

# Supplementary Notes on Reconstruction

The Radicals in Congress were able to win control of that body in the Congressional election of November 1866 and thereafter until 1872 remained in the majority able to do almost as they pleased. Their position was aided with the election of General Grant in 1868. By then, Presidential Reconstruction had been set aside and in a series of laws the South was placed under military rule with the intention of creating a strong Republican party in that area and readmission of the Southern states by the presidential election of 1868. Grant's victory over the Democratic candidate, Seymour was based greatly upon the votes of newly freed Negroes in the South.

Grant was not qualified for the office. Like many professional soldiers, he had no political experience and knew little of public affairs. Worse still, he was a poor judge of men, yet he clung loyally to those he appointed. He greatly admired the rich and the fashionable, so that he tended to be subservient to the greater business interests. Grant's policies alienated many people. His continued support of Radical Reconstruction helped lay the basis for the building of a strong Democratic party in the South, soon to become the "Solid South" and in the North, disgusted many Republicans who felt the program had gone too far. He also disappointed reform elements in his party by giving only lukewarm support to demands of Civil Service reform; and the excessively high tariff, lowered in 1872, was restored after the election. Many Republicans turned against the administration. Serious public scandals emerged during his second term--six major ones concerning money, and all affecting men close to the president and the administration. They tended to discredit Grant by demonstrating his inability to distinguish between good men and bad. Such scandals reflected upon the Republican Party and particularly upon the Radicals within that party. Radical and congressional influence declined. Democrats won control of the House and gained some seats in the Senate in the Congressional election of 1874.

Financial panic hit the United States in September 1873, when Jay Gould & Company bankers, failed and the New York stock exchange closed. Many bankruptcies followed, banks and factories closed, ending a boom, which had begun with the war. There were two chief causes of the panic: 1) Financial overconfidence--to much building, lending, and spending [i.e. railroads had built lines far in advance of immediate needs]; 2) Insurance companies had been hit by the great Chicago fire of 1871 and by the Boston fire of 1872. Furthermore, the Franco-Prussian War slowed greatly the inflow of European capital prompting a sudden loss of confidence.

By this time many economic inequalities had arisen. Hordes of destitute slum dwellers were present in American cities. Many of these were recent immigrants with no knowledge of American traditions. Confused, poorly paid and poorly housed, they easily drifted into vice and crime. As voters corrupt political rings exploited them. Private morals were distressingly low and public morals also left much to be desired. Businessmen and industrialist lived by the law of the jungle. The industrial boom had hit the United States so suddenly there were as yet no laws to protect the honest or punish the wicked. So they pursued monopoly without regard

for their competitors or for the public interest. Corrupt political machines had arisen out of the spoils system. Successful politicians rewarded their supporters with public jobs, sold their influence to business interests, and sometimes looted public funds (the Tweed Ring in New York was the most famous). Such machines were at their worst in the large cities but some states were almost as bad. Even the federal government, as the scandals of the Grant administration indicated, was tainted.

The power of the Radical Republicans declined rapidly and a serious breach occurred in 1872 between Liberal and Old Guard Republican. People tired of the Reconstruction issue, tired of graft and corruption, and resented the Panic of 1873. Democrats had gained control of the House and many Senate seats in 1874. Both parties aimed for victory in the election of 1876. The Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio and the Democrats Samuel J. Tilden of New York. When the returns became known, it was found that the electoral vote was in dispute. The three remaining states under carpetbag rule (Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana) had turned in two sets of such votes, and one electoral vote in Oregon was in dispute, Tilden needed one vote to win while Hayes needed them all. An Electoral Commission, set up by Congress, gave the election to Hayes late in February. The Democrats acquiesced for reasons of their own.