

Memo Perkins

*but discipline with
Bad!*

Those of us who have included in our readings in the United States History details of the Cabinet of our successive Presidents often have ^{been singular} noticed ~~that~~ and ~~wanted~~ to know why this or that man should have been ^{named} for a portfolio. Few indeed of our Presidential Cabinets have not included men whose presence required an explanation and when you had ^{the} explanation it frequently was far from satisfactory.

It is and it should be *a pride* to the people of the United States that the first woman to fill a Cabinet position is Frances Perkins is a member of the Cabinet of Franklin Roosevelt because there was none other in the country, man or woman, better fitted to fill ~~the~~ position as Secretary of Labor. I believe I speak for a very large number of those persons who have been observers of the development of the labor program of the United States when I say that there would have been deep disappointment if Mr. Roosevelt had not chosen her for the position she occupies. ~~And this not at all because she was a woman, it is because she was a thoroughly seasoned~~ Cabinet timber *and the President from my association* *never - never she did it herself* *OR* *A.* ~~She was made a member of Mr. Roosevelt's cabinet because he needed her - labor needed her - because he knew~~

it was that fact - rather than the fact that
see now a member of the cabinet
in which the award of criminal immunity is given
what is it

My dear Mr. [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

through a long period of working with her as the Governor of New York State that she had the qualities and the experience he needed for his Secretary of Labor.

It is not the fact that Frances Perkins is Secretary of Labor, the first woman to fill a Cabinet position that we are honoring tonight, it is rather the achievement of which that position is a recognition - an achievement so sound that she was the logical person to assume the responsibility for its complex and difficult problems.

What do we mean when we talk of an achievement? It is not an affair of the hour - not an accident; it is not a single deed, however brilliant. *not a tour de force* An achievement is a growth, with a definite origin, a steady pursuit. It is knowing ^{thing} what you are after each given moment, seeing the / you are after grow larger and larger as you proceed. It is enriching that pursuit, seeing it ripen, mastery of its technique. It is an increasing passion for the elevation of the process.

Where does an achievement begin? Who shall say what moment, under what circumstances Frances Perkins' achievement was born? She was one of that large group of women who in the first decade of this century chose to make ^{which we get} a profession out of / social reform, to enter an uncharted field whose whole object was to correct, to improve conditions, to

make life tolerable, particularly for those who labor ~~and~~
~~among these that labor~~ It was a deliberate choice, this
 field of social reform, made soon after her leaving college.
 There ^{was a} call for preparation, extra preparation, and she took it
 at Hull House, at Greenwich House, at Columbia. /but it somehow
~~these~~ did not come close enough to the field to which she was
 looking with steady eye.

Soon she had gone closer and was in the fight
 for control, of factory conditions, shorter
 working hours for women, protection / against fire, poisons,
 accidents. Step by step she took up one / disease and
 another of after
 the growing number of interests, suggestions for making
 more orderly, for controlling, the life of the woman who
 worked in factories. Life must be made tolerable for them,
 It must be safe.
 for those who labor. /Life must not be pulled down, they
 must be properly rewarded. All of those ambitions who
 to work in this broadening field in turn she sponsored
 compensation for loss of life and limb, for industrial
 diseases, old age pensions, child labor, unemployment
 insurance - an unfolding field to which she brought increasing
 knowledge, common sense, breadth of view. More and more men
 looked to her in New York State as a leader in the campaign
 before any one of these reforms.

It is inevitable that she should be brought to where
 a position of responsibility lay. Many of us remember with

what satisfaction we learned in 1926 that Governor Smith had made her Chairman of the State Industrial Board. How he had learned by that time that she had the background, the years of experience for the matters to be handled, that she had learned to know a fact from a rumour, ^a theory from practice. She had proved that she could work with people of various conflicting interests, to work with ^{Tam} Sullivan and work with Florence Kelly. She could bring them all to serve the pupose.

She learned how to investigate, that it was more than giving a factory the once over, that it was knowing its structure, understanding its economic needs and being able to separate them from economic greeds.

Those who looked on in 1926 at the new appointment were not disappointed. This position made her the natural, ^{the} inevitable person for the head of the State Department of Labor when Governor Roosevelt came in in 1929. What a responsibility to be given at that moment, just at the eve of the great breakdown with which we are still laboring so to repair. ~~Can~~ Can you think of a more difficult position for one who had made the cause of the working man and woman her cause, than that that Frances Perkins held from 1929 to 1932. It was her business to know how things were going in the shops and factories of this greatest of industrial states. From month to month she saw them going

from bad to worse, a steady fall in wages, a steady fall in the number of days work, a steady closing of factories. Frances Perkins knew in terms of human want and despair what all this meant - never forgot it. She went into the struggle to work out a practical plan, to take care of men and women in future disasters, a practical plan of unemployment insurance. To think of a future where there should be provisions for such a breakdown as we are now going through. was I fancy the only consolation she had in the tremendous and disheartening job through these years up to 1932.

One thing that interested observers was the growing respect with which Frances Perkins' reports of conditions in New York were received by all classes of people, the Government, not only in the State but at Washington, by employers, by employees. They became one of the best barometers of how things were actually going in the industrial world that we have in the country. They were respected; they were trusted.

Unless she really knew how to get information, she never doctored it, she gave it out as it was, trusting that if people know how things are, know actually, that they will listen to and consent to reasonable correction. That is, when Governor Roosevelt became President of the

United States he had, as I always have said, at hand seasoned timber for his Labor Secretary, a Secretary of proved achievement. And it is for this achievement, this proved understanding and power, her willingness to take larger, almost terrifying responsibilities, the courage, the that achievement gives that we are honoring here.

Never has a Secretary of Labor been called upon to face such intricate problems as you, Madam Secretary, are facing. For twenty five or more years of steady instructive effort to build up a body of sound regulations, sound practices, just, humane, have given you the knowledge of labor conditions of what can and of what cannot be done; what has been accomplished gives you courage to attempt the greater programs. And now it is really and outgrowth of all that you have done before which you are now facing. in the immense confusion of mind which we always have, and probably always will attend efforts in ^a democracy to correct its own stupidities and wrong doings, occupying a position in the great an beneficent effort to establish codes in our industry which would insure in the future more ethical practices, more humane dealings, which would help industry so to rule itself, all men concerned in it and the public upon which these men depend will feel that this New Deal

~~practical measures for the future~~ is truly a square deal.

You have gone your way holding to your gains;
the
having / knowledge enables you to avoid duplicating errors,
repeating the failures of the past. You have a clear
conception of what is to be builded from the achievements
of the last years. And while building is going on at
a rate at the moment which may fairly bewilder us outsiders
and possibly may for the moment perplex you, yourself, we
have profound faith that you will add substantial gains
to all of those of the past, and while doing this your
eyes will never be blinded to the future, the great next thing
that is to be done.