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

Title: Effects of Civil Rights Legislation on South in the 1960 Election

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

Morphew: Introduction...what relation the efforts toward civil rights legislation will have on the 1960 presidential election?

Colmer: Well, Dick, as you know, the civil rights, as I'm pleased to call it, civil wrongs, legislation is but a part and a parcel of the effort of the modern, or so-called pseudo-liberals, who would remake America under the image of the Old World from which our forefathers escaped to establish this New World and this new concept of freedom in the lives of men. Therefore, this particular issue of concentration of power and continuous whittling away at the foundation stones of our republic as conceived by our founding fathers, has been aimed at my section of our great common country, known as the South. And since this is peculiarly and particularly a problem of the South because of the concentration of Negroes in that section, and being a political issue of the highest order, it has had a tendency to solidify our people in the South and to, I think, bring about some cohesion and solidarity in the South that has been brewing all of these years because of the continuous drifting away from the foundation stones of the republic. And therefore, this question of independent electors, which a number of us have been advocating for a number of years, seems to be gaining strength. Now, as you know, there are 6 states in the South who already have the legislative machinery to send independent electors to the electoral college. Now, there's nothing new about this concept. As a matter of fact, as I say, I've been an advocate for a number of years, it's not new with me. It's as old as the constitution itself because the founding fathers, and if you'll pardon me using that term again, never had in mind that these electors that were selected to go to the electoral college to vote for a candidate for president, should go up there and become mere rubber stamps to cast a vote for a particular party candidate. The idea, and it's, no one can escape this, of this provision of the constitution setting up the electoral college, was for the several states to send electors to the electoral college to cast their ballots for the candidate that best represented the philosophy of that particular state or section. So, there's nothing new about it, but as you suggest, this drive for the civil, miscalled civil rights legislation, has had a tendency to solidify the South. Now, I said a moment ago that there were 6 states that had this machinery. It is my information that other states are

considering it. For instance, I think it's a foregone conclusion that the Old Dominion state, really the mother of the South, and the state that has contributed so much to the founding of this republic, is now in process of setting up such election machinery itself. So that, I'm very happy to say, the movement is growing and it should grow. Again, if I may, and I want you to do some talking, I don't want to take all the time, but let's go back. There's something deeper than this question of civil rights legislation. That within itself is bad, of course, and it's most reprehensible, but this thing goes to the very foundation stones upon which the republic was founded. If you listen to some of these modern liberals, by the way, I often like to refer to this opinion that if Jefferson, the true liberal of all time, were living, he'd term these modern liberals 'Tories,' because they believe in the concentration of power here under the dome of this Capitol in Washington as against the Jeffersonian theory and the founding fathers' theory of keeping the government close to the people, back home, on a local level. Now, I think everyone will agree that, with the modern trend, that we are gradually drifting further and further away from the foundation stones upon which the republic was built.

Morphew: In other words, the people of the South have been cognizant of this trend for awhile and it's finally built up enough momentum that they are ready to take some action to alleviate it.

Colmer: Right. Right, Dick, and this so-called civil rights thing has just served to kind of point the thing up and has awakened the people in the South to the real, true situation that exists. Now, let me just say this again. If this trend is not stopped, this trend of concentration of power here, we are eventually going to wind up, and I hope, I just hope I can find some reason to have some kind of hope to the contrary, but we are eventually going to wind up in some type of a totalitarian state, not unlike Russia itself. We must reverse the trend if we are going to save the republic which your generation and mine and the generations that have proceeded us have had the privilege of enjoying. If we are going to preserve it and perpetuate it for the generations to come, then the trend must be reversed.

Morphew: If the South is going to make its influence felt there has to be unity among Southern leaders...

Colmer: There's no question about that, Dick. The trouble in the South is no different from what it is in other sections. Our, too many of our political leaders, are too much concerned with their own self-aggrandizement, for their own perpetuation in office, for their own political preference, to go out and do the job that should be done if we're going to save the country.

Morphew: And the people are responsible for making sure their leaders are responsive to the public's demands.

Colmer: I am absolutely convinced that the people of the South are far ahead of the politicians of the South in their thinking on this. All they want is leadership, and I would like very much to see this thing of independent electors spread to other sections of our

great common country because, in the final analysis, while this may be aimed at the South, this civil wrong stuff, in the final analysis, it's going to affect them also because liberty is not a sectional proposition. The liberty of the people of the so-called North is being threatened by all of this so-called liberal movement for concentration of government as much as the people are in the South. And when the chicken finally comes home to roost, as we say down home, will find that it affects them as well as it does the people of the South.

Morphew: Do you feel that if the South remains united, is it too late to reverse the trend?

Colmer: No, I don't think it's too late. I think it's growing late, but I think that if the people of the South will unify that they can color the political stream and alter and change the trend.