The Kansas Senators and the Re-election of Lincoln

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In the presidential election of 1864 the two Republican senators from Kansas found themselves supporting rival candidates for their party’s nomination. James H. Lane cast his lot with the incumbent, Abraham Lincoln, who was seeking a second term; while Samuel Clarke Pomeroy joined the chief executive’s opponents who were attempting to nominate Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Portland Chase.

The Republican, or Union party as it had been called since 1862, was sharply divided during most of the war period over the perplexing problems of emancipation and reconstruction. Lincoln represented a moderate wing of the party which believed that the restoration of the Union was the paramount aim of the war. Regarding the institution of slavery, they preferred gradual, compensated emancipation, followed, perhaps, by colonization. They agreed that slavery was morally wrong, but they steadfastly refused to tamper with it unless its abolition would directly influence the salvation of the Union. Toward the erring Southerners they were inclined to be governed by a policy of moderation and tolerance. Lincoln had charted the course for this group on December 8, 1863, in his message to congress, when he reaffirmed his adherence to the emancipation proclamation, but offered a pardon to nearly all the persons in the seceding states who would take an oath of loyalty to the constitution, congressional acts, and the said proclamation. He further declared that when ten percent of the number of voters in 1860 in any of the Southern states had taken an oath of loyalty, they could set up a state government and receive his executive recognition.¹

These policies, as set forth in the proclamation, and the policies of reconstruction, as outlined in the congressional message, were unacceptable to a group within the party known as the “radicals.” This wing was led by Senators Benjamin Wade of Ohio, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, and

¹. Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 38 Cong., 1 Sess. (1863-1864), pp. 1-4.
Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. They felt that slavery was the fundamental cause of the war, and they regarded the emancipation proclamation in the light of a promise rather than a fulfillment. Nothing short of immediate emancipation would satisfy them. (They did not seem to understand that such a step was impossible until the Confederate armies were broken.) They also insisted upon the confiscation of so-called “rebel” property, and the employment of Negro troops. As part of their long-range program they favored the enfranchisement and social equalization of the Negroes in the hope that by these means Republican political and economic control could be saddled upon the South after the war. Few humanitarian impulses animated these men; their main inspiration came from a blind, unbending partisanship and a desire for repression. These unenlightened policies were destined to bear fruit in the tragic years of reconstruction.

Both Lane and Pomeroy were self-styled members of this radical faction of the party. Lane, in a speech before the senate in July, 1862, defined what he understood radicalism to be:

If to oppose the using of American volunteers for the protection of rebel property; if to favor the confiscation of rebel property constitutes radicalism, then, Mr. President, I am a radical. If opposing the use of American soldiers for the return of fugitive slaves to rebel masters; if opposition to the policy of driving from our lines the loyal men of the rebellious States because of their color renders me an abolitionist, then, Mr. President, I am one. Radical and abolitionist, Mr. President, I say crush out this rebellion, even if human slavery should perish in the land.\(^2\)

Pomeroy had similar views, but they differed widely on the merits of the President and on his capacity for carrying out such a program. Lane always maintained that Lincoln was at heart a radical too; a view with which Pomeroy took a most decided exception.\(^3\) In Pomeroy’s opinion, the man who had the talent and inclination to administer the radical program was Salmon Chase, and the senator became chairman of a committee which was organized to advance the presidential aspirations of the Secretary of the Treasury. The Lane-Pomeroy feud over the merits of Abraham Lincoln was symptomatic of conditions generally within the Republican-Union party.

Salmon Chase had been working since 1862 for the purpose of presenting his name for the presidential nomination. In this work he was ably assisted by a large following within the Treasury Department, for his agents were most active in his behalf, although

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Chase always steadfastly maintained that he never made use of his treasury patronage to erect a machine for himself. Chase was on intimate terms with most of the radical leaders in 1863, and he supported many of them during the state elections of that year in the hope that they would reciprocate his kindness in 1864. He worked hard to gain the support of powerful financial leaders throughout the nation, and once again his position in the Treasury Department was of great help in winning him the friendship of this group. Through his agents he sought to gain the assistance of the most powerful newspaper editors and publishers, such as Horace Greeley, James G. Bennett, Joseph Medill and John Forney; and he also tried to win the support of the influential Union League of America which boasted a membership of 700,000.

