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(Democratic Record Continued)

DISUNION CONVENTIONS.

As indicated by the resolutions quoted above from the Philadelphia platform of June 16th, 1861, the machinery by which this scheme was to be carried out, was that of conventions, either State or National. The party therefore commenced to agitate for conventions. The experience of the South had shown how easy it was under skillful manipulation, with such instruments, to carry State after State into open and armed opposition to the central authority.

As early as July 15th, 1861, the project was broached by the Hon. Benjamin Wood in the following resolution offered in the House of Representatives, which received the vote of every Democratic member:

Resolved, That this Congress recommend the Governors of the several States to convene their Legislatures for the purpose of calling an election to select two delegates from each Congressional District, to meet in general Convention at Louisville in Kentucky on the first Monday in September next; the purpose of the said Convention to be to devise measures for the restoration of peace to our country.

The revolutionary project was allowed to sleep for a year, when the disasters of the Peninsular campaign encouraged an attempt to revive it. Mr. William B. Reed came forward to feel the way. In August, 1862 he published his "Vindication," in which he affected to believe that a restoration of the Union was impossible, and that all that remained for us was to decide upon the new leagues which should be formed. To accomplish this, he preferred separate State action.

"If the choice be between a continuance of the war, with its attendant sufferings and demoralization, certain miseries and uncertain results, and a recognition of the Southern Confederacy, I am in favor of recognition, of course making the Abolition Party responsible for this dread necessity.

"If the inquiry be further pressed as to how I would arrange the terms of pacification and recognition.... I do not hesitate to say that, I would rather see it a ruin than what it is now."

In November, Mr. Reed returned to the charge, and openly suggested the raising of the standard of revolt by the Middle States.

"Several of the leaders of the Democratic Party sought interviews with, both before and after the arrival of the intelligence of General McClellan's dismissal. The subject uppermost in their minds while they were speaking to me was naturally that of foreign mediation between the North and the South. Many of them appeared to think that this mediation must come at last, but they appeared to be very much afraid of its coming too soon."

"They maintain that the object of the military operations should be to place the North in a position to demand an armistice with honor and effect. The armistice should, they hold, be followed by a Convention, in which such changes in the Constitution should be proposed as would give the South absolute security in its slave property, and would enable the North and the South to re-unite and to live together in peace and harmony. The Conservatives profess to think that the South might be induced to take part in such a Convention, and that a restoration of the Union would be the result. The most sagacious members of the party must, however, look upon the proposal of a Convention merely as a last experiment to test the possibility of reunion. They are, no doubt, well aware that the more probable consequence of an armistice would be the establishment of Southern independence, but they perceive that if the South is so utterly alienated that no possible concessions will induce it to return voluntarily to the Union, it is wiser to agree to separation than to prosecute a cruel and hopeless war."

"If their own party were in power, or virtually controlled the Administration, they would rather, if possible, obtain an armistice without the aid of foreign governments; but they would be disposed to accept an offer of mediation, if it appeared to be the only means of putting a stop to hostilities."

These humiliating negotiations with the agent of a foreign and unfriendly power show that Mr. Reed had only been the mouth-piece of the secret councils of his party. He, too, had urged an armistice as a necessary preliminary to the contemplated surrender.

"I would begin with a cessation of hostilities and an armistice for a fixed period, not too short. If this were laid down for a time, there would be a repugnance to take them up again, which, of itself, would be favorable to satisfactory adjustment."

This was inaugurated the policy of a "cessation of hostilities" and a Convention, to which the Democratic party steadily adhered. At Chicago, two years later, it formed the basis of the platform, and in November, 1864, it was indignantly rejected by the people. During those two years it was constantly put forward that the people might become accustomed to it, and no longer dread the fearful anarchy which would be almost necessary result.

Thus, at the formal inauguration of the Democratic Central Club, of Philadelphia, with which the party celebrated the 8th of January, 1863, the orator of the day, Mr. Charles Ingersoll, made the proposed Convention the subject of his discourse, and was prepared to adopt the most revolutionary means of attaining the object.

"There is but one way of arriving at a solution of the question as to whether we are to have a speedy peace and Union, and that is by a convention of the people. To effect this is not easy of accomplishment. There are many States in possession of the Republics. Under these circumstances, we should do what has frequently been resorted to in England—she should refuse the supplies. The speaker advocated this measure as long as a means of instituting a State Convention. This would be followed by Conventions throughout the Northern States. We should then be in a position to offer our terms and settle with the South this great question."

We are thus prepared to understand the authorized exposition of Democratic policy, as published to the world at Chicago, and can appreciate what was meant by the second resolution of the platform, where the war was explicitly declared to have been a failure.

