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Guest (s): Rep. William Colmer (D-MS)

Title: Predictions of 1960 Political Conventions

Note: Questions were paraphrased and/or shortened by the transcriber. For the exact question, please consult the audiotapes.

Morphew: Introduction...let's look ahead to 1960...does it seem to you that both parties are finally going to recognize the south as a powerful entity to be deal with?

Colmer: Well, Dick, I would say, as of the moment, in all candor and with some disappointment, that I don't see too much evidence of that now. The tendency, it seems to me, on the part of both parties, is to continue to seek the vote of the strong minority groups. I believe that you've realized, as I'm sure most people must realize, that this government is being operated largely by minority groups. The minority groups are not as strong as the great majority of our people but the point is that they are organized and the great majority is not organized, and therefore, the tendency of the politicians of both parties is to seek the vote of these minority bloc voters, such as the CIO/AF of L, the NAACP, the ADA, and these other groups that we consider to the left of center.

Morphew: So both parties will once again in 1960 have candidates that will be appealing to these minority groups and ignoring or slapping the south in the face?

Colmer: Well, I would say that that will be true unless the South really asserts itself. We are the strongest minority group, potential minority group in the country but yet we are ignored largely because we in the South permit ourselves to be taken for granted. For instance, it's nothing new to you to be reminded of the old expression about the South is in the bag, therefore, the Democrats ignore us, they pay no attention to us, they seek these minority bloc voters and of course, the Republicans don't look to anything from us or offer us anything because we in turn give them nothing. It's the old story of enough organized minority groups controlling the unorganized majority.

Morphew: How much strength does the south have when it comes to electing a president?

Colmer: Well, I just intimated the South is the strongest possible potential minority group, but it doesn't stand together and I want to comment on that a little later on if I may. The South has a hundred and twenty-eight electoral votes out of five hundred and

thirty-two. If the South would assert itself in the democratic party where it's taken for granted, it would get some consideration, both in the matter of the selection of a candidate and in the writing of a platform. Of course, the same thing holds true in the organization of the Congress. If the South were to stand together it could exercise itself. The trouble has been that our politicians all run off in different directions instead of unifying, not only for the interests of the South but for the interests of the country because we feel that the southern point of view, the southern philosophy, is not only good for the South but it's good for the nation.

Morphew: So you feel that the first thing the South should do is to go into the DNC and insist upon a platform and candidates acceptable to it?

Colmer: Dick, I've been advocating that for twenty years, practically even since I've been in Congress. Apparently, we haven't gotten very far, but I think our people have got to realize now that it's later than most people seem to realize, and that we've got possibly this last chance to make our weight felt. And I do hope that our southern leaders can forget their own desire for political preference at the hands of the party and unify and demand something for the southern philosophy or for that philosophy which after all is the philosophy has made this country really what it is today, the envy of the civilized world. And something that we're gradually losing because of the demands of these organized minority groups, that is what is responsible for your left-wing court, Supreme Court, that's what's responsible for a great deal of this left-wing legislation. Now, to illustrate, only a few days ago, we passed H.R. 3, which is a bill sponsored by my chairman, Howard Smith of Virginia, Congressman Howard Smith, which incidentally, I hope you'll pardon my saying, that I'm a co-sponsor of. Now, we passed that bill in spite of these groups to which I refer. We had for the first time, I think in the House of Representatives, a solid, united front with our southern members. Of course, we were not strong enough to put it across ourselves but we had considerable help from the Republican members of the House. It may be interesting to note in that connection that we only got one northern Democratic vote in that bill, in the passage of that bill.

Morphew: Let's assume the south unites and goes to the conventions in 1960 and the south is still ignored, then what should we do?

Colmer: Well, I'd say in the first place, Dick, that's going to happen unless we become unified in the South and exercise our rights and our privileges and make a bold, forthright showing to the politicians who control the Democratic Party. Now, it's quite obvious as the situation looks now that a candidate will be nominated who advocates these things that we decry. Now, if we will exercise our rights and if we will become united, we can prevent that from happening. Now, if they do do that, we should have in our bag some plans for what we are going to do, and for that reason I bring back something that I have, again if you will pardon the reference, been advocating for many years and that is independent electors. The constitution of the United States, as prepared by the founding fathers, never had any idea to start with that we would elect candidates from one party, not candidates but delegates or electors to the electoral college, who are bound to vote for any particular candidate. They were elected originally and that was the idea of the

founding fathers to go to the electoral college and cast their ballots for the man who best represented the people who they represents and by whom they were sent up there. So if the South would unite now, if they would make the machinery, get the machinery in order, to send independent electors up to the electoral college after the candidates were voted on in November and they went to the electoral college in December, they could go up there as a bloc of one hundred and twenty-eight electors and they could vote, the chances are that they could throw that election either way that they saw fit. In other words, they could carry out the concept of the founding fathers as they provided in the constitution when they set up the method of selecting a candidate for president.

Morphew: And I want to make clear that you're not talking in terms of a third political party but independent electors...

Colmer: I'm talking of independent electors. However, I wouldn't write off the possibility of a third party because I think we still ought to keep that back in reserve.