

# J. C. As I Knew Him

by LAURENCE B. KEITH

WHEN John C. Lincoln, formerly of Cleveland, passed away, I lost a warm, kind friend; electrical science lost one of its best thinkers; and the world lost a wonderful man. Much was written in the newspapers and labor publications, about his business career and scientific achievements with the usual embellishments, but very little about his personality, his family life, or the attributes which "made him tick."



The first time I ever met "J. C." as he was called as long as I knew him, was a strictly business call. At the time I was a salesman for Dennison Manufacturing Company, who were known as the "Shipping Tag People." It had been my good fortune to have designed what were called work tags for a number of the garment manufacturers in the Cleveland and Cincinnati areas. These tags were simply a strip of coupons, each of which was torn off by the operator as his part of an order was completed, and acted as a warrant for his pay. This was a simple but fast way of making up a payroll, as nearly all work of that type was piece work. There was no reason in my mind why it could not be used for workers on weekly wages too, as a matter of knowing who did what, in case of complaints from buyers after delivery.

When I walked into J. C.'s office, I saw an old roll-top desk flanked by a drafting board in one corner of the shop. He was very busy on the board and I was turned over to his foreman, Charley Schaefer. I was favorably impressed by J. C.'s knowledge of this wonderful electrical engineering, about which I knew little or nothing, and his courtesy in taking the time from his work to turn me over to his superintendent, as any youngster would have been.

When I got to talking to Schaefer,

it didn't take much listening to find that their biggest problem was the boss. The boss was always the first one there in the morning and the last one to leave at night. And before the employees got there he would have worked out something the night before, and taken a part of some motor, welder, or something that was being put together as part of an order, and rewound it, or tried out a new insulation, or something else, with the inevitable result that when that particular order reached the assembly point, there would be a part missing. Confusing to the orderly and routine minds of everybody else! But if each part bore a tag with the order number on it, it might be that J. C. would do his research on parts from stock or even have parts built specially for his experiments. So that was a sale for me and at least a partial solution of their problem.

Another thing that came up in the course of that conversation was the fact Saturday was payday, and all invoices were placed on J. C.'s desk on Friday night together with the bank statement and a copy of the payroll. It was his habit on Saturday morning to compare the amount of the payroll with the bank balance and mentally figure out how much he would have to collect in order to meet the payroll. Then he would pick up the invoices in order of proximity to the shop, go out

and collect enough to meet the payroll, go over to the bank, make the deposit, pick up the necessary change, come back and make up the payroll. Customers whose offices were more than five or six blocks from the plant were never bothered. Payment from them could come at their convenience. But payrolls had to be met, J. C. could get back to his beloved drafting board just as soon as he had those envelopes filled. It was the drafting board that counted.

#### **The Union's Appeal**

One of the incidents in my long friendship with John C. Lincoln occurred shortly after the close of World War I, when a group of union organizers walked into the office and announced they were there to organize the shop. J. C. said, "Well gentlemen, we do not have an auditorium or a cafeteria where we can get the whole force together at one time, but I assure you that if you will give me a few minutes to clear the winding room (which has the most free space), I have no objection whatever to your addressing the Lincoln employees."

The agitators could do nothing more than wait, of course, though we all knew they were expecting to be thrown out bodily as they had been so many times before. They probably thought the whole thing was merely to give Mr. Lincoln time to call the police.

But we did clear a space in the winding room, shut down the power, and called all employees to a meeting. When every one had been checked in, J. C. asked if he might say a few words to introduce the union delegates. They could not very well refuse and told him to go ahead. He climbed up on top of a work bench and said, "ladies and gentlemen of the Lincoln Electric Company, the electrical union has seen fit to send this delegation of its officials to organ-

ize this plant. I have promised them they will be heard, and I expect you to listen very carefully to what they have to say. But before they talk to you, I want you to know two things. The first is that it makes no difference to me whether you join the union and make this a closed shop, or not. The second is that if you want this to be a union shop you will be paid the union scale of wages, and not one copper cent more. The choice is up to you." Then he walked out.

I will say this for the union boys, they tried. But every single employee knew that J. C. meant exactly what he said. There would be no more stock buying plan, no more incentive pay, no more employee's association, no company picnics or group insurance with the company paying half the premiums. In other words, no more "fringe benefits."

The result, naturally, was that when the union boys finished their harangue the crowd got up and went back to work, with one exception. A big burly Irish watchman invited them outside so he could take them on, two at a time. "to show them what the Lincoln people thought of them."

#### **Team Work Pays Off**

J. C.'s theory and method of incentive was expressed this way: make regular pay as little as employees can get along on, personal economics being considered. If you give it to them every week they will spend it before next payday, but if you save it for them and give it to them in a lump sum once a year they will do something worth while with it.

It works!

I can still name a dozen or more Lincoln employees who bought their homes entirely with bonus money. Many boys and girls got a college education, long and severe illnesses were free from financial worry, and so on. The one most important thing

about it was that they learned to SAVE.

I can't say just what the company policy is now, but I do see in the papers every year that Lincoln Electric has just paid out another whacking big bonus, running into millions.

No matter what the grievance, Mr. Lincoln was always approachable—his office door always open to his employees. And they were not only given an answer, but they were also given an understandable explanation of the answer. I have never met a disloyal Lincoln employee. Dissatisfied, yes. But not disloyal.

J. C. was not particularly interested in the accounting end of the business, his forte was strictly engineering—producing a welder that worked satisfactorily, a motor that would operate under water, and as the old superintendent was wont to say, "stuff like that there." As long as things went smoothly he never interfered with other aspects of the business. He was nearly always there at the department head meetings, to be sure, but he let his brother who was a financial genius, operate that part of the job.

A little later I learned something about his background. His father owned a small farm near Painesville,

Ohio, and for a large part of his income raised hogs. On Saturdays the old man would hitch the team, drive into town, and collect enough garbage to feed the hogs until his next collection trip. By noon the wagon would be full. He would take the bridles off the horses, put on their feed-bags, and take his own lunch out from under the seat.

When his "light repast" was consumed he would stand up on the seat of the wagon and preach a sermon, or make a speech to any townspeople who were within hearing distance. Many of his speeches were tirades against taxation. "I pay the taxes on *my* land and that should be enough." So it was no surprise that J. C.'s interest in taxation was strongly directed toward the "single tax."

John Cromwell Lincoln was the president of the Henry George School from 1947 until his death in 1959. He was the engineering genius who founded the now-famous Lincoln Electric Company. During his long and brilliant career, which included many inventions, he never lost his inherited loyalty to Henry George's principles. He is memorialized by the Foundation which bears his name, and which carries on a distinguished research program into the philosophy and application of land value taxation.

The Erie Land Tax Association of Erie, Pennsylvania is again throwing its meager resources, together with its wholehearted convictions, into the November election. A young Republican, Al Woodel, is running for City Council, with land value taxation as his main platform. ELTA is appealing for public funds in this difficult task.

Bertram A. Wilson, president of ELTA, along with William Walker, Thomas Greene, Wylie Young and others, have plunged into this battle, encouraged by the fact that previous explanations of LVT have aroused a good proportion of voters and the electorate is reasonably well informed.

Good Government—a smart, new-looking periodical, arrived from Australia, replacing The Standard, long a familiar friend, established in 1905 by A. G. Huie. Good Government has a new colored cover, more pages, a new subscription rate (1£, \$2 annually), and a new editor, E. P. Middleton who succeeds W. A. Dowe.

No alteration is intended in the editorial policy which will continue to state the basic principles and philosophy of "the great American economist and social reformer, Henry George and those eminent thinkers who preceded him."