The climax to all of Chase’s efforts came when a group of his friends called an organizational meeting on December 9, 1863, in Washington for the purpose of erecting a national and some state committees to work for his nomination. This first Chase advisory committee, which drew most of its membership from the secretary’s own state, Ohio, proved to be a very nebulous affair, but within a few weeks its membership was expanded and it became a permanent organization. It finally became known as the Republican national executive committee, and Sen. Samuel Pomeroy was made chairman.

Pomeroy had been reported to be a supporter of President Lincoln in June, 1863, but during the intervening six months he had changed his mind. On December 13, a few days after Pomeroy accepted the chairmanship of the secret Chase committee, Mark Delahay, whom Lincoln had made a judge in Kansas, reported to the chief executive that Pomeroy was one of the “head devils” of a Chase conspiracy. The senator, however, was unwilling to reveal the work of the committee at that moment and still publicly claimed that he was supporting Lincoln.

It is difficult to explain why Pomeroy deliberately abandoned the President and secretly led a committee which was working to bring about his overthrow. John Nicolay and John Hay, Lincoln’s two very enterprising and observant young private secretaries, wrote later

6. James Blunt to Salmon Chase, June 14, 1863.—Salmon Chase MSS. (Library of Congress).
in their biography of the President that Pomeroy had become estranged from Lincoln because he felt the President showed more favor and gave more patronage to Lane. 8 Donnal V. Smith in his study of Chase's bid for the presidential nomination maintained that Pomeroy's predilection for the secretary may have been prompted by the fact that Chase had shown some favors to the Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad in which the senator was a large stockholder. 9 Whatever the motive may have been, there can be no doubt that Pomeroy was actively engaged in building an organization for Chase early in 1864. The secretary, who always feigned complete disinterestedness in the presidency, was aware fully of what was going on, for he wrote to a friend in Ohio on January 18 that a committee composed of "prominent Senators and Representatives and citizens" had been formed for the purpose of making him president. He also added, "This committee, through a sub-committee, has conferred with me . . . and I have consented to their wishes." 10

Senator Pomeroy's committee undertook its work on behalf of Chase in earnest, and on January 26 a rumor appeared in the press that one hundred thousand copies of a pamphlet were about to be gratuitously circulated. The rumor proved to be true, for within a few days a document was being distributed throughout many of the states under the frank of Sen. John Sherman and Rep. John Ashley of Ohio, as well as that of Rep. Henry T. Blow of Missouri. 11 Ward Hill Lamon wrote to Lincoln that he had recently received news from Ohio that "a most scurrilous and abusive" pamphlet was being distributed; Leonard Swett procured a copy of the document, and according to Lamon, intended giving it to the President on his next visit to Washington. 12 This document was a pamphlet known as The Next Presidential Election.

The Next Presidential Election was, indeed, a "most scurrilous and abusive" document. The pamphlet maintained that Lincoln's re-election was impossible in view of the opposition being manifested against him. If he were re-elected it would be a calamity, the writer maintained, for it would destroy American liberties to concentrate so much power and patronage in the hands of

9. Donnal V. Smith, Chase and Civil War Politics (Columbus, Ohio, 1931), pp. 114, 115; Salmon Chase to Samuel Pomeroy, November 17, 1863, in Salmon Chase MSS. (Pennsylvania Historical Society).
12. Ward Lamon to Abraham Lincoln, February 6, 1864.—Ibid.
one man for eight years. The document concluded by stating, “We want in our coming President an advanced thinker; a statesman profoundly versed in political and economic science, one who fully comprehends the spirit of the age in which we live.” Lincoln, in their opinion, fell far short on all three counts.

