, Otto, Bagnagatti, Setacci

George Odger, President of the Council
P.V. Lubez, Corresponding Secretary for France
Karl Marx, Corresponding Secretary for Germany
G.P. Fontana, Corresponding Secretary for Italy
J.E. Holtorp, Corresponding Secretary for Poland
H.F. Jung, Corresponding Secretary for Switzerland
William R. Cremer, Honorary General Secretary
18 Greek Street, Soho

From the Minutes of the Central Council, November 19, 1864:

Dr. Marx brought up the report of the subcommittee and a draft of the address for presentation to the people of America, congratulating them on re-electing Abraham Lincoln as President. The address was unanimously agreed to. A discussion followed on the mode of presentation and the propriety of including a Member of Parliament in the deputation. This was opposed by many members, who argued that workingmen should rely on themselves. It was proposed and carried unanimously that the secretary correspond with the United States Minister to appoint a time for receiving the deputation, consisting of Central Council members.

Reply from Ambassador Charles Francis Adams

Legation of the United States, London, January 28, 1865

I am directed to inform you that the address of the Central Council of your Association, duly transmitted through this Legation to the President of the United States, has been received by him.

So far as the sentiments expressed are personal, they are accepted by him with a sincere and anxious desire to prove himself not unworthy of the confidence extended by his fellow citizens and by friends of humanity and progress throughout the world.

The Government of the United States has a clear consciousness that its policy is not reactionary. It adheres to its initial course of abstaining from propagandism and unlawful intervention, striving to do equal justice to all states and men, relying on the beneficial results of that effort for support at home and respect abroad.

Nations exist not for themselves alone but to promote the welfare and happiness of mankind through benevolent intercourse and example. In this relation, the United States regards its cause in the conflict with slavery-maintaining insurgents as the cause of human nature, deriving encouragement from the testimony of Europe's workingmen that the national attitude is favored with their enlightened approval and earnest sympathies.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,
Charles Francis Adams

Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park, Kalamazoo // 1856

"Fellow countrymen:

Under the Constitution of the United States another Presidential contest approaches us. All over this land – that portion, at least, of which I know much – the people are assembling to consider the proper course to be adopted by them. One of the first considerations is to learn what the people differ about. If we ascertain what we differ about, we shall be better able to decide.

The question of slavery, at the present day, should not only be the greatest question, but very nearly the sole question. Our opponents, however, prefer that this should not be the case. To get at this question, I will occupy your attention but a single moment.

The question is simply this: Shall slavery be into new territories, or not? This is the naked question. If we should support Fremont successfully in this, it may be charged that we will not be content with restricting slavery in the new territories. If we should charge that James Buchanan, by his platform, is bound to extend slavery into the territories, and that he is in favor of its being thus spread, we should be puzzled to prove it. We believe it, nevertheless.

By taking the issue as I present it, whether it shall be permitted as an issue, is made up between the parties. Each takes his own stand. This is the question: Shall the Government of the United States prohibit slavery in the [territories of the] United States?

We have been in the habit of deploring the fact that slavery exists among us. We have ever deplored it. Our forefathers did, and they declared, as we have done in later years, the blame rested upon the mother government of Great Britain. We constantly condemn Great Britain for not preventing slavery from coming amongst us. She would not interfere to

prevent it, and so individuals were able to introduce the institution without opposition. I have alluded to this, to ask you if this is not exactly the policy of Buchanan and his friends, to place this government in the attitude then occupied by the government of Great Britain – placing the nation in the position to authorize the territories to reproach it, for refusing to allow them to hold slaves.

I would like to ask your attention, any gentlemen to tell me when the people of Kansas are going to decide. When are they to do it? I asked that question two years ago – when, and how are [they] to do it? Not many weeks ago, our new Senator from Illinois (Mr. Trumbull), asked Douglas how it could be done. Douglas is a great man – at keeping from answering questions he don't want to answer. He would not answer. He said it was a question for the Supreme Court to decide. In the North, his friends argue that the people can decide at any time.

The Southerners [Democrats] say there is no power in the people, whatever. We know that from the time white people have been allowed in the territory they have brought slaves with them. Suppose the people come up to vote as freely, and with as perfect protection as we could do it here. Will they be at liberty to vote their sentiments? If they can, then all that has ever been said about our provincial ancestors is untrue, and they could have done so, also. We know our Southern friends say that the General Government cannot interfere. They could as truly say, 'It is amongst us – we cannot get rid of it.'

