

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 1102

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

May 22, 1950

CONVENTION POSTPONEMENT EFFORT

(Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 4)

The Pomeroy circular issued in February 1864 had as its primary interest the creation of a "Chase for President" boom. This anticipated turning of the people to Chase did not materialize. George B. Lincoln in writing to the President on February 26 inquired, "What is the matter? Friend Pomeroy's yeast don't make the Chase pudding rise!" A secondary purpose of the circular is indicated by its timing. It was released just before the several states began to select their delegates for the national convention. It was hoped that a derogatory attitude towards the administration would prevent the various state groups from selecting delegates instructed for Lincoln. The circular fell far short in this objective as well. Charles C. Fulton enclosed in a letter written on March 25, 1864 to Secretary Blair a clipping which stated, "Mr. Lincoln has already been declared the people's choice for the Presidency by the Union State Committees of New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and California."

Just when the idea of postponing the national convention until late summer or fall began to be agitated is not known. As early as February 9, Lincoln was handed a letter written by D. Gregory of Jersey City to Hon. W. A. Newell which stated: "I prefer a spontaneous nomination of Mr. Lincoln by the people without a convention. The movement of forestalling comes from the Chase men, in office and out, and they are very active and powerful." This source of influence against Lincoln was more or less confirmed by Samuel Galloway writing on February 25 from Ohio with reference to the Chase movement as "using every false and foul effort to suppress the voice and embarrass the action of the people. The uncorrupted popular voice of the people demand your renomination and election."

The Union Convention had already been announced for Baltimore on June 7 and 8. With practically all the delegates instructed for Lincoln it was clear to the Lincoln opposition that the only means of stopping the President from becoming the choice of the convention was to postpone the conclave. It was the feeling of the anti-administration constituency that if there happened to be unsatisfactory progress in the conduct of the war popular sentiment might show a different political trend by the fall months.

The following petition was presented to the New York state union meeting at Albany on March 25, 1864:
"To the national Executive Committee of the Union and Republican Parties
Gentlemen

The undersigned friends of the Government and supporters of the present administration respectfully suggest to you the propriety of reconsidering your recent action calling a convention of the Union and Republican parties at Baltimore on the Seventh day of June next to nominate a candidate for President of the United States for the ensuing term.

In the opinion of the undersigned the country is not now in a position to enter into a Presidential contest. It is very important that all parties friendly to the Government shall be united in support of a single candidate and that when a selection shall be made it shall be acquiesced in by all loyal sections of the country and by all branches of the loyal party. It is equally clear that such unanimity cannot at present be obtained and it is not believed that it can be reached as early as the day named by you for the national convention.

Upon the result of the measures adopted by the administration to finish the war during the present spring and summer will depend the wish of the People to con-

tinue in power their present leaders or to change them for those from whom they may expect other and more satisfactory results.

Whatever time may be gained will be an advantage to the country inasmuch as it will allow of the forming of a better informed opinion on these subjects.

In the opinion of the undersigned whatever will tend to lessen the duration and allay the acrimony of the Presidential Strife which is always exciting and disturbing in proportion to the length of the canvas will be an advantage to the country.

In periods of war and great civil revulsions time is reckoned by events and months are as years in the periods of peace.

With a pure and patriotic desire to serve the best interests of the country and in the belief that they will be best served by a postponement of a political convention to the latest day possible. We respectfully ask that you will reconsider your action and name a day for the assembling of the national convention not earlier than the first day September next.

Peter Cooper, Francis Lieber, Seth B. Hunt, Charles Butler, Willm. Orton, R. D. Lathrop, Edgar Ketchum, Cesar Aug. Robert, W. C. Bryant, J. McKaye, Geo. P. Putnam, George Opdyke, Wm. H. Strong, Wm. Curtis Noyes."

Abram Wakeman at Albany wrote this observation to Montgomery Blair on the same day the petition was presented: "A strong effort was made to induce the committee to pass a resolution requesting the National Committee to reconsider the time for the meeting of the national committee until September next. This was proposed by the Fremont men and all others opposed to Mr. Lincoln and was with difficulty prevented."

As late as April 7 the effort to postpone the convention was being pursued. Simon Cameron wrote to Lincoln from Harrisburg, Pa. on that day: "Your friends had a very great triumph last night in the action of the State Central Committee. An uncommon effort had been made all over the state to get a recommendation to delay the National Convention. These efforts were aided by Gov. Curtin who joined the new past order of the 'String Band.' To give more effect to his exertions ex Gov. Whitson was here as well as Col. McClure but the committee would not be controlled. . . ."

One of the most significant facts in these attempts to sidetrack Mr. Lincoln is the calm and undisturbed attitude, which he displayed during these maneuvers and his unwillingness to combat his well known antagonists, revealed in his refusal to read the Pomeroy circular or remove Chase. Major General Carl Schurz wrote a long letter to Lincoln in February and another in March when the convention postponement propaganda was at its height, urging Mr. Lincoln to allow him to come to Washington and engage in the political activities. On March 13 the President wrote that he could not invite him to Washington "without a difficulty which at least would be unpleasant, and perhaps would be detrimental to public service." Schurz still pressing received a letter from the President dated March 21 with this notation: "I perceive no objection to your making a political speech when you are where one is to be made; but quite surely speaking in the North and fighting in the South at the same time are not possible; nor could I be justified to detail any officer to the political campaign during its continuance and then return him to the army."

It is evident from the failure of both the Pomeroy-Chase drive, and the attempt to postpone the Union convention that these thrusts at Mr. Lincoln's candidacy were in reality the maneuvers of a very small group of political leaders. It is doubtful if the great masses of the people or even the majority of the state leaders were even mildly interested in these dissention movements engineered by the Astor House political bosses.