The unfavorable reaction to the pamphlet was entirely unanticipated by Pomeroy’s committee. The voters in Ohio poured out the vials of their wrath on Senator Sherman for franking it out; and one of his best friends warned him, “If you were to resign tomorrow you could not get ten votes in the legislature provided it could be shown that you have been circulating such stuff as this.”\(^{13}\) The political ground slipped from beneath his feet so rapidly that Sherman was forced to publicly disavow any connection with the document.\(^{14}\)

Chase’s managers, however, misgauged its effect and prepared a second circular, dated February 8. Since this document bore the signature of Senator Pomeroy, it has gone down in history as the “Pomeroy Circular,” although he was not its author.\(^ {15}\) As in the case of the first document, it was franked out by several prominent radical congressmen. The Pomeroy circular was marked “strictly private,” but it soon appeared in the public journals. On February 20 the Washington Constitutional Union published a copy of it, and the following day it appeared in the Cincinnati Daily Enquirer. By Washington’s birthday it was released to the public generally over the wires of the Associated Press. The Pomeroy circular made essentially the same points as the earlier pamphlet, and it was only in their conclusions that the two documents differed at all. Where the pamphlet merely hinted broadly that a man of other talents was needed in the White House, the circular left nothing to conjecture but stated candidly that Salmon Chase had “more of the qualities needed in a President during the next four years than are to be found in any other candidate.”

The Next Presidential Election and the Pomeroy circular intensified public opinion against Chase and his managers. “The Pomeroy Circular has helped Lincoln more than all other things together,” was the opinion of one of Sherman’s constituents.\(^ {16}\) The circular

\(^ {13}\) G. W. Gordon to John Sherman, February 26, 1864.—John Sherman MSS. (Library of Congress).

\(^ {14}\) He published an open letter in the Cincinnati Gazette, March 3, 1864, in which he stated that he had been tricked into franking the document.

\(^ {15}\) According to Chase’s biographer, J. W. Schuckers, the document was written by James M. Winchell, secretary of the Pomeroy committee. See J. W. Schuckers, op. cit., p. 506. Lincoln’s Postmaster General, Montgomery Blair, insisted that Chase wrote it himself, but there is no corroborative evidence for this.

\(^ {16}\) Lewis Gunkel to John Sherman, February 29, 1864.—John Sherman MSS.
made enemies for Chase, wrote the Pittsburgh *Gazette*; the document was "not manly—not truthful—mean." 17 Pomeroy's "yeast don't make the Chase pudding rise," was the triumphant observation of one of Lincoln's partisans. 18 The storm was rising to such alarming proportions that the radicals soon had to seek means of disclaiming their connection with the documents. Senator Sherman, as mentioned, publicly stated that he had been tricked into franking out the first pamphlet. All along the line the radicals were forced to retreat from the advanced position they had taken against Lincoln, and even Secretary Chase hastened to write the President on February 22, explaining his connection with the document and offering to resign. He gave a brief account of the solicitation of his friends in compliance with which he had consented to become a candidate for the presidency. He assured Lincoln, "I had no knowledge of the existence of this letter before I saw it in the *Union*. . . . If there is any thing in my action or position which in your judgment will prejudice the public interest under my charge, I beg you to say so. I do not wish to administer the Treasury Department one day without your entire confidence." 19

Before Lincoln could reply to this letter an incident occurred which completely suffocated Chase's hope of securing the nomination. The Ohio state legislature, thanks largely to the undercover work of a host of Lincoln's friends and officeholders, adopted a resolution endorsing his renomination. Chase had no hope of securing the prize when even his own state refused to support him. Pomeroy's circular had forced a showdown in Ohio. Up to that time Lincoln's friends had made repeated attempts to move the legislature to endorse the President for another term, but each time the Chase men had beaten them. The Pomeroy circular, however, according to one of Chase's friends in Cleveland, "produced a perfect convulsion in the party." 20 The Kansas senator's ill-advised, hasty action in issuing this maligning pronunciamento actually defeated the presidential aspirations of the man he was dedicated to serving.