But I am afraid I waste too much time on this point. I take it as an illustration of the principle, that slaves are admitted to the territories. And, while I am speaking of Kansas, how will that operate? Can men vote truly? We will suppose that there are ten men who go into Kansas to settle. Nine of these are opposed to slavery. One has ten slaves. The slaveholder is a

good man in other respects; he is a good neighbor, and being a wealthy man, he is enabled to do the others many neighborly kindnesses. They like the man, although they don't like the system by which he holds his fellowmen in bondage. And here, let me say, that in intellectual and physical structure, our Southern brethren do not differ from us. They are, like us, subject to passions, and it is only their odious institution of slavery, that makes the breach between us.

These ten men of whom I was speaking, live together three or four years; they intermarry; their family ties are strengthened. And who wonders that in time, the people learn to look upon slavery with complacency? This is the way in which slavery is planted, and gains so firm a foothold. I think this is a strong card that the Nebraska party have played, and won upon, in this game.

I suppose that this crowd are opposed to the admission of slavery into Kansas, yet it is true that in all crowds there are some who differ from the majority. I want to ask the Buchanan men, who are against the spread of slavery, if there be any present, why not vote for the man who is against it? I understand that Mr. Fillmore's position is precisely like Buchanan's. I understand that, by the Nebraska bill, a door has been opened for the spread of slavery in [to] the territories. Examine, if you please, and see if they have ever done any such thing as try to shut the door.

It is true that Fillmore tickles a few of his friends with the notion that he is not the cause of the door being opened. Well; it brings him into this position: he tries to get both sides, one by denouncing those who opened the door, and the other by hinting that he doesn't care a fig for its being open. If he were President, he would have one side or the other – he would either restrict slavery or not. Of course it would be so. There could be no middle way.

You who hate slavery and love freedom, why not, as Fillmore and Buchanan are on the same ground, vote for Fremont? Why not vote for the man who takes your side of the question? 'Well,' says Buchanan, 'it is none of our business.' But is it not our business? There are several reasons why I think it is our business. But let us see how it is. Others have urged these reasons before, but they are still of use. By our Constitution we are represented in Congress in proportion to our numbers, and in counting the numbers that give us our representatives, three slaves are counted as 2 people. The State of Maine has six representatives in the lower house of Congress. In strength South Carolina is equal to her. But stop! Maine has twice as many white people, and 32,000 to boot! And is that fair? I don't complain of it. This regulation was put in force when the exigencies of the times demanded it, and could not have been avoided. Now, one man in South Carolina is the same as two men here.

Maine should have twice as many men in Congress as South Carolina. It is a fact that any man in South Carolina has more influence and power in Congress today than any two now before me. The same thing is true of all slave States, though it may not be in the same proportion. It is a truth that cannot be denied, that in all the free States no white man is the equal of the white man of the slave States. But this is in the Constitution, and we must stand up to it. The question, then, is, 'Have we no interest as to whether the white man of the North shall be the equal of the white man of the South?'

Once when I used this argument in the presence of Douglas, he answered that in the North the black man was counted as a full man, and had an equal vote with the white, while at the South they were counted at but three-fifths. And Douglas, when he had made this reply, doubtless thought he had forever silenced the objection.

Have we no interest in the free Territories of the United States – that they should be kept open for the homes of free white people? As our Northern States are growing more and more in wealth and population, we are continually in want of an outlet, through which it may pass out to enrich our country. In this we have an interest – a deep and abiding interest. There is another thing, and that is the mature knowledge we have – the greatest interest of all. It is the doctrine, that the people are driven from the maxims of our free Government, that despises the spirit which for eighty years has celebrated the anniversary of our national independence.

We are a great empire. We are eighty years old. We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity, and we shall understand that to give up that one thing, would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself. It has been said that such a race of prosperity has been run nowhere else. We find a people on the Northeast, who have a different government from ours, being ruled by a Queen. Turning to the South, we see a people who, while they boast of being free, keep their fellow beings in bondage. Compare our Free States with either, shall we say here that we have no interest in keeping that principle alive? Shall we say, 'Let it be'? No – we have an interest in the maintenance of the principles of the Government, and without this interest, it is worth nothing.

I have noticed in Southern newspapers, particularly the Richmond Enquirer, the Southern view of the Free States. They insist that slavery has a right to spread. They defend it on principle. They insist that their slaves are far better off than Northern freemen. What a mistaken view do these men have of Northern laborers! They think that men are always to remain laborers here – but there is no such class. The man who labored for another last year, this year labors for himself,

and next year he will hire others to labor for him. These men don't understand when they think in this manner of Northern free labor. When these reasons can be introduced, tell me not that we have no interest in keeping the territories free for the settlement of free laborers.

