

LINCOLN LORE

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN "PLATFORMED"

Most of the subjects discussed in *Lincoln Lore* are suggested by queries that come to the Foundation asking for information about Lincoln's viewpoint on certain subjects usually of current interest. While this publication does not attempt to state or imply how it is believed Lincoln would stand on any issue before the people today, it is always anxious to make available without bias historical data which indicate how Lincoln reacted toward certain emergencies in his day.

Eighty-five years ago on June 7 Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter of political importance to Lyman Trumbull in which he reasserted his loyalty to the party. He then used this significant statement: "I am in, and shall go for any one nominated unless he be 'platformed' expressly, or impliedly, on some ground which I may think wrong." Possibly Lincoln coined a political expression here which reveals that he felt there was a certain obligation which a candidate assumed with respect to the platform on which he was standing. No better expression could have been chosen with respect to this relationship than by referring to a candidate as being "platformed."

Influence Upon Electorate

Hon. Nathan Sargent in a letter to Lincoln had used some rather disrespectful words about the opposition party which he was in favor of incorporating in the Republican platform, believing that the inclusion of such statements would unite certain elements and help materially to carry the election of 1860. In Lincoln's reply of June 23, 1859, the importance of statements made in a party platform with respect to their influence upon the electorate is very clearly stated:

"Well, I say such a platform, unanimously adopted by a National convention, with two of the best men living placed upon it as candidates, would probably carry Maryland, and would certainly not carry a single other State. It would gain nothing in the South, and lose everything in the North. Mr. Goggin has just been beaten in Virginia on just such a platform. Last year the Republicans of Illinois cast 125,000 votes; on such a platform as yours they can not cast as many as 50,000. . . . Your platform proposes to allow the spread and nationalization of slavery to proceed without let or hindrance, save only

that it shall not receive supplies directly from Africa. . . . It is altogether too much to ask us to try to stand with them on the platform which has proved altogether insufficient to sustain them alone. . . . I do not deny that there are as good men in the South as the North. . . . For my single self I would be willing to risk some Southern man without a platform; but I am satisfied that is not the case with the Republican party generally."

Antecedents of Candidate

Lincoln made some speeches in Kansas in 1859 and discussed the possibility of having candidates without platforms as advocated by the *St. Louis Intelligencer*. To this suggestion Lincoln replied, "Well, I am not wedded to the formal written platform system; but a thousand to one the editor is not himself in favor of his plan, except with the qualification that he and his sort are to select and name the 'good man.' To bring him to the test, is he willing to take Seward without a platform? . . . The sum of the matter is that, in the absence of formal written platforms, the antecedents of candidates become their platforms."

Generalities

It is very evident from a letter written to the famous Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky that Lincoln believed a political platform should consist of something more than generalities. Crittenden felt a platform with but one plank, "The Constitution, the Union and the enforcement of the laws," would be sufficient.

Lincoln answer Crittenden with an anecdote: "Father told a story of a man in your parts required to give a warrant bill of sale with a horse. He wrote, 'I warrant him sound in skin and skeleton and without faults or faculties.' That is more than I can say of an unmeaning platform. Compromises of principles break of their own weight."

Approved and Sealed

In reply to the committee sent from the Chicago Convention to notify him of his nomination for the Presidency in 1860, Lincoln said, "I shall, by your leave, consider more fully the resolutions of the convention, denominated the platform, and without any unnecessary or unreasonable delay respond to you, Mr. Chairman, in writing, not doubting that the platform will be found satisfactory, and the nomination gratefully accepted."

Four days later Lincoln wrote to George Ashman, President of the

convention, and in his letter of acceptance stated, "The declaration of principles and sentiments (platform) which accompanies your letter meets with my approval; and it shall be my care not to violate or disregard it in any part."

Shifting Position

During the campaign, on September 22, 1860, Lincoln wrote to G. Y. Tams in reply to a question about his opinion on the tariff question: "The convention which nominated me, by the twelfth plank of their platform, selected their position on this question; and I have declared my approval of the platform, and accepted the nomination. Now, if I were to publicly shift the position by adding or subtracting anything, the convention would have the right, and probably would be inclined, to displace me as their candidate."

After Lincoln's election he received a letter from John A. Gilmer with certain proposals as to the course he might follow. Lincoln replied on December 15, 1860, "Is it desired that I shall shift the ground upon which I have been elected? I cannot do it."

Dual Obligations

The First Inaugural Address contains in the first paragraph after the salutation a statement of reassurance of security in which Lincoln concludes, "Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them. And, more than this, they placed in the platform for my acceptance, and as a law to themselves and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read. . . ."

Lincoln was severely criticised by one of his close friends, O. H. Brown, for certain executive policies, and he replied on September 22, 1861, "If you will give up your restlessness for new positions, and back me manfully on the grounds upon which you and other kind friends gave me the election and have approved in my public documents, we shall go through triumphantly."

"Platformed" in 1864

The reply of the President to the committee of the National Union Convention which had notified him of his nomination at Baltimore in 1864 is in the same general tenor of all of his remarks about his attitude toward being "platformed." He wrote, "The nomination is gratefully accepted, as the resolutions of the convention, called the platform, are heartily approved."