

LINCOLN LORE

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THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS

(Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 12)*

The strength of the Union Party in the campaign of 1864, one month previous to the national election in November, was tested by the state contests in October held in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. The Lincoln National Life Foundation is fortunate to be in possession of the original letter which the President sent to General W. T. Sherman on September 19, stressing the importance of the political issue to the nation. The significance of this document warrants its printing in full:

Executive Mansion, Washington, D. C.,
September 19, 1864.
Major-General Sherman:

The State election of Indiana occurs on the 11th of October, and the loss of it, to the friends of the government, would go far toward losing the whole Union cause. The bad effect upon the November election, and especially the giving the State government to those who will oppose the war in every possible way, are too much to risk, if it can possibly be avoided. The draft proceeds, notwithstanding its strong tendency to lose us the State. Indiana is the only important State, voting in October, whose soldiers cannot vote in the field. Anything you can safely do to let her soldiers, or any part of them, go home and vote at the State election will be greatly in point. They need not remain for the Presidential election, but may return to you at once. This is in no sense an order, but is merely intended to impress you with the importance, to the army itself, of your doing all you safely can, yourself being the judge of what you can safely do.

Yours truly,
A. Lincoln

Harper's Weekly went all out for the Union ticket in October with the state elections in view. The issue of October 1 gave over the most of its editorial page in attacking the candidates and platform of the Democratic party. In the center spread of this issue a two page woodcut by Thomas Nast showing Lincoln surrounded by soldiers and sailors was presented. The following week editorials supporting the administration still continued and its popular cartoon appearing on the last page portrayed McClellan riding a horse labeled "War," and beside him Pendleton riding on a donkey labeled "Peace."

General Grant wrote to Stanton, October 12, 1864, the day after the election inquiring about the results of the voting but Stanton not being at his office Lincoln replied as follows:

"Ohio largely for us, with all members of Congress but two or three. Indiana largely for us—governor, it is said, by 15,000 and eight of the eleven members of Congress. Send us what you may know of your army vote." From John W. Forney at Philadelphia came this dispatch on October 12: "We will carry the state (Penn.) in November high and dry by a large majority. Spirit of opposition 'dead broke.'" If Lincoln had received this telegram before writing Grant, his letter might have been even more encouraging.

Reporting the results of the election in Pennsylvania *Harper's Weekly* stated: "All hail, Pennsylvania: As you are the keystone of the Union so you have struck the keynote of the chorus of Union Victory." Turning to Ohio the same paper commented, "The mother of the west has spoken, and the great and glorious family will

echo her words in November." In referring to the Hoosier state Harper's expressed this opinion: "We had not dared to hope for victory in Indiana," and concluded the summary with this tribute, "To the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, all Union loving Americans owe a debt they will not forget." As a final comment Harper's stated: "The October elections show that unless all human foresight fails, the election of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson is assured."

The day following the election, Chief Justice Taney died, which was also an important factor in the favorable trend towards the Union Party. Friends of prospective candidates for the seat on the Supreme Court bench began to court the favor of the President, and most active among them were the followers of Salmon P. Chase, who had fought the Lincoln candidacy persistently. A group of dissatisfied Democrats, meeting in convention at Cincinnati, indirectly helped the Union cause and military situations, were also taking on a more promising aspect.

Yet with all these contributing factors observed, Lincoln on October 13, still gave some evidence of concern about the results in November. While in the war telegraph office two days after the October victories he wrote on the back of a cipher telegraph blank, which has been preserved, his opinion about how the states would vote in November. He wrote in the first column the states which he felt would vote Democratic and the number of electors assured, and in the second column those states who would support the Union with the number of electors available. The list follows:

Democratic: "New York 33, Pennsylvania 26, New Jersey 7, Delaware 3, Maryland 7, Missouri 11, Kentucky 11, Illinois 16."

Union: "New England States 39, Michigan 8, Wisconsin 8, Minnesota 4, Iowa 8, Oregon 3, California 5, Kansas 3, Indiana 13, Ohio 21, West Virginia 5."

Major Thomas T. Eckert who was present at the time added the total vote of electors and after Nevada with three votes had been added to Lincoln's Union column the totals showed: Democrats 114, Union 120. Lincoln still left Pennsylvania, New York, and his own state of Illinois in the Democratic column. How far Lincoln failed to estimate his own political strength is revealed by the fact that in November only New Jersey, Delaware and Kentucky failed to give him their 21 electoral votes of the total of 234.

It is doubtful if there was ever a political campaign in the nation which presented so many movements of various character which kept the political fortunes of the incumbent administration in a constant state of uncertainty. Here are some of the many episodes contributing to the changing fortunes of the Union party which finally was able to reelect Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency: the Pomeroy Circular, the attempt to postpone the Union convention, the radical Democratic convention at Cleveland, for Fremont, the ovation for Grant, and the putting forth of other generals, the Baltimore nomination, the call for a rival Union convention at Cincinnati, the attempt to secure Lincoln's withdrawal from the race, the ambitions of old Lincoln rivals, the Chicago Democratic convention, Fremont's withdrawal and Blair's resignation, the Wade-Davis Manifesto, the state elections, Taney's death, the Cincinnati Democratic convention, and the changing fortunes of the Union in the civil strife.

*This is the last of a series of monographs carrying the subtitle "Political Puzzle of 1864." Former contributions are to be found in the following issues of *Lincoln Lore*: 1088, 1092, 1097, 1102, 1106, 1111, 1114, 1118, 1123, 1127, 1130.