

SPEECH BY HON. S. C. POMEROY,

ON

*The Platform and Party of the Future, and National Freedom secured
by an Amended Constitution.*

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

MARCH 10, 1864.

Mr. POMEROY said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I do not propose to reply very minutely to the argument of the Senator from Kentucky. I did not listen to his argument, and it has not appeared in the Globe.

As the discussion is not very closely confined to the subject before the Senate, I propose to address a few remarks upon topics of general interest.

Some curiosity has been manifested, here and elsewhere, as to the authority and genuineness of a *Circular* issued by me, as chairman of the *National Executive Committee*.

Such curiosity is very laudable, and I take an early opportunity to say, that I did issue that circular, and that it embodies the views of the National Committee upon the subject presented. The committee was instituted in the usual manner, at a public meeting convened in this city in the month of January last. That meeting comprised members of Congress and citizens from nearly every loyal State in the Union. The committee is composed of members of Congress and other citizens of the United States; all of them, so far as I am advised, of the most unquestioned loyalty, and devoted to the Union, and to *Freedom* as the best means for restoring and *preserving the Union*.

The object of the committee is to unite the sentiment of the country in the support of men and measures suited to the times. It issued a *letter*, called by some a circular, which it has distributed, as also the speeches of members of Congress on the pressing topics of the day.

There was nothing secret in, or about the letter, unless some person wrote "private" or "secret" upon it in order to attract attention and secure a wider circulation. The only motive for its dissemination at all, was to notify the country of the existence of such a committee, and of the purpose of its organization. Copies were sent by mail to the President of the United States, to the judges of the courts, the Governors of the States, and other distinguished persons in the loyal portion of the country.

I do not know that the Secretary of the Treasury was consulted in reference to the organization of the committee. So far as I am informed, he was ignorant as to the persons composing that committee, as also of its action.

This is the era of drafting men into the service of their country, without notice, and in that spirit he was *drawn* for the service. And

because we believed the Secretary of the Treasury to be a suitable person, he was named as a candidate for the Chief Magistrate of the nation. We still believe him to be the man whom the people will delight to honor.

And I find that many other men in the country think as we do in this matter. Indeed, I have yet to find the man friendly to freedom who does not concede that our choice would deposit the responsibilities of the Executive Government in able and safe hands.

Mr. President, the National Executive Committee still lives, and in my humble judgment bids fair to establish the fact of its existence on the page of the future. Indeed, its existence has now become almost a "military necessity." Through it we hope to stimulate, encourage, and combine the loyal men of the country, for a more vigorous and successful prosecution of the war; believing that a speedy issue to a three years doubtful conflict, will save the credit of the nation, the lives of the army, and the very hope of a free Government among men!

Great and radical changes are transpiring in this country. Theories of long standing are exploded; and positions believed to have been well taken, are abandoned—rendered obsolete by the events of a single year! From the nature of things political parties cannot be immutable. During a period of revolution in public sentiment and established institutions, they must necessarily change. The community is made up of at least three distinct classes: The one, earnest, hopeful, radical, comprises the party of progress, and is the party of the future. Another, time-serving, toadying to power, glorifying only the present, is the party of to-day. The fossil and decaying elements of the social structure, who are wrapped in the most gloomy apprehensions of the future, and can descry nothing bright or glorious save in the dead records of the olden time—these compose the vanishing party of the past, sighing for what it will soon obtain, retirement from public duties, and leisure to sigh over the dead and buried relics of a forgotten history.

In the absence of any other national political organization, fully representing our views, this was thought a most opportune period—while the nation is emerging from the blood and toil of a three years war—to initiate an organization of thorough and earnest men, who, gathering inspiration for the present and strength for the future from the lessons and discipline of the past, should become the safe, successful, and controlling party of the future. Old party lines and platforms are superseded by living issues, which have sprung into being since any party has held a national convention. And this is equally true of all parties, whether their platforms were laid at Charleston, Baltimore, or Chicago. It is in behalf of a higher, purer, and freer democracy, than comes down to us from the past, that we now appeal to the loyal heart of the nation.

It is no part of my purpose to criticise the past measures of this Administration. No human foresight could have divined and provided for all the emergencies of the war; and to sow discord among ourselves would be a poor way to prepare for the exigencies of the future. I propose to build up rather than pull down, to unite

and to prevent, if possible, a division of the loyal and radical sentiment of the country.

The influence of parties must not be ignored or lightly estimated in this country. While "one goeth and another cometh," it must not be forgotten, that each has its mission; and when its day is passed, it must be absorbed in the advancing column or retire before it. Political parties are a necessity in a representative government, and are time-honored, as are also the fundamental principles of the Republic. They form and concentrate public sentiment, and are mediums of political action and political power. No administration can properly perform its functions and achieve its ends, if not supported by an efficient party organization, and measurably adherent and respectful to party fidelity.