I pass, then, from this question. I think we have an ever growing interest in maintaining the free institutions of our country.

It is said that our party is a sectional party. It has been said in high quarters that if Fremont and Dayton were elected the Union would be dissolved. I believe it [that the South does so think]! I believe it! It is a shameful thing that the subject is talked of so much. Did we not have a Southern President and Vice-President at one time? And yet the Union has not been dissolved. Why, at this very moment, there is a Northern President and Vice-President. Pierce and King were elected, and King died without ever taking his seat. The Senate elected a Northern man from their own numbers, to perform the duties of the Vice-President. He resigned his seat, however, as soon as he got the job of making a slave State out of Kansas. Was not that a great mistake?

(A voice: 'He didn't mean that!')

Then why didn't he speak what he did mean? Why did he not speak what he ought to have spoken? That was the very thing. He should have spoken manly, and we should then have known where to have found him. It is said we expect to elect Fremont by Northern votes. Certainly we do not think the South will elect him. But let us ask the question differently. Does not Buchanan expect to be elected by Southern votes? Fillmore, however, will go out of this contest the most national man we have. He has no prospect of having a single vote on either side of Mason and Dixon's line, to trouble his poor soul about.

(Laughter and cheers)

We believe it is right that slavery should not be tolerated in the new territories, yet we cannot get support for this doctrine, except in one part of the country. Slavery is looked upon by men in the light of dollars and cents. The estimated worth of the slaves at the South is $1,000,000,000, and in a very few years if the institution shall be admitted into the new territories, they will have increased fifty percent in value.

Our adversaries charge Fremont with being an abolitionist. When pressed to show proof, they frankly confess that they can show no such thing. They run off upon the assertion that his supporters are abolitionists. But this they have never attempted to prove. I know of no word in the language that has been used so much as that one, "abolitionist", having no definition. It has no meaning unless taken as designated as a person who is abolishing something. If that be its signification, the supporters of Fremont are not abolitionists.

In Kansas all who come there are perfectly free to regulate their own social relations. There has never been a man there who was an abolitionist – for what was there to be abolished? People there had perfect freedom to express what they wished on the subject, when the Nebraska bill was first passed.

Our friends in the South, who support Buchanan, have five disunion men to one at the North. This disunion is a sectional question. Who is to blame for it? Are we? I don't care how you express it.

This government is sought to be put on a new track. Slavery is to be made a ruling element in our government. The question can be avoided in but two ways. By the one, we must submit, and allow slavery to triumph, or, by the other,

we must triumph over the black demon. We have chosen the latter manner. If you of the North wish to get rid of this question, you must decide between these two ways – submit and vote for Buchanan, submit and vote that slavery is a just and good thing, and immediately get rid of the question; or unite with us, and help to triumph. We would all like to have the question done away with, but we cannot submit.

They tell us that we are in company with men who have long been known as abolitionists. What care we how many may feel disposed to labor for our cause? Why do not you, Buchanan men, come in and use your influence to make our party respectable?

(Laughter.)

How is the dissolution of the Union to be consummated? They tell us that the Union is in danger. Who will divide it? Is it those who make the charge? Are they themselves the persons who wish to see the result? A majority will never dissolve the Union. Can a minority do it?

When this Nebraska bill was first introduced into Congress, the sense of the Democratic party was outraged. That party has ever prided itself, that it was the friend of individual, universal freedom. It was that principle upon which they carried their measures. When the Kansas scheme was conceived, it was natural that this respect and sense should have been outraged.

Now I make this appeal to the Democratic citizens here. Don't you find yourself making arguments in support of these measures, which you never would have made before? Did you ever do it before this Nebraska bill compelled you to do it? If you answer this in the affirmative, see how a whole party has been turned away from their love of liberty!

And now, my Democratic friends, come forward. Throw off these things, and come to the rescue of the great principle of equality. Don't interfere with anything in the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties. And not to Democrats alone do I make this appeal, but to all who love these great and true principles. Come, and keep coming! Strike, and strike again! So sure as God lives, the victory shall be yours.

(Great Cheering)"

Eugene V. Debs

Lincoln's Birthday Speech, Chicago // 1911

This day 102 years ago Abraham Lincoln was born. He was in many respects the most extraordinary man ever produced by this country. Up to the time of his birth the slave ships sped from coast to coast, fanned by the wings of the Holy Ghost. Fifty years ago Lincoln filled the presidential chair. That chair has been vacant ever since. When Lincoln entered upon public life slavery had control of every department of government; the president was its puppet. The Supreme Court was its liveried lackey, Congress its medium. At the behest of this power the Supreme Court announced to the world that the slave had no right that his master was bound to respect.

