

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1092

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 13, 1950

LINCOLN'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS IN JANUARY 1864

(Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 2)

The election year of 1864 recalled by one editorial writer a statement made by De Tocqueville, philosopher and prophet of democracy, in which he declared that "each epoch of the election of a President in the United States might be considered as a national crisis." This conclusion seemed especially apt considering the various movements which had as their objective the defeat of Abraham Lincoln for reelection to the presidency.

Possibly the first encouraging statements which reached Lincoln on New Year's day 1864, or shortly after, were two pieces of mail from Illinois: One from Judge Gillespie, written on December 29, 1863, at Edwardsville, Illinois, in which Lincoln was advised by the writer that "nine-tenths of the loyal men I meet with are in favor of your election. I conversed with many army men and they all stated that the sentiment of the army was overwhelmingly for you." The other statement came in the form of an editorial in *Illinois State Journal* for December 30, 1863, expressing this sentiment with reference to the President:

"Today there is no other man in the nation who the people so implicitly trust and in whose honesty and unswerving purposes they have such assuring confidence."

These sentiments however, had been confirmed by the ballots cast in the 1863 elections which had shown to a marked degree the desire of the people to support the administration. Political leaders, especially those in the ranks of the radicals of Lincoln's own party, were complimentary about his stand taken in the annual message in Congress in December 1863. Many words of commendation were received about his declaration:

"While I remain in my present position I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation, nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of the proclamation, or by any of the Acts of Congress. If the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an executive duty to re-enslave such persons, another, and not I, must be their instrument to perform it."

The concluding statement of the address also gave reassurance to the large group of Union men who were in favor of carrying on the contest to a favorable conclusion:

"In stating a single condition of Peace I mean simply to say that the war will cease on the part of the government, whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it."

Norman B. Judd, who had been sent as United States Minister to Prussia, wrote to Lincoln from Berlin on January 4, 1864, an important political letter. Judd had been chairman of the Illinois State Central Committee of the Republican Party and also chairman of the Illinois Delegation at the Chicago Convention in 1860 when Lincoln received the nomination for the presidency at the Wigwam. It might be expected he would have some interest in Lincoln's reelection in 1864. He said in part in his letter:

"You belong in principle to the radicals although in execution your caution leads people to call you a conservative. Your declaration in 1858 is enough for all doubters. . . . Before the next convention you will have to meet the question of whether your constitutional advisors are to continue the same through another administration. So get ready for the question, I am opposed to committals even as a general rule. I do not believe that there ever was any such committals as required you to lay aside your own judgment—if made at Chicago. . . . Congress intends to stick its nose into frauds etc. allowing them to say as soon as everything is developed 'Honest old Abe must strike the offender' and without delay make it your own act."

Probably before Judd's letter reached Lincoln the investigation of the Custom House at New York City began as the President wrote to Secretary Chase on January 11, "I am receiving letters and dispatches indicating an expectation that Mr. Barney is to leave the Custom House at New York. Have you anything on the subject?"

By the latter part of January Lincoln's mail became heavy with recommendations on what to do about the Custom House situation. Dexter A. Hawkins wrote on January 21, "No matter how pure, efficient and upright the collector might be, it has been impossible for him since the establishment of the corrupting political maxim by General Jackson: 'To the victor belongs the spoils' to avoid being surrounded by a set of dishonest place holders . . ."

In reading through the Robert Lincoln Papers at the very beginning of the attempt to discredit Barney, one regrets that Carmen and Luthin did not have access to this great mass of documentary data referring to this very important contest which would have contributed much to this phase of *Lincoln and the Patronage*.

A letter written on the last day of January by Porter L. Foy of St. Louis to Maj. Gen. F. P. Blair must have given Lincoln much satisfaction as it revealed he had one general at least who was not then politically minded. Foy said, "I have just heard that Haw put the question to Grant, with whom he is quite intimate, whether he would consent to run for the Presidency. He answered that under no circumstances would he be a candidate in opposition to Lincoln."

There were other military leaders who were not immune to the political appeal, and members of Lincoln's cabinet were also stirring about. While there did not appear on the surface any well planned opposition to Mr. Lincoln in January 1864, no sooner than the month of February dawned than the attack on the incumbent in the White House began to take a definite form.

Abraham Lincoln's prospects to succeed himself apparently looked brighter to him in January 1864 than at any other time, except those few days just preceding his election. We shall observe for the next eight months, at least, a definite trend away from Lincoln until he reaches the most despondent attitude which he ever manifested in his political history, rallying at almost the last moment to win a decisive victory.