

Liberty

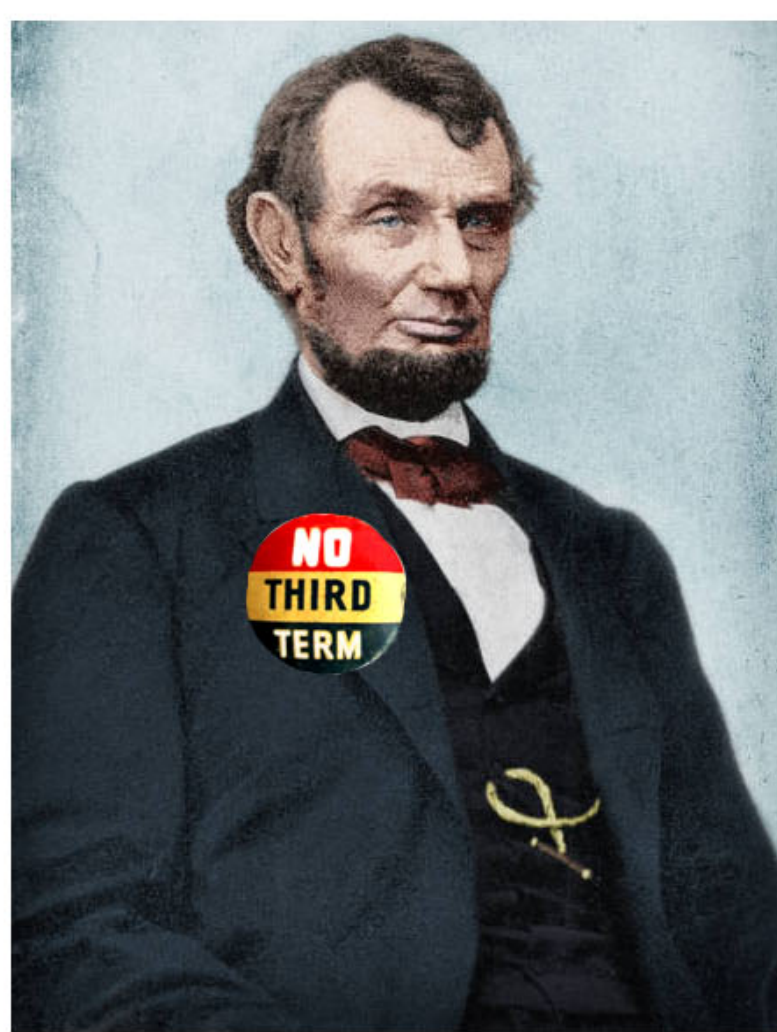
October, 1936

IF LINCOLN Were in the WHITE HOUSE Today

*The Great Emancipator Ponders
the New Deal and the Problems
of 1936*

by

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I WAS waiting with other newspapermen for the press conference with the master of the New Deal. What with the drone of the conversation and the heat of the room, I dozed—until some one touched me on the arm. "Come," he said. "The President is waiting."

It was Ike Hoover, immemorally Chief Usher of the White House. At the moment it did not strike me as strange that he had been dead for two years.

In the President's study was Abraham Lincoln!

"Mr. Lincoln," I said, "what has brought you back?"

"The condition of the country," he said, "fills the mind of every patriot with anxiety. Our common country is in great peril, demanding the loftiest views and boldest action to bring a speedy relief."

"Don't you think we have had enough of relief?"

The ghost of a smile slowly crept up the gnarled features. "I am for those means which will give the greatest good to the greatest number. This government is expressly charged with the duty of providing for the general welfare."

"You believe in the Public Works program?"

"Time and experience have demonstrated 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 the clearing of navigable streams is what no person will deny."

"Don't you think the administration is disposed to deal too kindly with labor at the expense of capital?"

"Workingmen are the basis of all governments."

So far he had smiled approval upon the New Deal.

"Mr. Roosevelt's enemies insist," I said, "that he is encroaching upon the sovereignty of the states."

Lincoln shrugged expressively. "No one of our states, except Texas, ever was a sovereignty."

"I can understand that you as a Republican favor every measure that strengthens the federal government, but—Mr. Roosevelt was elected as a Democrat! Many of his actions are contrary to his party's doctrines today. Has an elected official the right to repudiate his platform pledges?"

Lincoln at once became very serious.

"We should do neither more nor less than we gave people reason to believe we would when they gave us their votes."

"The legitimate object of government," he continued, "is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all, or so well, for themselves. Whatever concerns the whole should be confided to the whole—to the general government; whatever concerns only the state should be left exclusively to the state."

"You do not advocate the interference of governmental paternalism in private business?"

"In all that the people can individually do as well for themselves, government ought not to interfere. If there is anything which it is the duty of the whole people to never intrust to any hands but their own, that thing is the preservation and perpetuity of their own liberties and institutions."

"You believe a President should run Congress?"

Lincoln shook his head. "By the Constitution, the Executive may recommend measures which he may think

proper, and he may veto those he thinks improper, and it is supposed that he may add

to these certain indirect influences. My political education strongly inclines me against a very free use of any of these means. As a rule I think it is better that Congress should originate as well as perfect its measures without external bias."

"Mr. Roosevelt's opponents claim," I resumed, "that he is riding roughshod over the Constitution."

"It is the duty of the President and other government functionaries," he said, "to run the machine as it is."

The Great Emancipator
vs.
the
New
Dealers



"Encouraged by Mr. Roosevelt, Congress passed several measures of doubtful constitutionality—"

"Do not forget that Constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court."

"Is the President ever justified in going beyond the Constitution?"

"No organic law can ever be framed with a provision specifically applicable to every question which may occur in practical administration. No foresight can anticipate, nor any document of reasonable length contain, express provision for all possible questions."

"Mr. Roosevelt's speeches have seemed to hint that he will seek to amend the Constitution. Do you approve?"

"No slight occasion should tempt us to touch it. *It can scarcely be made better than it is.* I do not mean to say we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did. What I do say is that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand."

Mr. Lincoln rejected governmental extravagance upon the basis of an ever-growing mountain of debt.

"For several years past," he said, "the revenues of the government have been unequal to its expenditures, and consequently loan after loan, sometimes direct and sometimes indirect in form, has been resorted to. By this means a new national debt has been created, and is still growing on us with a rapidity fearful to contemplate. Coming expenditures must be met, and the present debt must be paid. Money cannot always be borrowed for these objects. *The system of loans is but temporary in its nature, and is not only ruinous while it lasts, but one that must soon fail and leave us destitute.*"

"Do you think we are justified in experimenting in America with Fascism or Communism?"

"This government must be preserved, in spite of the acts of any man or set of men. Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality. To the humblest and poorest among us are held out the highest privileges and positions."

The interview was over. "Tell me," I asked Ike Hoover as I was leaving, "does the spirit of Abraham Lincoln frequently haunt the Executive Mansion these days?"

"Lincoln's spirit," Ike replied, "at times descends upon Mr. Roosevelt when he relies on his own common sense, but it vanishes quickly when he listens to advisers who are too wild-eyed or politicians who are too shrewd."

THE END

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: Except for unimportant stylistic changes and condensations, every statement placed in Lincoln's mouth is an excerpt from his state papers, speeches, or letters.]