

CHAPTER XIV

THE ABOLITION OF PRIVILEGE

Let us now proceed to the discussion of the only other remaining method of solving our problem, viz: the abolition of privilege.

Here again it should be borne in mind that effective leadership requires that the leader should have definitely settled in his own mind the ultimate remedy which must finally be adopted; but when that is clear, intelligent statesmanship requires that any step proposed for immediate political action should be a short and easily comprehended one. The historic example is the action of Lincoln and the leaders of the Republican party. They believed in the ultimate abolition of slavery, but their political program only committed the party to the restriction of slavery to the slave states.

Lincoln's Definition of Privilege

The best definition of privilege was that made by Lincoln when he said "There has never been but one question in all civilization, there is now only one question, and there never will be but one question in the future, and that is how to prevent a few men from saying to many men, you work and earn bread and we will eat it." Any solution of the intricate problem

which confronts us must keep this fundamental truth in mind. A consideration of historic facts at once shows the truth of the statement that in the past there has been but one question, and that was some form of privilege as defined by Lincoln's statement.

In Lincoln's time the one question was the form of privilege known as slavery, and a careful examination of our economic system will show privilege as the one outstanding and fundamental problem of our time.

The next most important contribution by Lincoln was in his analysis of the nature and characteristics of the privilege of his time, to wit, slavery. Most abolitionists saw in slavery only its cruelty, the separation of families, the beating of slaves by cruel task masters, and the long hours of labor to which they were driven. Probably Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" did more than any other single influence to arouse the public mind to a hatred of the institution of slavery, and she did this by picturing in a thrilling narrative the horrid cruelties incident to the institution.

While Lincoln was not insensible to this phase of the problem, he analyzed as no other abolitionist did the essential characteristics of this institution, and of privilege in general. He saw that while the institution was accompanied by horrible characteristics portrayed by Mrs. Stowe, taken at large the slaveholders were as kindly as other men, and refrained from cruelty in the treatment of their slaves, as the average animal used in production is kindly treated by its owner, partly because the average man is humane, and partly because that policy is the one that pays best in the long run in treating humans as well as animals. What he saw

in slavery as in all privilege was that it menaced the foundations of this Republic, and impaired the true rights of property. He saw that this institution could not long be maintained unless the beneficiaries controlled the government, and that its beneficiaries realized this fact to the fullest extent. They knew better than anybody else that once they lost control of the government their institution was doomed, and when they did lose control of the government, in order to protect their institution they seceded from the government which they could no longer control.

Lincoln also saw that government could not regulate slavery or any other form of privilege. It is quite obvious that it would have been impossible to set up any effective national or state tribunal charged with the duty of seeing that slaves were properly treated. This point ought to be kept in mind in considering the possibility of regulating forms of privilege which will be herein discussed. Lincoln also saw that the form of privilege known as slavery could not be confined to the existing slave states, and that in order to protect it the slaveholders would be driven to extend it into the free territories and ultimately into the free states. This profound truth found utterance in his famous statement that the country could not remain permanently half slave and half free, that it would be eventually all slave or all free. It was the analysis of these characteristics of slavery that put Lincoln in the forefront of the statesmen of his day. He saw the whole problem and appreciated its essential characteristics.

Lincoln's Problem Simpler than Ours

The next great truth that must be comprehended is

that these characteristics of slavery are necessarily the characteristics of every important form of privilege in past history, and as privilege manifests itself at the present time. Whenever the beneficiaries of privilege have lost control of the government their particular form of privilege has gone down, frequently in a bloody revolution, as in France and Russia.

Bearing in mind these essential characteristics of privilege, let us proceed to investigate the different forms of privilege.

Our political task is more difficult than Lincoln's because he had to do with only one form of privilege, which was confined to one section of the country, and to the colored race. It was a problem of great simplicity, although as history proved, of enormous difficulty in its solution. Our task is complicated by the fact that we are not dealing with one single privilege, nor is privilege confined to any part of the country or to any race. But if a political program can be formulated which is confined wholly to the abolition of privilege, and all irrelevant issues avoided, we can create a program with a paramount issue similar to the abolition of slavery.

FORMS OF SPECIAL PRIVILEGE

Privilege manifests itself in our time mainly in four ways.

First:—In that element of the private ownership of land which gives to the owner the power to hold land out of use, either for speculation or to support monopoly, or without any reason whatever, and to exact rent for the use of land, and to appropriate the land values

created by the community, without rendering any service in return.

Second:—Privileges in transportation enjoyed by a few so called trusts, which are denied to competitors.

Third:—The partial and outright monopolies, such as the railroads, pipe lines, and public utilities of our municipalities.

Fourth:—Patents which are absolute monopolies, and the perversion of our patent laws by which owners of valuable patents are permitted to acquire competing but not infringing patents which threaten their monopoly, and to hold these newly acquired patents out of use to support their monopoly.

These four forms of privilege therefore are the most important methods which enable the possessors of them to say to many men, "You work and earn bread and we will eat it," and are sufficient to form the basis of a new political program and if necessary of a new political party.

Let us proceed to examine these privileges.