

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



PATRIOTIC RECOLLECTIONS

Lincoln Oder McClellan? Aufruf an die Deutschen in Amerika
(Lincoln or McClellan? Appeal to the Germans in America)
by Francis Lieber
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Countrymen and Fellow Citizens:

The presidential election is rapidly approaching, and it is time for every citizen to reflect and decide conscientiously for whom he shall give his ballot. At an election of such importance, when everything dear to us, as citizens, is staked on the issue, it is unworthy - it is cowardly - to throw away the right of voting. No patriot will choose political impotency at this crisis. The entire political existence of this country, of which we became citizens by the choice of our mature years, and not by the accident of birth, rests upon the free ballot; and he who has the right, has also the duty to vote. If sensible and honest voters stay away from the polls, they may be sure that those whose votes have been bought, and those who have no right to vote at all, will be ready there to appear in their stead.

The great majority of those who come from Germany to America are Democrats in the true sense, and when they find in this country a large party, which for years has been called the Democratic party, many allow themselves to be deceived by the mere name. The assemblage which gathered at Chicago, and nominated General McClellan for the Presidency, also calls itself the Democratic party - and of what sort of people was this mixed-up convention composed? In the first place, a great proportion consisted of old "Know-nothings." They openly proclaimed themselves such. Can you, Germans, vote on the same side with these men, whose only principle has been to shut in your faces the gates of this wide continent, to which their own fathers came from Europe. Or else, as you are here already, to take from you the right of citizenship? Will you vote with those who, like their friends, the rebels, would load you with infamy, and who speak of you as the offscouring of the earth? The Know-nothings plot in secret. They have their lodges, and form a secret society. Is that, in a free country, democratic? Freedom, above all, rests on publicity.

Another portion of the Chicago convention consisted of those who set State-Rights, as they call it, above everything else; who openly say that Americans have not a country and that the sovereignty of the single state stands high above everything else - is absolute; that each state has the right to tear itself away, and be a separate dominion; that there is therefore no right anywhere to compel such a state to remain in the Union.

They utter untruths, and they know it! What would these same people have done if Ohio or Massachusetts had suddenly broken away and declared itself a monarchy? What do the rulers in Richmond at this very instant say of those men in North Carolina, who desire to withdraw their own state from the so-called confederacy? They call them rebels. How comes it that, up to this very day, there are men sitting in the congress at Richmond, as delegates from Missouri and Kentucky? Have these states seceded? Why have the rebels all along claimed Maryland as belonging to them? The delegates from Kentucky and Missouri sit in their congress; Maryland troops fight in their ranks, because Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland are, or were, slaveholding states. With these enemies of the Union, therefore, slavery is the principle of cohesion of a new country, and state-sovereignty is not the basis of the right of secession. Why did these gentlemen all support General Jackson, when the old hero told South Carolina she should be-compelled, by force of arms, to stay in the Union? And is the doctrine of state-sovereignty democratic? I feel almost ashamed to ask such a question of a German. The Democracy has always, and everywhere, been for the unity of the country; it will have but one country, worthy of a great nation. All Pumpnickel sovereignties, all the "Algerine states," as in Germany they are now called, have always been objects of loathing and execration to the Democracy.

Unquestionably each state in the United States has its rights, and ought to have them, but so, too, each man has his rights, and the rights of the individual which belong to every person in a free country are far more valuable, and are more important, taken on the whole, than the rights of states are. But the individual man is not for this reason a sovereign. Do you know that the word sovereignty does not once occur in that great instrument, the Constitution of the United States? The word "sovereignty" was smuggled into our political dictionary when this Constitution had already been adopted. Who then is sovereign in America if the states are not? Nobody! No man, no corporation, no congress, no president, no officer, no body of men, is sovereign in a free country. The United States are sovereign in respect to all other sovereign nations. We are sovereign when we treat with France and England, or when we engage in war; but within the country itself no one is sovereign.

This is no new theory, nor is it any theory at all. It is a fact. Two hundred years ago, when the famous Bill of Rights was under consideration in the English Parliament, the greatest lawyer in England declared that the word "sovereign" was not known to English law. He said this because the dynasty which had just then been expelled had constantly talked of the king's sovereign power.

But can it be necessary to argue with Germans against a hankering after petty state domination and provincial pomposity. State sovereignty, indeed! Have we not had enough of that sort of thing in the land from which we came? If a German wants to have a stew of states, he never need come for it to America. Has he not got enough of sovereign states, big, little, and minute, at home?

What are the ideas which most animate the German in Germany? They are the unity of Germany and civil freedom. And shall he here give his vote for those who would see the country torn asunder in fragments while the cause of human slavery should triumph?

German working men! why did you leave home, family, the friends of your youth, and seek this distant America? It was because you heard that in the United States you would find a country wherein you and your children would enjoy all the rights of the free citizen; where skill and industry would surely find their reward, and where your children would never find themselves debarred from any merited attainment by the privileges of others. If then you would not have, in place of this Union, a land where the working man should be delivered over to a grinding tyranny far worse than any endured in the oppressed countries of Europe, do not lend your aid to the party which would give up the Union to the dominion of the Southern landholders.

For do you know what this slave-owning, would-be oligarchy pretends to aim at? Perhaps you suppose they struggle only to retain possession of their negro slaves. The Southern slaveholders are fighting for that which was for so long a time the prerogative of the owners of the soil, the privilege of using the working man, whether white or black, as the instrument of their power, their pleasure, and their arrogance. The working

man is to bear all the burdens of the state, but he is to have no rights in it. It is for him to obey and for the rich man alone to rule. Hear what the secession leaders have said:

"No state can endure in which the laboring class has political rights. Those alone who own the soil and the capital must govern and be the masters of those who labor."