Lincoln objected to this, dared to criticize this august judicial tribunal, and was denounced and condemned by the press of the slave power.

At Springfield, President Taft pronounced a eulogy upon Lincoln yesterday. It would be interesting to know now what Lincoln thinks of Taft. The party with which Lincoln affiliated was revolutionary under his leadership. That party today is reactionary, rotten, and not the place of celebration. The place of his home, Springfield [Illinois], has been turned into a den of thieves. These small fry politicians and shyster lawyers are now hitching their old cart in the Lincoln style.

Lincoln does not need them; they do need Lincoln. They are trafficking under his great name, furthering their own schemes, their own selfish interests.

I believe it has been announced that I was to speak upon Taft, a very big subject—but nothing in it.

The very first I ever heard of Mr. Taft was when we were engaged in a strike on a railroad over here in Toledo, Ohio, and he was on the Federal bench. A railroad corporation pressed the button and he came from Cincinnati, his home, to Toledo on a special car, the road having called for him, and when he arrived at Toledo he went to the headquarters of that corporation and issued an injunction without hearing the employees, thereby paralyzing the labor organization with which I was connected. That was the first time I ever heard of Mr. Taft.

The next time I heard of Mr. Taft was two years later, when, at the behest of the same corporate power, he issued another injunction, sending a lot of workingmen to jail, and when he sentenced a lot of them he said: "I am only sorry that Debs is not here, for if it were he instead of you, I would give him as many years as I am giving you months."

You observe that there is no love lost between my subject and myself.

From the time that Mr. Taft issued these injunctions his promotion was very rapid. It is now said that he has risen from the ranks to a place of eminence.

Fred Warren cannot make that claim—he stayed in the ranks, fighting side by side with the working people for emancipation.

President Taft evidently concluded that a mistake had been made in the indictment and prosecution, or rather persecution, of Warren. According to the courts, Warren is not fit to be at large; according to Taft he is not fit to be in jail. He is then an extremely undesirable citizen. I would not undertake to say what I think may become of him, but this is certain, that he has a very promising future behind him.

President Taft imagines that he has snuffed him out; as a matter of fact he has just lighted his torch.

The judges were foolish enough to imagine that if they could only put Warren in jail they would have silenced him. Taft knew enough to know if they put him in jail his voice, though mute, would be heard all around the world.

Warren's crime consists of having been absolutely true to himself and having, in the discharge of his duties to himself, exposed the crimes of capitalism. They have not money enough to buy him nor power enough to intimidate him, so they tried to put him in jail through their judges.

And here let me say that we all owe a great deal to my colleague and fellow-worker; it is not on his account that he is at liberty today, but on account of those of you who are assembled here this afternoon. The tide has been steadily rising. It became a menace to the class in power; they could not help but recognize it, and they thought that if they could but jail him they would silence him.

The Supreme Court consists wholly of corporation lawyers, and the corporation lawyer does not become a hallowed saint when he is elevated or raised to the bench; he is a corporation lawyer, and so he is a corporation judge. As he is here so he was there. Only a little while ago President Taft filled two vacancies on the Supreme bench: one of them went to Willis Van Devanter, formerly a lawyer of the Union Pacific Railroad Company, and the other went to Horace H. Lurton, the attorney for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company.

They are on the bench simply because they will do the will of the corporations—and what earthly chance does a workingman have before that tribunal? That court is

maintained simply to pronounce his doom, to keep him in slavery and subjection.

Let me cite here an illustration of what the courts do. When a little girl in a factory down in New Jersey, while working, had her arm torn from her body by defective machinery, she appealed to the courts for reparation. She was awarded a verdict and judgment for $17,500 in the trial court.

The corporation promptly appealed to the Supreme Court of New Jersey; the Supreme Court, in reviewing the testimony, found that in the course of the trial a photograph had been introduced showing the defendant in her confirmation attire, and the learned judges, as they are called, declared that this was irrelevant, and that because this was irrelevant, all of the evidence tending to show the criminal negligence and the responsibility of the corporation was nullified, and the Supreme Court turned that poor, mutilated girl out in the street empty-handed.

And now let me choose a few words deliberately. There is not a footpad in the whole city of Chicago that would rob a poor mutilated child, yet the Supreme Court of New Jersey, under capitalism, has been guilty of that crime.