"All questions of boundaries, confederations and union or unions would naturally and easily adjust themselves, according to the interests of parties and the exigencies of the times. Herein lies the true law of the balance of power and the harmony of States."

So, too, the Hon. W. W. Boyce, of South Carolina, in a letter to Jefferson Davis, Sept. 29, 1864—

"I think our only hope of a satisfactory peace, one consistent with the preservation of free institutions, is in the supremacy of this (the Democratic) party, at some time or other. Our policy, therefore, is to give this party all the capital we can. You should therefore, at once in my opinion, give this party all the encouragement possible, by declaring your willingness to an armistice and a Convention of all the States, in their sovereign capacity, to enter upon the subject of peace."

A Congress of the States in their sovereign capacity is the highest acknowledgment of the principle of State Rights."

Mr. Stephens was suspected of being weak in the knees, and on Nov. 14, 1864, when a frank exposition of his views could no longer injure the prospects of McClellan, he communicated to the press another letter, dated Nov. 5, 1864, in which he gave his reasons for desiring the Convention, as proposed at Chicago. A paragraph in this remarkable document shows in the clearest light the results expected, North and South, from the co-operation of the States Rights Democracy with rebellion, and the fearful abyss which we escaped by the reelection of Mr. Lincoln.

"There is no prospect of such proposition a Convention of the States) being tendered, unless McClellan should be elected. He cannot be elected without carrying a sufficient number of the States, which, if united with those of the Confederacy, would make a majority of the States. In such a Convention, then, so formed, I have no strong reasons to hope and expect that a resolution could be passed denying the constitutional power of the Government, under the compact of 1787, to coerce a State. The Chicago platform virtually does this already. Would not such a Convention probably reaffirm the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1788 and 1797? Are these not strong reasons, at least, to induce us to hope and believe that they might? If even that could be done, it would end the war. It would recognize as the fundamental principle of American institutions the ultimate absolute sovereignty of the several States. This fully covers our independence—as fully as I ever wish to see it covered. I wish no other kind of recognition, which ever it comes, than that of George III. of England, viz: the recognition of the sovereignty and independence of each State separately and by name."

The same ground was taken by the Hon. H. W. Hilliard, of Georgia.

"It seems to me plain that we should accept the forum indicated by the Chicago Convention, as the appropriate one for the settlement of our troubles. The very proposal to refer the settlement of the great quarrel to the arbitration of a convention, composed of delegates from all the States, is the most emphatic recognition of sovereignty of the States."

Thus, by the mere fact of their assembling, the Union would be resolved into a mass of independent jarring nationalities, and they would then proceed, as Mr. Reed told us, to "change, modify, ABROGATE."

Lincoln, in his sphere, has fired into the Constitution, and has literally attempted its destruction. If the rebels, for firing at the flag, deserve to be devastated by war, what punishment should be visited upon the President for firing into the Constitution?"

And Mr. William B. Reed, in a letter to the Hon. E. F. Chambers, of Maryland, published in the Age, Nov. 7, 1864, draws a picture of the time when, in case Mr. Lincoln should be re-elected,

"Lee and Beauregard, Johnson and Longstreet, and Breckenridge and Ewell and Early are killed, or captured, or dead to the world, or gone, like the unfortunate but gallant Jacobites, like Berwick and Sarafeld, into foreign service, 'while the work of conquest, or even subjugation, if that be the wretched word,' is entrusted 'to the unstarred Molochs whom three years of bloody, fruitless warfare have not satisfied."

So the Philadelphia Evening Journal of Jan. 20, 1868, commences an elaborate article devoted to the praise of Jefferson Davis, as follows:

"The third annual message of Jefferson Davis to the Confederate Congress and Abraham Lincoln's last message to the United States Congress, provoke a comparison quite damaging to the intellectual capacity of the Federal President."

At the great ratification meeting of the Chicago nominations, held in Philadelphia Sept. 17, 1864, the Hon. Emerson Bheridge made speech, in which he said, as officially reported in the Age:

"There is not an honest man in my State, there is not a man with an honest reputation who will vote for Abraham Lincoln. [Laughter and cheers.] They think the unlawful despotism of Jefferson Davis is no more unconstitutional and dangerous than the arbitrary usurpations of Abraham Lincoln. [That's so, and applause.] Before the war, no Southern man ever made war upon liberties until Northern aggressions converted them from our friends to our foes, and to-day, Abraham Lincoln stands, according to his own confession, as much opposed to the restoration of the Union as Jefferson Davis. Lincoln says they cannot come back unless under an unconstitutional condition, while Jefferson Davis says he will not come back unless he can have his own way. Now who is the war traitor, Jefferson Davis or Abraham Lincoln? [Cries of 'Lincoln,' and cheers.]"