While the war has changed the channels of commerce and trade, and in some cases opened new and better ones: while an unknown and uncertain currency has been displaced by a known and national currency, so, too, the old political organizations, having been formed for other times and other issues, have had to give way to the one party and the one sentiment of progress, of nationality, of freedom!

All parties have taken a hand in trying to make something out of slavery. Its vote being generally a unit in national politics, has been bidden for by every aspirant for office, and has as surely wrought the ruin of those whom it elevated to power, when they were no longer available to promote its ends.

The old Whig party with its gifted and immortal leaders struck upon this rock and was rent in fragments. And while memory lives to cherish an Ashland and a Marshfield, there will be an undying record of the ingratitude of slavery!

The Democratic party—in its early days the friend of freedom and the rights of man—became ultimately the ally of the slave power and the embodiment of its interests, but held its discordant elements together until the Charleston convention, in 1860. In the canvass of that year—running two candidates, neither of whom was for freedom—the two factions struck against each other and were destroyed in the concussion. Since then we have known no National Democratic party.

The mission of the Republican party was ended when its work was accomplished. That work was to stay the progress of slavery and preserve the public domain to freedom. It never pretended to aim at more. But it made two splendid campaigns and died in its last triumph! It struck one telling blow for freedom and against slavery; so the reminiscences of its short and eventful career shall forever remain tender and interesting.

The first achievement for freedom as against slavery, was upon the soil of my own State. The slave party triumphed in the legislation of Congress, carried the Missouri compromise of 1820, and the compromise measures of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska bill of 1854. It had triumphed in Congress, in the national conventions, in the elections which followed, and in the decisions of the Supreme Court. Everywhere had this power been successful until it undertook to

make a practical use of this legislation, and build up the institution on the soil of my own State; and then it yielded only after a three years' struggle and the disgrace of two administrations! Sir, I have seen and felt enough of slavery to hate it. I have no confidence in any man's freedom, if his title to it is held at the mercy of this slave power. Compromises settle nothing. They are only temporary adjustments, and always liable to be broken. There is no compromising with an inherent wrong. There is no peace where freedom and slavery are housed together. This conflict is natural as well as "irrepressible." It is the great law of the case, the "higher law," for it exists in the nature of things, that no great wrong can anywhere rest. It is itself aggressive, making war upon the right, and it must live in triumph, or die by extermination! The case is fairly made up before the American people whether their Government shall live or whether slavery shall die? And this position was reached in the triumphs of freedom and the defeat of slavery in the canvass of 1860.

At the period of this triumph, the long threatened conflict between slavery and freedom culminated in open war. It had been tending to this issue for nearly half a century; and now, maddened by political defeat, it struck the threatened blow, and during the warring days of its last and chosen administration selected its own battle-field. Secession, the forerunner of war, commenced at the opening of the last Congress of Mr. Buchanan's administration. On the 20th day of December, 1860, South Carolina "seceded," as she said, from the American Union. It was the falling of a star of doubtful brilliancy and more than suspected loyalty. Four days later her whole delegation withdrew from Congress, and left Washington in order to prosecute their schemes of treason; three days more, and the Palmetto flag—that rag of rebellion and treason—floated over Charleston and Forts Moultrie and Pinkney; two days later and Mr. Floyd, having first stolen the Treasury poor, tendered his resignation, and received from Mr. Buchanan an affectionate and tearful farewell! On the fifth day of January following, that delectable body, the South Carolina convention, adjourned, having laid the corner-stone of the southern confederacy deep in the quicksands of slavery. On the 7th day of January, Mr. Toombs made in this Senate Chamber, and standing in this very place, a most treasonable speech in behalf of slavery and secession, and left Washington unhung! On the 9th, only two days later, that gallant old ship, "Star of the West," while entering Charleston harbor on an errand of mercy which an angel might have envied, was fired upon and compelled to return! and on the 28th day of the same month South Carolina demanded the surrender of Fort Sumter. On the 4th of February, 1861, the first confederate convention was held at Montgomery, Alabama; on the 8th a constitution was adopted and a provisional government organized; on the very next day, February 9th, Mr. Jefferson Davis was elected president of the southern confederacy, and on the 12th day of April the batteries of Charleston opened upon Fort Sumter, which was compelled on the 13th to surrender!

