

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE POMEROY CIRCULAR

A circular, appearing over the signature of Senator S. C. Pomeroy of Kansas, was distributed as a preliminary document in a "Chase for President" movement in 1864. It received wide publicity at the time and is still recalled as one of the most critical attacks on the Lincoln administration.

Senator Pomeroy was one of the committee of Senators who, in 1862, visited Abraham Lincoln and urged, almost demanded, the removal of Seward from the Cabinet. Here we observe what is possibly Pomeroy's first outward break with the administration and the beginning of his alliance with the Chase faction.

The two Senators from Kansas, Lane and Pomeroy, were continually clashing which called forth a reprimand to Pomeroy from the President in these words: "I wish you and Lane would make a sincere effort to get out of the mood you are in. It does neither of you any good; it gives you the means of tormenting my life out of me, and nothing else."

The opposition group in the Republican party took form under the name of the National Executive Committee, and Senator Pomeroy was made the chairman. The committee, attempting to head off public sentiment for a second term for Lincoln, was anxious to press the claims of Chase. This was responsible for the famous circular released in February 1864, in which five definite statements were made with reference to the administration as follows:

"First, that even were the reelection of Mr. Lincoln desirable, it is practically impossible against the union of influences which will oppose him.

"Second, that should he be reelected, his manifest tendency towards compromises and temporary expedients of policy will become stronger during a second term than it has been in the first, and the cause of human liberty, and the dignity and honor of the nation, suffer proportionately, while the war may continue to languish during his whole Administration, till the public debt shall become a burden too great to be borne.

"Third, that the patronage of the Government through the necessities of the war has been so rapidly increased, and to such an enormous extent, and so loosely placed, as to render the application of the 'one-term principle' absolutely essential to the certain safety of our republican institutions.

"Fourth, that we find united in Hon. Salmon P. Chase more of the qualities needed in a President during the next four years than are combined in any other available candidate; his record, clear and unimpeachable, showing him to be a statesman of rare ability and an administrator of the very highest order, while his private character furnishes the surest obtainable guarantee of economy and purity in the management of public affairs.

"Fifth, that the discussion of the Presidential question, already commenced by the friends of Mr. Lincoln, has developed a popularity and strength in Mr. Chase unexpected even to his warmest admirers; and while we are aware that this strength is at present unorganized, and in no condition to manifest its real magnitude, we are satisfied that it only needs systematic and faithful effort to develop it to an extent sufficient to overcome all opposing obstacles."

Mr. Chase at once wrote to the President after the circular appeared, stating that he had no knowledge of the letter until he saw it in print. Mr. Lincoln replied that he had known of Mr. Pomeroy's activities for several weeks and was not surprised at the appearance of the letter. He then assured Mr. Chase that he perceived no occasion for his removal from the Cabinet.

One of the Cabinet members, however, expressed himself in very frank terms with respect to the situation as will be evident from these excerpts from the original letters:

"Department of the Interior

"Washington, D. C., Feby 17 1864

"R. W. Thompson Esq

"Dear Sir, A secret circular has just been issued signed by Pomeroy chairman for Chase for President. Mr. C. must have knowledge of & approved it. It contains reflections upon the President of such an offensive character that there will have to be explanations and will I think cause a rupture in the cabinet. There is much caballing & plotting going on here all dangerous to the government and there will have to be explanations. I hope for the peace of the country that our convention will most unmistakably declare for Lincoln, by doing that it will tend to suppress some of the malcontents now making mischief. They are looking for the strong side and when they find that Lincoln is to have the further control, if it be had at all by a Union man, they will be for him & cease their creating difficulties. I have written fully to Gov. Morton may be he will show you the letter.

"Truly yours

"J. P. Usher"

"Department of the Interior

"Washington D. C. Feby 25th 1864

"Hon R. W. Thompson

"Dear Sir, I handed your dispatch to the President last evening with which he was much gratified. I suppose you have seen the Pomeroy circular and have been amazed that Mr. Chase should have allowed such a paper to go to the public. It is a most indecent thing and how a man of strict honour can hold his position as advisor of the President after stating that he disagreed with him in his policy is more than I can tell—Lincoln says but little finds fault with none & judging from his deportment you would suppose he was as little concerned as any one about the result—I do not see how we are to keep the family together much longer and you need not be surprised to hear of a distintegration of the cabinet any day. . . .

"Yours truly

"John P. Usher"

It was not until March 10, 1864, when he addressed the Senate at length on the subject of the forthcoming Presidential election, that Senator Pomeroy made public reference to the circular. Pomeroy was interrupted but once during the speech, when Senator Doolittle arose to inquire if it was the purpose of Mr. Pomeroy to organize a new political party. Pomeroy replied that "no party now exists which has ever been seen in a national convention." He then outlined the objectives of the new political organization. (1) Immediate suppression of rebellion, (2) Constitutional amendment prohibiting slavery, (3) Maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine, (4) Rigid economy, (5) Confiscation of property of rebel leaders, (6) Sound system of national currency, (7) Subordination of states to general government, (8) One term for President, (9) Liberty of speech and publication, (10) Liberal and protective system of foreign emigration, and (11) Extension of transcontinental railway systems.

Pomeroy's speech was the swan song of the newly proposed political party, for it sounded the death knell of Chase's Presidential aspirations. When Thad Stevens observed that Lincoln and Seward were going to Gettysburg in November, 1863, for the dedicatory exercises and learned that Chase and Stanton were to remain in Washington, he remarked, "Let the (politically) dead bury the dead." Lincoln's political prospects at that time were at low ebb and Chase was in the ascendancy. Four months later, however, it appears as if it would have been just as well for Chase to have gone to Gettysburg as far as his political fortunes were concerned. The Pomeroy circular will always be remembered as another one of those many new party appeals which failed to arouse a sympathetic public sentiment.