Lincoln replied to Chase's letter on February 29 and assured

17. Pittsburgh *Gazette*, February 24, 1864.—Clipping in *ibid*.
18. George P. Lincoln to William Doyle, February 26, 1864.—Robert T. Lincoln MSS.
20. Richard Parsons to Salmon Chase, March 2, 1864.—Salmon Chase MSS. (Library of Congress). L. Devin to John Sherman, February 26, 1864.—John Sherman MSS.
him that he perceived no reason why the secretary should resign. Chase continued to serve the administration as a cabinet officer until June, but his opportunity to secure the party presidential nomination was blasted. On March 5, the secretary wrote to his manager, James C. Hall, in Toledo, Ohio, telling him that no further attention was to be given his name for the nomination. This letter appeared in the press throughout Ohio on March 11.

Regardless of the fact that Chase had decided to withdraw from the presidential race, Pomeroy announced that his committee would not be disbanded but would continue its work on behalf of the secretary. On March 10, he rose in the senate and described how the national executive committee had been organized in January for the purpose of making Salmon Chase President. He stated boldly that he alone was responsible for issuing the circular, and he absolved Chase of any guilt by insisting that the secretary knew nothing of the circular and that he had only consented to run when the committee insisted.

Pomeroy's indiscreet action had done him irreparable damage with the President, and the patronage fount was shut tighter after the circular episode than it had been before. This did not ease the situation in Kansas, for Lane and Pomeroy, who hated each other with an unexcelled ferocity, redoubled their feud over the state's patronage. The situation was aggravated further when Lane denounced his colleague before the senate because of the Chase circular. Lincoln tended to rely more closely upon Lane, who, despite the fact that he often said uncomplimentary things about the President's ability and policies, was astute enough never to place himself in a position of open hostility as Pomeroy had done.

The two senators continued to wrangle over patronage, and in May Pomeroy visited Lincoln in the hope of mending his fences. The chief executive, who rarely carried a grudge for past political sins, did so on this occasion, and Pomeroy returned from his visit empty handed. John Hay noted in his diary on May 14, "Pomeroy has recently asked an audience of the President for the purpose of getting some offices. He is getting starved out during the last few months of dignified hostility and evidently wants to come

21. Abraham Lincoln to Salmon Chase (copy), February 29, 1864.—Robert T. Lincoln MSS.

22. Salmon Chase to James C. Hall, March 5, 1864, quoted in J. W. Schuckers, op. cit., pp. 302, 303; Salmon Chase to James C. Hall, March 6, 1864, in Salmon Chase MSS. (Pennsylvania Historical Society).

down. He did not get any.” 24 Immediately after the interview Lincoln wrote a note to the senator in which he implored, “I wish you and Lane would make a sincere effort to get out of the mood you are in. It does neither of you any good; it gives you the means of tormenting the life out of me, and nothing else.” 25 The rift between the two senators, however, was not bridged.

Pomeroy’s national executive committee continued to function until June, and he devised a plan for holding what he termed a “People’s Convention” in Baltimore on June 7, the same day on which the regular Union party convention was to meet. 26 Lincoln’s officeholders with their power and irresistible organization easily overcame these plans. The Union convention met in Baltimore as scheduled and the nomination of Lincoln was obtained with no difficulty; only Missouri cast her 22 votes against him on the first ballot, but speedily shifted to him before the roll call ended so that the selection was made unanimously.

Secretary Chase resigned from the cabinet shortly after the Baltimore convention, and he retired to the White Mountains for a long rest. He kept close contact with the political situation, however, and made frequent trips to New York and Boston, which were centers of anti-Lincoln activities. Pomeroy and others kept him abreast of developments at the capital. There was still some talk that Chase might be nominated at another convention, but the national executive committee was no longer functioning and Pomeroy apparently had given up his work. He was still not reconciled to accepting Lincoln, but intimated that he might go to Europe for a vacation rather than enter the canvass. 27

While Pomeroy was busily engaged in heading up much of the opposition to President Lincoln, Senator Lane had climbed aboard the President’s bandwagon and was leading the fight to secure his renomination. In 1863, when Lincoln incurred the wrath of the radical Republicans in Missouri by appointing Gen. John Schofield to the military command in that state, Lane had indirectly opposed the President. At the meeting of the Union League of America in Cleveland on May 20, he presented a series of resolutions demanding Schofield’s removal but finally withdrew them...
in the face of the opposition of Lincoln’s friends. On several occasions during that year, Lane had expressed the belief that Lincoln’s re-election might be inadvisable. He had been won over completely to Lincoln’s side, however, when Gov. Thomas Carney of Kansas made a bold bid to usurp his senatorial seat. In the struggle which followed, the President had supported Lane and checked the governor’s maneuver.