Even the Hon. S. S. Cox, of Ohio, who was the leader in Congress of what was called the War Democracy, while professing opposition to the rebels, in his Chicago speech denounced the Administration with equal or greater bitterness.

"For less offences than Mr. Lincoln had been guilty of, the English people had chopped off the head of the first Charles. In his opinion, Lincoln and Davis ought to be brought to the same block together. The other day, they arrested a friend of his, a member of Congress from Missouri, for saying, in private conversation, that Lincoln was no better than Jeff. Davis. He was ready to say the same here now in Chicago. Let the minions of the Administration object, if they dare."

At the great Democratic meeting of January 16, 1861, at Philadelphia, the ninth resolution adopted declared,

"We are therefore utterly opposed to any such compulsion as is demanded by a portion of the Republican Party; and the Democratic Party of the North will, by the use of all constitutional means, and with its moral and political influence, oppose any such extreme policy, or a fratricidal war thus to be inaugurated."

And a month later, at the Democratic State Convention, held at Harrisburg, February 22, 1861, the following resolution "was received with the most rapturous applause, nearly all the members of the Convention rising, cheering, and waving their hats."

"Resolved, That we will, by all proper and legitimate means, oppose, discountenance and prevent any attempt on the part of the Republicans in power to make any armed aggression upon the Southern States, especially so long as laws, contravening their rights shall remain unrevoked on the statute books of the Southern States, and so long as the just demands of the South shall continue to be unrecognized by the republican majorities in these States, and unsecured by proper amercatory explanations of the Constitution."

It was in precisely the same spirit that Benjamin G. Harris, a Democratic member of Congress from Maryland, on April 9, 1864, had the effrontery to declare in the House of Representatives:

"The South asked you to let them go in peace. But no; you said you would bring them into subjugation. That is not done yet, and God Almighty grant that it never may be. I hope that you will never subjugate the South."

This being good Democratic doctrine, it is not surprising that, with one exception, the Democratic members voted in a solid body against Mr. Harris' expulsion, nor that, when he was sent as a delegate to the Chicago Convention, he was received there as a member of the party, in full communion and good standing.

At Chicago, indeed, Mr. Harris found himself among congenial spirits. There the Rev. C. Chauncey Burr, of New Jersey, publicly declared,

"You cannot have the face to ask the South to come back into the Union until you withdraw your marauding army. Is there a man in this audience that wants to have one-half of the States conquered and subjected?" [No.] When this is done you have ended the Government. After three years of war, who are conquered, you or the South? I say you are conquered. You cannot conquer the South, and I pray God you ne'er may."

And the Hon. James H. Reed, of Indiana:

"The will of the people is declared for peace, and in this declaration there is nothing tending to folly, in as much as in the coming election they intend tooust the incumbents of office, and to inaugurate a rule which will bring peace and prosperity once more to this land."

So the Rev. J. A. McMaster, of New York:

"Let us demand a cessation of the sacrifice until the people shall pronounce their great and emphatic verdict for peace, and let the tyrant understand the demand comes from earnest men and must be respected. We are often called the 'Unfriendly.' I trust you are. I hope that your nerves may be of steel, for there is a day of trial coming and you must meet it."

It is hardly worth while to multiply examples of this seditious peace spirit in the convention, and we will content ourselves with a few indications of the mode in which the party elsewhere endorsed it.

Thus at the McClellan Ratification Meeting, held in New York, August 29, 1864, every speaker declared in favor of peace, denounced the draft, and congratulated the party that it had finally and definitely accepted the peace policy. Mr. James Brooks exclaimed, "No more fighting; fighting will never restore the Union; fighting and cuffing make no friends."— Judge Daly "thought there was a possibility of a peace and a preservation of the Union through a compromise." Mr. Nelson Smith told the crowd of admiring Democrats:

"The question now is, whether after four years of war this Union can be saved without any further prosecution of the war.... After four years of war, we must now resort to some other means than that way, by which our troubles can be settled and peace restored—that peace is received as the duty of the incoming administration, a cessation of hostilities, and a convention of the two worlds or parts country, to see if they cannot settle this matter."

Mr. Conrad Swackhammer assured his applauding auditors that,

"George B. McClellan will be the next president, and within twenty four hours after that election peace will be declared. We are tired and sick of calls for 200,000 more men by those who have no thought but for slavery. I hope in November you will all go forth, not with a musket to take your brother's life, but to cast a little white ballot for McClellan and Pendleton, and thus this war will be stopped. This war will be ended by diplomacy."

Mr. Robert C. Hutchins declared that,

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