

Abraham Lincoln papers

From Alexander K. McClure to Abraham Lincoln, July 1, 1863

Philadelphia, July 1. 1863

Sir

I telegraphed you yesterday urging that Gen McClellan be assigned to duty here as commander of the Dept. & briefly gave the reasons which, in my judgment, demanded such a change.¹ In reply I have your telegram suggesting the difficulties which would attend the restoration of Gen McClellan to active service.²

¹ See McClure to Lincoln, June 30, 1863.

² For Lincoln's reply to McClure's June 30 telegram, see *Collected Works*, VI, 311.

I am well aware that some ardent friends of the Administration are resolutely determined that Gen McClellan shall not be called to any office of usefulness — or, if called, they would sacrifice our cause to sacrifice him. This feeling was painfully manifested here yesterday when his call to Penna was decreed possible. That there are others, with unfaltering fidelity to the government, who believe that Gen McC, is not himself faithful, & cannot therefore be useful in any command, is true; and from these classes you have been threatened with the new "leaks" and new "clamors" in case he should be assigned to duty.³

³ Lincoln wrote to McClure on June 30 that the re-appointment of McClellan would be like "opening one leak to stop another."

I am not in any sense a partizan of Gen McC. I do not know him personally; have never communicated with him person directly or indirectly, and probably would not if I had the power, place him at the head of an army to lead offensive operations Nor would I call him to the field if it involved in any degree, the humiliation of the administration. To maintain its dignity & power is of paramount importance, and to impair them is to peril our nationality

But, in my judgment, the call of Gen McC to Penna in this crisis would have been attended with the most fortunate results Had it been done when the foe hurled his army upon our border, there would have been a degree of unanimity in his support & a success in organizing troops that would

has been measurably if not entirely decisive alike in protecting us, and in relieving the army of the Potomac from the perilous duty of [uncovering?] Washington

The period may now be past when the full measure of Gen McC's usefulness can be realized, as delay has invited the fiercest hostility to his call here, — some from honest, and still more from most unworthy motives. Still, I would call him because it is right that he should be here; because he is peculiarly fitted for the task of organizing raw troops & defending our state; because he would be earnestly sustained by thousands of loyal men in the Democratic ranks who are poisoned against the government, & disloyal leaders would be compelled to follow them; and last but not least, because it would clearly charge the Democratic party with its just share of responsibility in defending our State & sustaining the government. If then disaster should be the issue of battle between Lee & Meade, instead of revolution threatening us with anarchy, the government would be ten-fold stronger to enforce its authority in conscription & otherwise, & the future would, I feel assured, be relieved of fearful uncertainty

I know that a portion of your Cabinet is implacably hostile to Gen McC, & I fear that they do not realize that in a period of common peril like this, the people are slow to appreciate personal or political animosities. Had success attended the army since the dethronement of Gen McC the country would have blessed you for the act; but with the shadow of disaster growing still heavier under new leaders, whether well or ill founded, the people sympathize with our exiled generals, and to traitors at home are opened all the channels leading to the desponding national heart. The strongest governments have learned well the lesson that teaches obedience or at least deference to popular "leaks & "clamors" & ours, when trembling on the very verge of existence, should not be insensible to it. Wise therefore as it may have been to supercede McC, it is equally wise to-day that he be called to some sphere of duty, & here is one that seemed to open the way for both you and him to be just to each other & to the country.

Politically & personally rest assured that I am your friend, nor can any act of your administration make me anything else, for in your success is [united] the hope, the life of the Republic. I have therefore written with the frankness of a friend, as such at least receive it — & with your better information & judgment decide.

Gen Couch⁴ has done his whole duty. In head, in heart & in effort he has performed the cruel task assigned him as far as mortal could; but he cannot make or unmake sentiment, & the State has seemed lifeless even with the foe at our doors & in our homes.

4 Darius N. Couch was commander of the recently created Department of the Susquehanna.

I go to Harrisburg to-day

Truly Thine

A K McClure