

# 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 1123

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

October 16, 1950

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL POLITICAL THRUST (Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 9)

During the campaign of 1864, just at the time when Lincoln's political fortunes seemed to be at lowest ebb, a movement to sidetrack him as the presidential nominee, managed by his own associates, was ingeniously planned and all but succeeded in its designs. While the effort to replace Lincoln with a military leader had been attempted by rival cliques through several maneuvers against the administration, now those who might be expected to give Lincoln their full support subtly suggested the wisdom of his withdrawal from the contest. This attempt to rob the President of the opportunity to succeed himself might be called an inside job.

As early as March 1864 one of Lincoln's correspondents advised him that "Mr. Seward has never failed to think he will succeed you and that his faithful manager (Weed) hopes to carry him into the Presidency next March." Lincoln received a letter from O. Follett postmarked "Sandusky, Ohio, July 21, 1864" in which the President was warned: "The influence exerted in New York in 1862 is now at work to deceive and mislead the whole people. . . . I need be no more specific in my arrangement than to name Thurlow Weed as the instrument or conduit through which that influence worked and is now working." Weed seems to have been the moving spirit in this attempt to bring psychological pressure on the President to give up his candidacy for the sake of party success. Apparently Weed had a conference about the tenth of August with the President which may have been the beginning of the pressure period noted later by Lincoln. The decision to bring the drive on Lincoln to a show-down was apparently decided on August 22 at a conference in which Weed, Raymond and Swett participated.

On that day Weed wrote to his intimate associate, Seward: "When ten or eleven days since I told Mr. Lincoln that his reelection was an impossibility I also told him that the information would soon come to him from other channels. It has doubtless ere this reached him. . . . Mr. Swett is well informed in relation to the public sentiment, he has seen and heard much." Weed also indicates in the same letter that he has been in conference with Raymond.

On the very same day, August 22, Raymond also penned to Lincoln a long letter in which he stated he had been in conference with Mr. Swett. The letter coming from the man who, as chairman of the national committee was supposed to be directing his campaign, must have been the climax of a series of thrusts apparently engineered by Weed. Raymond wrote:

"I feel compelled to drop you a line concerning the political condition of the country as it strikes me. I am in active correspondence with your staunchest friends in every state and from all I hear but one report. The tide is setting strongly against us. Hon. E. B. Washburn writes, 'Were an election to be held now in Illinois we should be beaten.' Mr. Cameron writes that Pennsylvania is against us. Gov. Morton writes that nothing but the most strenuous efforts can carry Indiana. . . ."

Supplementing the pessimistic letter by Raymond, supposed to be the promoter of Lincoln's candidacy, and the argument discrediting Lincoln in the Weed letter, there were two or three other thrusts. The statement made by Horace Greeley on August 18 that "Mr. Lincoln is already beaten. He cannot be elected and we must have another ticket to save us from utter overthrow;" was fresh in the President's mind. The Opdyke resolution of August 22 claiming, "That none of the candidates for the Presidency already presented can commend the united confidence and support of all loyal and patriotic men;" issued on October 22 was before Lincoln, and finally the Weed and Raymond letters which he had

perused, advising him "all is lost," brought him to a mental attitude which his plotters had anticipated in part at least.

The planning of the coordinate pressure propaganda was so well timed that the climax of the psychological drive occurred on the morning of August 23. This might be called, politically speaking, Lincoln's darkest hour. The President prepared on that day the following memorandum which embraced a deduction regarding his political prospects based on the pessimistic reports of his advisors:

Executive Mansion  
Washington, Aug. 23, 1864

This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be reelected. Then it will be my duty to so cooperate with the President Elect as to save the Union between the Election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such grounds that he cannot possibly save it afterwards.

A. Lincoln

That same day this writing was taken to the cabinet meeting and although the contents were not made known the President asked each member of the cabinet to subscribe his name on the folded and sealed manuscript. They signed in this order: "William H. Seward, W. P. Fessenden, Edwin M. Stanton, Gideon Welles, Edw. Bates, M. Blair, J. P. Usher." Under this endorsement of names there appears the date "August 23, 1864" in the handwriting of the President.

Evidently Weed, Raymond, Swett and others had succeeded in putting before Lincoln a darker picture than facts would warrant. On the same day Weed wrote that Cameron reported: "Pennsylvania is against us." Cameron himself wrote to Lincoln, "The clouds are dark and lowering, but do not despair. Faith and good works are rarely unsuccessful." Washburne reporting unfavorably for Illinois may have been somewhat interested in the possibilities of still inducing his close friend, General Grant, to reconsider the use of his name in connection with the Presidency.

Speculation was rife among the members of Lincoln's cabinet and leading politicians about the contents of the heavily sealed secretive document, inscribed by those present at the cabinet meeting on August 23. Although the President took no one into his conference the writing was supposed to be of a political nature because of the pressure being brought on the President. Seward at least knew of the contents of the Weed letter and possibly the general tenor of the Raymond correspondence. All knew about the *Cincinnati Call*. It did not take long for news of the mysterious writing to reach Illinois and James C. Conkling wrote Lincoln from Springfield on September 5th concerning one speculation: "John Wentworth (mayor of Chicago) says, you have already written out a letter of resignation."

The *Cincinnati Gazette* on August 27 stated editorially, "General Fremont has, we learn, signified his willingness to retire in view of a nomination (other than Lincoln) . . . and we doubt not that Lincoln's patriotism would induce him to adopt the same course." Four days later from the same city Lincoln received a letter from S. F. Cary who wrote, "Listen to no clamor of politicians to permit your name to be withdrawn from the canvass. You have the hearts of the people and you will have their votes."

Those who directly or indirectly worked for Mr. Lincoln's withdrawal as a candidate and had thought that possibly the mysterious cabinet document contained Lincoln's reaction to their psychological thrust were obliged to wait until the first cabinet meeting after Lincoln's reelection before learning the contents which Lincoln explained, "Were penned . . . Six days before the Chicago nominating convention when as yet we had no adversary and seemed to have no friends."