As the canvass for the presidency approached, Lane took the stump in December, 1863, at Waterbury, Conn., and named Lincoln for re-election. From there he moved on to New York, where he addressed a crowd at Cooper Institute and once again praised Lincoln and favored another term. It was rumored that Lincoln had personally chosen Lane to begin the canvass for him. Lane continued his peregrinations throughout New England and never lost an opportunity to endorse Lincoln for re-election.

Early in 1864, various state legislatures and Union party state conventions began to adopt resolutions endorsing the President for another term. Among the first was the Kansas legislature. Lincoln had won the approbation of the radicals in Kansas by a timely appointment of Gen. Samuel Curtis, an idol of that clique, to the military command there. A correspondent hastened to write the chief executive that this wise, happily received appointment would win him at least 100,000 votes in Kansas. The estimate may have been exaggerated, but it does serve to show the extreme popularity of Curtis among the Kansas radicals. Late in January, spurred on by Curtis’ appointment, the legislature put through a resolution, with but one dissenting vote, in favor of Lincoln’s re-election.

The mere fact that the legislature had been induced to support him did not mean that Lincoln was universally in favor among the Republican leaders in Kansas. As we have seen already, Pomeroy was busily at work during January and February with his Chase committee. Governor Carney, probably still smarting because the President had sided with Lane over the senatorial seat issue, joined forces with Pomeroy in the anti-Lincoln crusade.

31. E. N. Clough to Abraham Lincoln, January 27, 1864.—Robert T. Lincoln MSS.
Early in February, one of Lincoln’s friends in Kansas wrote to Lane that Carney; Pomeroy; James McDowell, United States marshal for Kansas; James F. Legate, United States assessor, and the three Indian agents, Fielding Johnson, William Ross and H. W. Martin, were using all their influence and patronage to defeat Lincoln, even though the legislature had already spoken in his favor. 33 Another Lincoln man in Kansas wrote the President shortly after the Pomeroy circular had been made public, acquainting him with the already apparent fact that Pomeroy was “with the bought up faction.” He promised Lincoln, however, that the people of Kansas were with Lane and would attest their devotion in November at the polls. 34 As an added precaution against Pomeroy and Carney, Lane returned to Kansas after his Eastern journey to keep his eye on the situation.

The Kansas Union state convention assembled at Topeka on April 21. Prior to this meeting, Lincoln instructed John Speer to return to the state capital for the purpose of securing the election of Lane as a delegate-at-large to the Baltimore convention and also to aid in his selection as a delegate to the meeting of the Grand Council of the Union League of America, which was scheduled to meet in the convention city on June 6. 35 At the Topeka meeting Speer performed his commission; James Lane was selected as a delegate-at-large along with A. C. Wilder, Thomas Bowen, W. W. H. Lawrence, M. H. Insley and F. W. Potter. 36 Subsequently the Kansas Union League held a convention at Leavenworth, and Lane was selected also to attend the meeting of the grand council.

