Social Justice Through National Action

I am so accustomed in Chicago to saying "Fellow Citizens," that I think I will venture to say it even in New York. Since we have learned to vote we use it on every occasion, but perhaps I can say in addition, "Fellow Progressives," which is just a little more intimate than fellow citizens.

It is, of course, fitting to meet here together on the birthday of a great man, to renew our patriotism, and to renew our faith in the principles for which that great man, such a great man, lived and died, and it is especially so in the case of a man like Lincoln, who lived in the midst of baffling circumstances and unprecedented actions. We find ourselves faced by difficulties, and it is fitting that we should look to him for wisdom, but in the case of Abraham Lincoln, even as we do this, we find he eludes our patriotism, as it were, that he escapes the bounds of it, because, after half a century of criticism and research into his minutest motives, we find that he has joined that scant company, which is universal and immortal, and to which every century has the privilege, sometimes of adding none, and sometimes none are added for several centuries, and so when we take a view of Abraham Lincoln, we are irresistibly pushed into the point of view that goes back into the seething of life, into the powers and principles which make or move, and almost in spite of ourselves we look at our contemporary affairs as they will be seen later, from the grave and measured tread of history, because it is that faculty of a great man, so great as to lift us out of the contemporary and into the more eternal aspects.

So when we come, as we do, to celebrate Lincoln's Birthday, in spite of ourselves we get into this somewhat solemn mood.

If I speak a little from the domestic side of Lincoln, it is because, after all, he did live a large portion of his life in Illinois, and with those of us who belonged to my generation—I had almost said the past generation—who knew the men who always called him "Mr. Lincoln," they always found it impossible to say "Abraham Lincoln" or "President Lincoln"—we knew men who were full of stories about him, never-ending stories, and which were full, each one of them, tremendously full of characteristic pungency.

I remember, when I was a little girl, I used to go out of my way to go down a street in a neighborhood village to catch sight of a man named Jerry Patterson. Jerry Patterson had once met Abraham Lincoln when he was out on one of his debates with Douglas touring the State. He was a famous Democrat and had taken this occasion to say to Lincoln, that he was known to be the homeliest man in the county, and he was also continually being told that he looked like Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Lincoln looked at him shrewdly and said, "Yes, I think we do look alike, there is a striking resemblance, but I have a little less cheek than you have, Mr. Patterson." (Laughter and applause.)
I should go on with many stories, with which we grew up in Illinois, stories which we knew quite as we knew the tales of the village or tales of our own fathers and mothers.

Now, as one reviews Lincoln from the point of view of his great difficulties and his great achievements, I think one is first impressed with the fact that he always was afraid, during the four years of that furious conflict, that simply because he was Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and simply because the ordinary affairs of the Government were very much disturbed, that out of that difficulty our free institutions would be impaired, and that self-government itself would suffer.

You know, he used to say, that if self-government failed in America, it would be the great disappointment of the centuries, because, after all, it had taken a great deal of strife before self-government could be established on a large scale on which it was established here.

That, I think, contains a certain lesson, does it not, for those in this Party of ours? We are trying to bring about in America something in the way of a much-needed control of large industrial undertakings. We are trying to repair some of the inevitable disasters, apparently inevitable of modern industry as has been done in older countries, controls which have been established, and repairs made in older countries with centralized government. We could easily cite the attempt to take care of the unemployed in Belgium, the whole series of social insurance for old age and sickness in Germany, or a dozen other things which occur to us all. But, we have the difficulty of doing that in America, in such ways, that the institutions of self-government shall not be impaired; and that, I think, is one thing we have to consider very carefully; and I think the Progressive Party considered it very carefully, when at the time it issued this program of social control, social insurance and a standardization of industry, it also said: "It cannot be done unless the power of direct legislation is placed in the hands of the people," in order that these changes may come, not as the centralized government have given them, from above down, but may come from the people up; that the people shall be the directing and controlling factors in this legislation. (Applause.)

I should say, then, that we must follow this one great principle of Lincoln's, that in times of great transition, when desirable things are to be brought about, we must be more than ever careful to keep those guarantees of self-government which we have received from the fathers, and since it is impossible, to make a semi-political speech without referring to "The Fathers," I will make that reference now and be finished with it.

Then I think there is another thing which we must think of when Abraham Lincoln is even mentioned, and that is his great passion, that the union of the States, North and South, East and West, should be preserved. It has been said of him that if he had any leaning towards an infatuation, it was this great passion, which almost queered him, that the Union should be preserved.

Now, in these great industrial adjustments, which the Progres-
sive Party seems to have the courage to face, another thing is obvious:—that for a long time the politicians have been left in sole control of the situation.