When, a little while ago, a locomotive fireman in North Carolina, who had been on duty 23 consecutive hours and who from physical exhaustion fell and had his leg cut off, appealed to the court and was awarded $5,000 by the jury. The corporation appealed to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court declared he was guilty of contributory negligence, because he had violated a law of the state that provided no employee of a railroad should be on duty more than 16 consecutive hours.

If he had not violated that law he would have been discharged and blacklisted; having violated that law to save his job, and

having been practically incapacitated for life and having been awarded $5,000 by a jury, the corporation, under the capitalist system, appeals to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court sets aside this verdict of $5,000 and declares that he was not entitled to a cent.

The working class, in my opinion, would have been perfectly justified in marching upon that court and disbursing it; they would have been perfectly justified in taking such an action.

If ever I lead another strike in the city of Chicago and Peter S. Grosscup, or any other corporation hireling sitting on the federal bench, issues another such outrageous and unjust injunction against me as he did 15 years ago, I will tear it to tatters and trample it under my feet. And, if this be contempt of court, let him make the most of it—and I will not engage a lawyer to defend me either. If there is any power in the working class, I will not need a lawyer; and if there is no power in the working class, a lawyer can do me no good.

Now, let's get right down to the matters that immediately concern us. It is well to protest against all of these injustices and outrages, but the effect of a mere protest dies away. There must be some change. In a word, the working class must be organized. I use the word "organized" advisedly; I don't mean disorganized, but I mean organized.

When we workers realize and develop and assert ourselves and our economic and political power, there is nothing between this earth and the stars that shine above us that can stand between you and complete emancipation.

Lincoln said that "whereas the good things are produced by those who toil, therefore those who toil are entitled to have and enjoy the things that are produced."

That is the very quintessence of socialism. Lincoln wanted the worker to have and enjoy the full product of his labor. You workers are simply the hands in the capitalist system. You do the work and they do nothing, yet they think you are entitled to nothing and hold you in contempt, and this will be as long as you let them do so.

Take the women under this system, the ones who work. Take the woman who, under the scourge of poverty, is driven to the factory and becomes a factory girl. She has no social standing whatever. If they work in a building scrubbing, getting down upon their knees without pads to scrub the stairways and clean cuspidors all night long—and this for a mere pittance—they are simply another tool of the capitalists without social standing, without respect, and not earning a comfortable living by working more than half of each day. They are reduced in the eyes of society to the lowest plane of degradation.

I am not appealing for the exceptional man, but for the working class for the purpose of counseling themselves to victory. The socialist movement was organized for the purpose of leading the workers to a higher plane, of getting them to rely upon themselves, and our industrial unions have done much for this. We should not have craft unions and fight one another through our craft leadership, thus taking you away from each other and thus taking away from you the strength of your power.

We have had an object lesson here in Chicago. The garment workers' strike ought to have been won triumphantly and would have been if the workers had been organized into one great organization. That is a lesson we all should heed. We work together in a united body and as a working class and not accept that which is handed down by a few capitalists.

Therein lies the secret of success—to take possession of industry in every department of activity. You do not need the capitalist, but the capitalist needs you and must have you.

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1. William Howard Taft was the fattest president in American history, with his weight topping out in 1911 at 332 pounds (151 kilos).
2. Willis Van Devanter (1859–1941) of Indiana was nominated for the Supreme Court by William Howard Taft in December 1910. He remained on the bench until his retirement in June 1937.
3. Horace Harmon Lurton (1844–1914), a native of Kentucky and former lieutenant in the army of the Confederate States of America, was the oldest person appointed to the Supreme Court when he was nominated for the bench by William Howard Taft in December 1909.
4. Peter S. Grosscup (1852–1921) of Ohio was named a judge of US District Court for Northern Illinois by President Benjamin Harrison in December 1892. In that capacity he was one of the first judges to impose injunctions against Debs and his American Railway Union in 1894. Grosscup would remain a personal nemesis of Debs for the rest of his life. In 1899 Grosscup became a judge of the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh District, a position which he held until 1911.
5. This is a very rough paraphrase of the original quotation, which reads: "And, inasmuch [as] most good things are produced by labor, it follows that [all] such things of right belong to those whose labor has produced them. But it has so happened in all ages of the world, that some have labored, and others have, without labor, enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To [secure] to each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a most worthy object of any good government." See: "Fragments of a Tariff Discussion," Dec. 1, 1847 in Roy P. Basler (ed.), The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, volume 1, page 412.