Thus, step by step, in quick succession, slavery committed the

overt acts of rebellion and treason, and thus opened the war during the first days of the present Administration. And what could have been clearer than the *cause of the rebellion*? What easier than then and there to have pronounced upon the means for its overthrow? But how slow it was to learn the lesson of events, to comprehend the magnitude of the struggle, or the manner and means for its successful termination! It was early and hastily proclaimed that the relations of the Government to slavery and of slavery to the States should remain unchanged, as if amid the wreck of State governments and State sovereignty slavery alone was entitled to stand; that whatever else might perish, that at least should be preserved. So little was the crisis understood that it was pronounced a "ninety-day" affair, and this ended, the States were all to be restored and the institution of slavery remain undisturbed. It was unhesitatingly announced that this was no war for freedom and the rights of man; but for the Constitution and the rights of the States in the restored Union; and to make this position doubly sure, a joint resolution was dragged through Congress to secure it against further question. No wonder that we suffered the teachings of adversity, or that our course lay over many well-fought battle-fields of doubtful triumph! No wonder, I repeat, that with such declared purposes and *impolicies* we have been called to weep over the slaughter of thousands, and find the pathway of national success to be "by the way of the wilderness and the Red Sea!" For a year and a half, with the blindest fanaticism, it followed in the wake of slavery, for that interest led, both in the council and in the field. But, by the discipline of sorrow and the teachings of adversity, the heart of the nation has been reached; and rapidly reorganizing, the people are preparing for an edict of emancipation, made legal and irrevocable by an amendment of the Constitution, as provided for and anticipated in the instrument itself.

Entertaining these views, and in order to save this Government to freedom, and that the hope of its founders may become fully realized, we are for organizing a party with a well-defined platform and policy; for in periods of national convulsion it becomes the solemn duty of the people to increase their vigilance, and to acquire new strength for the support of their cherished institutions.

The Revolution of 1776 produced the noblest political declaration ever made to the world, and on which was afterward founded our Federal Constitution. But the inevitable progress of ideas made it impossible that slavery should long continue to exist in a free republic, and the death-struggle of that institution has nearly resulted in the destruction of the nation itself. This struggle has rendered obsolete the old fallacy of a political compromise between liberty and slavery, on which our Union, otherwise admirable, was insecurely based; and it has proved the necessity of such amendments of our Constitution as shall enlarge its spirit, and make certain the way of emancipation, and guaranty us from any future rebellion of a class against the people, who are, and of right should ever continue to be, sovereign.

In the present conflict, I repeat, all political parties have been destroyed. Partisan democracy early perished through the alliance

and corruption of its leaders with slavery; partisan republicanism, aiming only at the restraint of slavery, and never once asking its extinction, was shattered by the first gun aimed at Sumter.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. If my friend from Kansas will allow me, I do not know that I understand precisely some of the statements he has made. Am I to understand him as organizing a new political party?

Mr. POMEROY. I will allow the Senator to answer me at full length in a few minutes.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator cannot be interrupted unless he gives way.

Mr. DOOLITTLE. I only wished to understand the Senator.

Mr. POMEROY. I was saying that partisan democracy early perished through the alliance and corruption of its leaders with slavery, partisan republicanism aiming only at the restraint of slavery, and never once asking its extinction, was shattered by the first gun aimed at Fort Sumter. No party now exists which has ever been seen in a national convention. And after three years of fearful and exhausting conflict, the country is still menaced by dangers, which can only be averted by instant and intelligent political action on the part of the people, and a marching to triumph and victory on the part of the army. To save the nation from demoralization and disgraceful bankruptcy, and also from the threatened perils of official usurpations, a contest of ideas is inaugurated for the promotion of just principles, and not for the aggrandizement of men. To this end the aid of all citizens should be invoked who desire a speedy restoration of the Union upon the principle of universal freedom secured by an amended Constitution, inviting all to unite in advocating and maintaining a political organization embracing the vital issues of the present day.

1. The immediate suppression of the rebellion, by using and controlling, if need be, for the time being all the civil and all the military power of this nation, without premature offers of pardon by proclamation of amnesty to traitors, but reserving to a triumphant people the right to determine to what extent mercy shall be tempered with justice.

2. Such amendments to the Federal Constitution as shall prohibit slavery wherever the flag of the Union floats, with suitable encouragement to a general system of education, in order that suffrage shall be *intelligent* as well as *free*, thus furnishing additional guarantee for the perpetuity of our liberties.

3. The maintenance of the Monroe doctrine, by which the despots that afflict the Old World shall be denied any additional foothold in the New, thus guarding our country against the encroachments of tyranny, and dedicating this American continent to the development of popular institutions.

4. The organization of a rigid economy in the administration of public affairs, in order both to relieve the burdens of the people and to insure the financial credit of the nation.

5. The confiscation of the property of leading rebels, and inauguration of republican governments in all the districts in rebellion,

whenever the loyal inhabitants shall voluntarily acquiesce in and adopt the same.

