

LINCOLN LORE

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ANNUAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS—1862

President Eisenhower in his address to the United Nations on June 20 used a quotation from Abraham Lincoln's annual message to Congress in 1862 that has again called attention to this important state paper by the Emancipator. The quotation was taken from the next to the last paragraph of the document in which Lincoln said:

"The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country."

The preceding and following paragraphs to this quotation are significant as all three combined bring Lincoln's humanitarian appeal in this state paper to a magnificent conclusion. His humility and diplomacy are revealed in these words which introduce the Eisenhower excerpt:

"I do not forget the gravity which should characterize a paper addressed to the Congress of the nation by the Chief Magistrate of the nation. Nor do I forget that some of you are my seniors, nor that many of you have more experience than I, in the conduct of public affairs. Yet I trust that in view of the great responsibility resting upon me, you will perceive no want of respect to yourselves, in any undue earnestness I may seem to display."

The concluding paragraph, following the Eisenhower quotation, takes the form of a challenge: "Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. . . . We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth."

The opening paragraph of the 1862 message to Congress is Lincolnic in expression. After the salutation the President observes: "While it has not pleased the Almighty to bless us with the return of peace, we can but press on, guided by the best light He gives us, trusting that in His own good time, and wise way, all will yet be well."

With respect to foreign relations to which Lincoln gives considerable attention he sums up the attitude of the nation in these words: "We have forborne from taking part in any controversy between foreign states, and between parties or factions in such states. We have attempted no propagandism, and acknowledged no revolution. But we have left to every nation the exclusive conduct and management of its own affairs."

The President notes that "The condition of the finances will claim your most diligent consideration" and observes that "Fluctuations in the value of currency are always injurious, and to reduce these fluctuations to the lowest possible point will always be a leading purpose in wise legislation."

The reports of the Postmaster General and Secretary of the Interior receive notice with chief concern about the Indian uprisings in Minnesota coming in for special attention. The Department of Agriculture had just been

established and Lincoln hoped it "would become the fruitful source of advantage to all our people."

Over one half of this annual message in 1862 was utilized for an appeal on behalf of Compensated Emancipation and the concluding paragraphs containing the Eisenhower citation refer to the emphasis Lincoln had placed on this method of bringing about peace and freedom.

Abraham Lincoln introduces his compensation argument with this truism, "A nation may be said to consist of its territory, its people, and its laws. The territory is the only part which is of certain durability." Lincoln then follows this statement with a biblical passage which he puts in quotations, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever." The President then continues with an interesting argument that the "United States is well adapted to be the home of one national family; and it is not adapted for two or more."

Illustrating this opinion he quotes this statement from the First Inaugural Address: "Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them." He continues, "There is no line, straight or crooked suitable for a national boundary, upon which to divide."

Coming directly to some aspects of the slavery question Mr. Lincoln points out that "without slavery the rebellion could never have existed, without slavery it could not continue." He further commented that even among the friends of the Union there is diversity of thought with respect to the institution. He presented stages of development with these three objectives: 1st-Emancipation, 2nd-Time for Consummation, 3rd-Compensation. He seemed to give more attention to the idea of compensation and mapped out a plan which would reimburse the states for the loss of slaves through emancipation at an agreed amount per capita using the eighth national census report as a statistical basis.

Lincoln presented the cost element in these words: "The war requires large sums, and requires them at once. The aggregate sum necessary for compensated emancipation, of course, would be large. But it would require no ready cash; nor the bonds even, any faster than the emancipation progresses. This might not, and probably would not, close before the end of the thirty-seven years. At that time we shall probably have a hundred millions of people to share the burden, instead of thirty one millions as now."

In his discussion about emancipated compensation in developing the labor phase he uses this expression, "Labor is like any other commodity in the market— increase the demand for it and you increase the price of it." Because of the agitation over the emancipation question Lincoln used this timely suggestion, "If there ever could be a time for mere catch arguments, that time surely is not now. In times like the present, men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and eternity."

Yet with Lincoln's logical appeal which stressed peace, conservation of life and economic stability he was unable to sell Congress on his idea of Compensation Emancipation, one of the really great humanitarian enterprises in which he took the initiative.