And they say this, remember it well: "Capital has an inherent right to own labor."

If you would have masters set up over you, on this principle, vote for McClellan. Would you retain your equal rights as the citizens of a free country, vote for Lincoln, who has been an honest working man like yourselves.

Another part of the Chicago Convention consisted of those who seem to believe that all can be made right if people will only keep on shouting "the Constitution, the Constitution," as loud as they can.

We think we understand the Constitution quite as well as these gentlemen, and respect it more. For it should be noticed that the so-called Democratic Party has of late years always set the Constitution aside whenever it seemed to be for their advantage. Was Nullification constitutional? Was it constitutional when Mr. Douglas, shortly before the last Presidential election, promised the South to advocate a law subjecting to heavy punishment the mere discussion of the slavery question? Was it constitutional, when, for twenty years, and probably longer, the letterbags in the South were opened to see whether they contained abolition documents? Was it constitutional to deny the right of petition? Is Secession constitutional? Is it consistent with the Constitution to say with those Chicago people that it is the President's right and duty to release any State that may desire to leave the Union? Is it constitutional to speak of secession as "one of the reserved rights of the State"? Is it constitutional to declare that our whole political State-structure exists only to benefit a single class of men - a class known by the complexion of the skin? Even the ancient heathen had a higher view of the State and of the objects of civil government. Is it constitutional to represent one whole government as a mere Confederation or League - that poorest of all governments for a modern and free people? Was it in the spirit of the Constitution when Mr. Calhoun and all his followers proclaimed that the Senate should always be equally divided between slave states and free states, thus making for the first time in our history slavery an immutable institution? Was the precious Ostend proclamation conceived in a constitutional spirit?

We too honor the Constitution, but the Constitution is not a deity. We love our country, the nation, freedom; and these things are superior even to the Constitution; and it should never be forgotten that by this Southern Rebellion a state of things is brought upon us for which the Constitution never was, and never could be calculated. Shall we fold our hands, as did Mr. Buchanan, and declare that nothing can be done on our part to save the country because the Constitution does not prescribe what we are to do in such a case? Such was the opinion which his Attorney-General of the United States gave to Mr. Buchanan. God forbid! We are one nation; we mean to remain one people, and our country must not be suffered to perish. The life of the patient must be saved whether the case is mentioned in the recipe book or not. The Constitution did not make the people for the people made the Constitution. But has the Constitution been violated at all? We have not space for an examination of the question. But, my countrymen, admitting that some things may have occurred which could not be justified by existing laws, I am, as I think I may safely say, as well acquainted with the history of the past as any of these Chicago gentlemen, and I can advisedly affirm that never yet has there been any civil war, nor even any ordinary war in which the government has tolerated the thousandth part of that liberty which the enemies of the Government and the friends of those enemies enjoy among us - infinitely more, than the latter would allow us in a reversed case.

It is still the so-called Democratic Party which has brought this civil war upon us, and now they say that they only can end it. Why so? Does a man in America acquire some mysterious power or wisdom as soon as he calls himself a Democrat? They want to make up a peace, to give still greater guarantees to the South -

everything to the rebels; in short, they belong to those in the North who have always been the obsequious servants of the South, and who seem to think themselves honored by fulfilling the behests of an arrogant slaveholder. Is that Democracy?

My friends, let us vote for Lincoln. Many of you doubtless say that he has done some things which you do not like, or that sometimes he has not acted with sufficient promptitude. But the simple question before the people now is, shall Lincoln or McClellan be the next President? No other man can be elected; and now is there a German who can hesitate, or one who can be so indifferent as not to vote for either? The one candidate is national the other is not. The one is for freedom and for the removal of that which is the disgrace of this century - he is opposed to slavery, which has brought upon us the demon of civil war. The other would preserve slavery. The one is out-spoken and candid; is the other so? The one is for all the citizens of this great country, whether they were born here or not; the other owes his nomination in a great degree to the Know-nothings. The one is truly a democrat - he is a man of the people; the other is no real democrat - at least those who have set him up before the people are anything but democratic in feeling. The one, though surrounded by unparalleled difficulties, has at least so guided the ship of state that we are now in sight of the desired haven; the other, when he was at the head of one of the grandest armies that had been seen in a century, did little more than hesitate, when he might, as the enemy now admits, have put an end to the war.

It is easy to understand why some very rich and some very poor Germans, who want to get into office, exert themselves for McClellan. But of every German who has no such views, who simply gives his vote for the honor, the unity, and the freedom of his adopted country, and who does not allow himself to be deluded by the mere name of "Democrat," we may naturally expect that when he has calmly reflected over the vast importance of the occasion, and the character of the candidates, he will vote for Lincoln.

Every citizen ought to exert himself to the utmost in this remarkable election, when a great nation is called upon at the very crisis of a gigantic civil war, to elect a ruler by the popular and untrammelled ballot. It is not sufficient to carry the election of Mr. Lincoln by a bare overplus of numbers. A sweeping national majority is required to prove to Europe, to the South, and to its friends here in the midst of us, that this people is resolved to maintain this country in its integrity, a great and unimpaired commonwealth. The result of this election should be like a great national harvest, garnering its full sheaves from every portion of the land.

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