In this great attempt to meet the situation regarding industrial development, the difficulties which have been brought about by rapid industrial development, it is, of course, most important that the Union should be preserved in its spiritual sense as well as in its actual sense; and the trouble has been that the industrial problems have been discussed in spots, and not in places where there is congestion of population, so that the difficulties of the situation have not been properly understood. The situation has been discussed here and there, but we have not had a discussion of this situation as a National problem. It was not discussed in every hamlet, in every crossroad, until the Progressive Party brought forward these measures, as National measures, and said,—if we are going to take care of these things, they must be taken care of by the country as a whole, and we must effect some sort of like-mindedness in regard to them which can only be done when they are political issues and brought forward before the entire country, as only a political program can be brought forward.

I believe that the social reformer has had his part of this; but social reformers are not to be trusted as is the great political sense. The great common-sense of the people is to be trusted; and these social problems have been formulated in such ways that they were placed and had to be placed before the entire country for the careful attention of the people.

Now, in Illinois, the people who knew Mr. Lincoln as a lawyer were always saying, as his own partner said of him, perhaps more than anyone else, that his great success as a lawyer lay in the fact that he had an invincible grasp of fundamental justice, that he had the capacity of going through all the subtleties and difficulties of a given situation, and unearthing the fundamental justice of the case; not only that he could present that view of the case in such a way that the most ordinary jury could grasp his meaning and follow him, but that he could convince the jury of the justice of his cause.

Now, something of that sort will have to do in our Party. We will have to take out of the industrial experience of our country, the wrongs which have grown up in this country. We must take each man and find the thing he has felt and believed, and we will have to lead him and show him that it is an inevitable conclusion that these matters shall be made right. And they will be made right, not because they were presented to him by a bunch of doctrinaires—I will pull up that sentence that has the word “bunch” in it, by using a bigger word at the end (laughter)—but that they are inevitable, to use Senator Beveridge’s words, “and they are sprung from the grass roots of public necessities.” We will have to learn from the great mind of Abraham Lincoln. In Illinois we feel that Abraham Lincoln did things in a surprising way. His earlier experiences on the farm, with poverty and hardship; then in a little country store, then as a lawyer, but as he advanced from one step or class to another, he never forgot in any one of the positions he oc-
cupied, how the people in the other positions he had passed through thought and felt about different questions. He made a synthesis of the feelings of those people and constantly interpreted them to themselves, as well as to the country at large as a whole. And there was that sense of validity in what he said; it was not what one man thought and experienced but was a synthesis of the thoughts and experiences of the people he had known all along the way; what they had thought and felt; what the people had believed. And he revealed their own higher visions to themselves and they looked upon him as a synopsis of the higher life of the American people.

Now, something of that sort every political party has to do. It must learn to embody within itself the experiences and the thoughts of the people of the nation; and, personally, I wish we had more labor people in the Progressive Party than we have at the moment, although they are coming in all over the country with a rapidity that is most gratifying. We will have to embody the interpretation and the aspirations of the various bodies throughout the country. We must have the sort of thing which Aristotle called “political affection.” He said you could bring men together for a given purpose, if there was some “filia”—(its meaning is affection or friendship). It is the thing which differentiates a body of men and makes them feel that they have some common tie, and belong to the same thing, if they have similar ideas or a similarity of hope.

Now, certainly our Party had a tremendous start in that direction. Perhaps never before—I won’t say that—I was going to say, never before in the city of Chicago, but I must remember that Lincoln’s convention was held there—but perhaps never before on this continent were the wills and hearts of the people so merged in one another as they were in the convention at Chicago. And you were surprised at the people you met at the convention. It was like a sort of resurrection day, when your ideals and your hopes were found to be held by people whom one did not dare hope believed the same things. So, we must keep this sympathetic power which our Party has, and make it national. If it is broken into sectional bits, we will be sure to make mistakes. We had an illustration of that in the Federal Child Labor Law. I am sure these things will not come to pass in this new form in the form for which the Progressive Party stands, unless we bring them to a national basis in the sense of Lincoln’s definition of nationality.

Before I close, I will state a thought from Walt. Whitman: He said—As he looked abroad and saw the men about him, it seemed to him unendurable that large masses of men follow those who do not believe in men. Now, if the Progressive Party has done one thing more than any other Party, it has reaffirmed the belief in man. Let us keep that faith—the supremacy of the human interest in all political affairs, in all social undertakings, in all our national undertakings and dreams; and then, we will have to be the Party of the future, as the future belongs to the men and the women of this nation.