On the appointed day the grand council held its session in Baltimore. There were 136 members present at this meeting; many of these men, such as Jim Lane, were also delegates to the Union party convention scheduled to meet the following day. According to William O. Stoddard the Union League meeting was to be “the place where all the anti-Lincoln steam [would] . . . be let off, so that it [would] . . . not scald the work in the Wigwam.” 37

The radical Republicans were prepared to make a last attempt

33. W. H. Lawrence to James Lane, February 15, 1864.—Robert T. Lincoln MSS.
34. R. C. Garvey to Abraham Lincoln, February 25, 1864.—Ibid.
to prevent Lincoln’s selection by the national convention. Samuel Miller of Pennsylvania presented a resolution to the grand council recommending the renomination of Abraham Lincoln. This was the signal for the radicals to begin their all-out offensive. They paraded again the old story of Lincoln’s alleged malfeasance, tyranny, corruption, abuse of power, favoritism, ribald frivolity, and a host of other crimes and indiscretions of which the President had been accused. After listening to this torrent of scurrility for a while, Senator Lane rose to his feet and began to refute the charges. At first the radicals raged under his stinging verbal lashes, for according to Stoddard, Lane had a “peculiar faculty for saying an offensive, insolent thing in the most galling offensive and insolent manner.” He riddled the radicals’ indictment against Lincoln, and as he progressed with his speech the delegates began to lean forward and listen, while they more or less rapidly are swept into the tide of conviction and are made to believe, with him, that any other nomination than that of Lincoln to-morrow is equivalent to the nomination of [George Brinton] McClellan by the Republican Convention and his election by the Republican party; that it would sunder the Union, make permanent the Confederacy, reestablish the slaves, dishonor the dead and disgrace the living.

At length Lane’s speech carried the day, and the grand council endorsed Lincoln with only a few dissenting voices.

At the Union national convention on June 7, Governor Stone of Iowa presented Lincoln’s name to the delegates. Some of them began to grumble and it looked as if the fight would begin afresh. Above the din the governor later reported that he could hear the clarion voice of Jim Lane shouting, “Stand your ground, Stone. Stand your ground! Great God, Stone, Kansas will stand by you!” After a few tense moments the opposition subsided, and Lincoln’s renomination was secured without further difficulty.

Three days after the meeting of the national convention, Senator Lane attended a session of the National Union executive committee for the purpose of preparing for the canvass. He proposed the creation of a “National Committee for the West,” with headquarters at St. Louis, as a subsidiary agency of the national committee so that the canvass in the states beyond the Mississippi

38. Anna Smith Hardie, op. cit., p. 46.
40. John Speer, op. cit., pp. 283, 284. Gen. George B. McClellan was nominated on August 29 by the Democratic convention at Chicago. He was nominated on a peace platform which branded the war a total failure and called for a cessation of hostilities and an eventual convention of the states to discuss a reunion.
could be more easily conducted. The other delegates saw the wisdom of such a suggestion and the group was established with Lane as its chairman.42

Lane was a most influential speaker during the canvass. He did much good in the important state election in Indiana where Gov. Oliver P. Morton was seeking re-election. Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania held their state elections in October, so they were regarded as key states. It was generally felt that whichever party carried the elections in the three October states would undoubtedly win the national election in November, therefore, Lane's campaigning in Indiana was of great importance.43 The senator spent most of his time campaigning in Missouri and his own state. According to a Chicago journal, he "stumped southern Kansas, rode fifty miles a day for eighteen days, and made three speeches per day—never missing an appointment." 44

The senator's work was not confined entirely to speech making. Late in the canvass it was learned that the rebel general, Sterling Price, intended to invade Missouri and Kansas. Lane immediately went to Leavenworth where he offered his services to Gen. Samuel Curtis to meet this crisis. His senatorial rival, Samuel Pomeroy, who had been sulking like Achilles in his tent during most of the canvass, responded too when his beloved state was threatened. Both senators became aides-de-camp in Curtis' army, and the general later wrote that he "found both of these men of great service in giving correct intelligence to the wavering public mind, and in suppressing false impressions. . . ." 45

Thus throughout the year, Lane and Pomeroy had played leading roles in the Lincoln-radical feud. Though the two men represented different ideals and gave much to the causes to which they subscribed, they co-operated under General Curtis to save their state and the North from the danger of another Confederate invasion. The force of partisanship was forgotten in this effort which required their mutual assistance.

42. Wendell H. Stephenson, loc. cit., p. 145.
44. Wendell H. Stephenson, loc. cit., p. 146.