

Transcription

"Pass this tax ordinance"

This is not a time for Virginians to be divided; and lest my position and the position of the people of my section may be misunderstood; lest our position might exert a deleterious influence upon the people of the East, by being supposed to be that of hostility to this movement; and anxious to promote that unanimity so essential to the success of the cause in which Virginia is now engaged, while I have not heard a word from my constituents for a month, yet, assured that they will sustain me in view of the events that have transpired recently, I shall now ask leave of the Convention to change my vote on the ordinance of secession, from the negative to the affirmative.

I have contemplated this change for days. I have been waiting only for one thing to be done, and that would have been done if gentlemen only understood the salutary influence it would exercise among the people of my section. I refer to the tax question. You all know that this has been a thorn in the side of our people. I will hazard the opinion that some gentlemen in that far distant border would be very well pleased if this Convention would take no action in this matter, but allow it to remain as it is, and thus afford these gentlemen an opportunity to create mischief.

But in order to obviate such difficulties and defeat the infamous plans of that class of mischief makers, I had hoped that the Convention would see the importance of removing this source of difficulty, and doing that which would lead to conciliation and harmony among our people at this time. If they would pass this tax ordinance we could go home to our constituents and say we had done our duty, and having been defeated in our efforts at peace by the machinations of the powers at Washington, we changed our policy and went in for secession. Our Eastern brethren found it their duty to pursue this line of policy, and we aided them in it. But they have done you justice by adopting the *ad valorem* principle of taxation in reference to the negro property and we have no cause now for any misunderstanding. They would hail joyfully this change, and unite heartily with the East.

Citation: Extract from speech of George W. Berlin, of Upshur County, in the Virginia Convention, April 23, 1861, printed in George H. Reese and William H. Gaines, Jr. eds., *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965), 4:404–405.

