

# LINCOLN LORE

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## SUPPORT OF LINCOLN IN 1864 BY JEWISH GROUPS

The 1950 fall elections in the United States gave expression to one of the most important factors in the preservation of the democratic way of life. The unwillingness of one great block of humanity, under pressure tactics, to be herded and voted as a unit irrespective of personal inclinations, was a refreshing occurrence and should be a warning to any future class of provincialists who attempt to nullify the sacred right of the individual voter. Back in 1864 certain politicians were said to have been planning to line up a racial group to be voted as a unit, and this attempt likewise failed to materialize.

That the Jewish people during the Civil War were not surpassed by members of other races in the effort to preserve the Union is a well established fact. They did not, however, allow this loyalty to congeal into an organized constituency that could be voted in toto. Correspondence which passed between some intelligent Jewish spokesmen and the President is of current interest as it reveals there was no such entity as "The Jewish Vote" in 1864.

Dr. I. Zacharie, a skillful chiropodist who attended the President and members of his cabinet, very early became interested in Mr. Lincoln's political campaign of 1864. He must have been misinformed, however, about the objectives of a group of politicians who visited the President a few weeks before the election. Dr. Zacharie was under the impression that they had been able to make some sort of a bargain for the support of the Hebrew race. Dr. Zacharie informed Samuel A. Lewis, editor of the *Hebrew Leader*, of his suspicions who, on October 26, 1864, wrote a letter to the President about the incident.

Mr. Lewis reviewed for the President the suppositions entertained by Dr. Zacharie that "some parties representing 'a committee from the Jews' had called on you to solicit contributions." Mr. Lewis continued, "We propose to give—not to take. I would esteem it a favor if any Jewish committees call on you or the Union committee in Washington if you would send them to me as Dr. Zacharie will be away frequently between now and the election." Mr. Lewis assured the President that "nothing should be wanting on the part of your friends here towards carrying the Union cause."

On the same day that Mr. Lewis wrote to the President, Myer S. Isaacs of the *Jewish Messenger* corresponded with Mr. Lincoln, feeling it was his duty "to add a word to those that have already been communicating to you from other sources with reference to a visitation on the part of persons claiming to represent the Israelites of New York or the United States and pledging the 'Jewish vote' to your support, and I am informed succeeded in a deception that resulted to their pecuniary profit." Mr. Isaacs was a "firm and earnest Union man" who had been connected with the *Jewish Messenger* for eight years and was also the secretary of the "Board of Delegates."

Mr. Isaacs informed the President that since the first firing on our national flag his paper had been "a steady supporter of the government in its efforts to maintain the integrity of the Union and crush the unhallowed

rebellion." On the other hand, Mr. Isaacs insisted that "the Jews as a body have no politics and while we have earnestly counseled and implored attachment to the Union at whatever cost, we have refrained from interfering with the private political views of individual readers."

Bringing to a close his letter he emphasizes the loyalty of many Jewish people, to the administration and his indignation because a certain group may have attempted to impose upon the President. Mr. Isaacs concludes: "There is no 'Jewish vote.' If there were it could not be bought. As a body of intelligent men we are advocates of the cherished principles of liberty and justice, and must inevitably support and advocate those who are exponents of such a platform. Liberty and Union, now and forever."

The President would not allow this interesting letter to go unnoticed and hastened to convey the information that there had been some mistake about the purpose and import of the committee which waited on the President. The letter is in the handwriting of Lincoln's secretary, John Hay, and is signed by the secretary.

Executive Mansion

Myer S. Isaacs  
My Dear Sir

Washington Nov. 1, 1864

The President directs me to acknowledge your letter of the 26th of October.

You are in error in the assumption you make in regard to the circumstances of the recent interview to which you refer between certain gentlemen of the Hebrew faith and the President. No pledge of the Jewish vote was made by these gentlemen and no inducements or promises were extended to them by the President. They claimed no such authority and received no such response as you seem to suppose.

The President deems this statement due to you and directs me to thank you for your letter.

I am very truly your servant.

John Hay

Possibly the sequel to this misinformation based on Dr. Zacharie's supposition can be found in a long letter which the doctor wrote to Mr. Lincoln on Nov. 3, 1864. He opened his comments with this paragraph:

"I have just returned to the city after a trip of nine days through Pennsylvania and New York state and I am happy to inform you that I am satisfied that I have done much good. I now think all is right and if we can reduce the Democratic majority in this city I should be satisfied. As regards the Israelites with but few exceptions they will vote for you . . . Three years ago I promised I would elect you and if you are not, it shall not be my fault."

The correspondence now available in the Lincoln Papers which passed between the President and members of the Jewish race reveal the loyalty of large groups of Jewish people to the Union cause, their determination to maintain personal political independence. So likewise, the correspondence further reveals the integrity and high moral idealism of the President.