6. The perfection of a sound system of national currency, made stable and sure by a pledge of the wealth and resources of the whole country, thus protecting the people from the evils of an issue of unguaranteed paper currency, and supplying them with a safe and convenient medium of commercial exchange in a national currency of uniform value in all parts of the country, and *convertible into gold* without loss.

7. Such subordination of the several States to the General Government as shall secure a homogeneous and undisputed nationality, while not destroying the rights reserved to the States, so that allegiance to the National Government shall always be regarded as the highest fealty, and the title of an American citizen the proudest that can be borne, believing him to be an American who has an American heart in his bosom, no matter where may have been the accident of his birth or education, for he is as likely to be as truly an American who becomes one from choice as he who is compelled to be one from necessity.

8. A general adherence to the usage of the Government for thirty years past in the one term principle as applied to the office of the Presidency, believing that the policy of a second and third election is fruitful of temptations, and tends to impair the purity and patriotism of his administration, and to surround him with influences fatal to the use of a free and unbiassed Executive patronage, and highly dangerous to popular liberty, which he was chosen to protect.

9. Thorough protection to individual rights, including those of the writ of habeas corpus, and the liberty of speech and publication, while at the same time, there are suitable safe-guards against a treasonable, subsidized, and corrupted press.

10. The support of a liberal and protective system of foreign emigration, which shall attest our sympathies with the struggling people of Europe, while it shall replenish the wastes of the present destructive war, stimulate our injured commerce, supply the demand for labor, and develop those immense resources of our country, on which we must so greatly rely for the speedy extinguishment of the national debt.

11. The extension of suitable aid for the construction of a railway across the continent, for the better union of the Atlantic and Pacific States, and their easier defense against possible foreign enemies, as well as to hasten the development of the rich mining regions of the continent, which we have reason to believe, are destined to control the commercial values of the world.

Mr. President, I need not add more. The earnest and loyal men of the country are awakening and uniting upon these issues. We have had enough of hesitating and uncertain policies. Enough of indecisions, and of wrong decisions. Enough of coldness and neglect given to the friends of the Government, while favor and kindness have been meted out to its enemies. The voices of the multitude, like the mingling of many waters, are calling for vigor, progress, and success. This appeal is urged by the sad memories of an unsatisfied

record of the past, by doubtful and uncertain movements of the present moment, and by the most fearful apprehensions of the future; and *faith* in progress and triumph of the right, must not be left to languish without works. One blow for freedom by an edict of legislative emancipation, made efficient by a cordial and decided executive enforcement, would make "our light to rise in obscurity," and we should expect success in no other way. And, sir, we are urged to commence this work only in this way, by a remembrance of every martyr to liberty since the foundation of the world, and especially by the fathers of this Republic, who cradled its infancy making it the day-dream of their hopes, while it "inspired their songs in the night."

We are impelled to it by a sight of the weeds of sorrow, that are indicative of the mourning of ten thousand hearts, in households now and hereafter to be forever desolate. We must accomplish this work in this way to strengthen the arms of our brave men in the field, who are perishing their lives for their country, their Government, and mankind. And, above all, and more than all, by the recollection of fifty thousand northern and western freemen who have gone down to early and unmonumented graves on the soil of slavery, and because of it, trusting, as I hope they did, that the "spirit of liberty" would early rise from their ashes, and linger there, as the guardian of freedom, restoring man to his manhood, making it doubly certain that in the union that is to be, Liberty and Union shall be forever one and forever inseparable.

Sir, to close the war in this way will be most gratifying to mankind; for we stand to-day in the face of the world. The present generation, the millions to come after us, are interested, equally with us, in this struggle. Let the news go through the nations, that with the triumph of the Union, liberty has triumphed, every fetter has been broken, the oppressed go free, and, sir, every dungeon of tyranny in the Old World will be illuminated for the hour, and joyous tears of gratitude falling upon the wasting limb of the captive, will soften his fetters and enable his emaciated hands to be uplifted while he thanks his God, and waits, and hopes. Oh, this is a war for mankind. It has the old battle-ery of liberty. It establishes freedom in a free Government, as the hope of the world.

—And, sir, I will not omit to say that in this conflict of arms, if prosecuted in this way, we shall be successful. Whether the sky at this moment looks bright or dark; whether the conflict of the present shall rage for a longer or a shorter period, it shall terminate ere long in the triumph of justice and liberty. They who are for this result are *more than they who be against it*. For to this side of the issue plead truth, justice, God, and His oppressed poor; the captive in his cell; the fettered prisoner wasting in despotic and hopeless dungeons; the slave, waiting in undying hope, and now for the first time allowed to strike the redeeming blow of his own freedom—these all, all unite in an appeal of agony that this great heritage of freedom, bequeathed by its immortal founders to human nature, shall triumph in this, its last great struggle, and remain here upon this American continent, as an asylum for mankind forever.