Dirksen at Cooper Union Marks Lincoln Centennial

By Ralph Chapman

Senate minority leader Everett M. Dirksen, of Illinois, expressed confidence yesterday that "meaningful civil rights legislation" will be passed during the current session of Congress despite the fact that "the opposition are pretty determined."

In New York to speak on the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's famous "Right Makes Might" speech at The Cooper Union, he discussed the current fight in the Senate during a press conference yesterday afternoon.

He pointed out that an important factor forcing Congress to come to grips with the problem is the national conventions to be held this summer. The issue, he said, cannot be put off because "postponement would only mean that we will have to face it on another day."

Reluctant to Limit Debate

In answer to questions, he admitted that the Senate is always reluctant to impose cloture (limitation of debate) on an important and highly controversial measure because it might set a precedent that would backfire against its proponents on some future occasion. He sidestepped a question as to whether he and Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, majority leader, have enough votes to impose cloture if the chips were down. A two-thirds majority of those present and voting is required to adopt such a measure.

For the moment, he seemed to place his confidence in the around-the-clock sessions ordered by Sen. Johnson to begin tomorrow. Continuance of such sessions for as much as a week, he felt, would so arouse public opinion as to force the Senate to act. He made it plain that the Senate leadership intends to exhaust every other avenue before moving toward cloture.

Sen. Dirksen was inclined to deprecate the claim of Southern senators that twenty-four-hour sessions would have serious physical effects on the older members. He called this argument "not crucial."

"There are only twenty-six Senators older than the minority leader," said the sixty-four-year-old minority leader, "and some of those are not very much older."

Asked whether he is prepared to sleep on one of the army cots being installed on the Senate side of the Capitol, he replied:

"Why sure."

The title of his address last night in The Cooper Union's Great Hall was "The Man from Illinois." He told an audience of 1,500 that Lincoln's statements from the same platform should be remembered as Congress "wrestles with the great issue of civil rights, civil liberty and the equal protection of the laws."

Message From President

Irving S. Olds, chairman of Cooper Union's board of trustees, introduced Sen. Dirksen. He also read a message from President Eisenhower, which said in part:

"Human slavery no longer exists in our land but Lincoln's courage and his painstaking search for truth could be used on the problems of our time. Particularly, we might as well be guided by his clear and irrefutable logic. Some of the dangers he pointed out in 1860 continue to persist in 1960. There is still a woeful tendency to substitute "falseness and deception for truthful evidence and fair argument."

On the platform were the lectern Lincoln used and the chair in which he sat while waiting to be introduced by William Cullen Bryant, the poet, who was editor of "The New York Evening Post."

The program included the unveiling of a new life-size portrait of Lincoln as he looked on the day he delivered his speech. It was painted by John C. Johansen, of 15 Gramercy Park. On exhibit was a collection of contemporary paintings and editions of the Cooper Union speech which historians agree played a major part in winning for Lincoln the Republican nomination for the Presidency.
Lincoln's Podium

COOPER UNION celebrates today the centenary of an historic event which made its Great Hall one of the nation's shrines.

On Feb. 27, 1860, Abraham Lincoln—a man from the West—stood in the Great Hall and delivered the oration which led to his nomination by the young Republican Party, and his election to the Presidency.

Had that speech not been made, the Union might not have been preserved, and chattel slavery might have been prolonged on this continent.

The Great Hall remains intact. Also remaining, exactly as they were in Lincoln's day, are the chair in which he sat and the lectern from which he spoke.

Appearing tonight, in commemorative exercises on the same platform, will be another man from Illinois, Sen. Everett M. Dirksen, a worthy choice.