

Wade-Davis Bill

The Wade-Davis Bill of 1864 was a program proposed for the Reconstruction of the South written by two Radical Republicans, Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Representative Henry Winter Davis of Maryland. In contrast to President Abraham Lincoln's more lenient Ten Percent Plan, the bill made re-admittance to the Union for former Confederate states contingent on a majority in each Southern state to take the Ironclad oath to the effect they had never in the past supported the Confederacy. The bill passed both houses of Congress on July 2, 1864, but was pocket vetoed by Lincoln and never took effect. The Radical Republicans were outraged that Lincoln did not sign the bill. Lincoln wanted to mend the Union by carrying out the Ten Percent Plan. He believed it would be too difficult to repair all of the ties within the union if the bill was passed.

Background

The Wade-Davis Bill emerged from a plan introduced in the Senate by Ira Harris of New York in February, 1863. It proposed to base the Reconstruction of the South on the government's power to guarantee a republican form of government. The Wade-Davis Bill was also important for national and congressional power. Although federally imposed conditions of reconstruction retrospectively seem logical, there was a widespread belief that southern Unionism would return the seceded states to the Union after the South's military power was broken. This belief was not fully abandoned until later in 1863. The provisions, critics complained, were virtually impossible to meet, thus making it likely there would be permanent national control over the southern states.

Lincoln's veto

One of Lincoln's objections was that the idea that the Southern states needed to "re-join" the Union permeated the whole bill. The philosophy of the war from Lincoln's point of view was that the Southern states were not constitutionally allowed to secede in the first place and therefore were still part of the Union, even though their return to a full participation in the Union would require the fulfillment of some conditions. But he didn't think the war was being waged against "treasonous" States as such (since the refusal of the Union to recognize their right to secede made the ordinances of secession null) but merely to "compel the obedience of rebellious individuals". The problem was that the language of the bill was at times undermining the Northern rationale for the war by plainly asserting for instance that the Southern states were not part of the Union anymore.

The Wade-Davis Reconstruction Bill passed the House by a vote of 73 to 49. The measure set Congress's agenda for postwar Reconstruction of the South and portended conflict with the President over that process. Named for its sponsors, Representative Henry Winter Davis of Maryland—a Baltimore Congressman and a leader among the radical Republicans in the House—and Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio, the bill firmly asserted congressional control over the rehabilitation of the defeated Confederate states. It formally abolished slavery and prohibited Confederate officials and veterans from voting. The most controversial provision required that a majority of the voters in each state swear their allegiance to the United States before re-admittance into the Union. Representative Davis declared that until Congress recognized "a state government organized under its auspices, there is no government in the rebel states except the authority of Congress." President Abraham Lincoln's plan was far more lenient, requiring only 10 percent of the voting population to take a loyalty oath. Lincoln pocket vetoed the Wade-Davis measure. Radical Republicans countered with the "Wade-

Davis Manifesto,” denouncing President Lincoln for thwarting congressional powers; later, they resurrected portions on the un-enacted bill as a blue print for Reconstruction.

Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction (10% Plan)

Lincoln issued this proclamation with hopes of expediting Reconstruction. By this time during the war, a vast portion of Confederate states were under Federal control and needed reorganization of their governments. His plan proposed that if ten percent of a state's voter population swore allegiance to the future alliance of the United States as well as approving Emancipation, then Reconstruction would begin in that state. With respect to amnesty, Lincoln declared that all opposition to the Union--with the exception of those in rank above Colonel in the Army or Lieutenant in the Navy, as well as traitors to the Union--would be pardoned, their property except for slaves given back, and their rights as citizens restored if they claimed allegiance to the Union. Although his plan was a step in the right direction as far as Reconstruction was concerned, the Radical Republicans who held an influential role in Congress wanted a harsher process for ex-Confederates as well as black civil rights before Reconstruction was to begin in a state. Regardless, Lincoln made sure to emphasize that his plan was by no means a permanent policy, but rather a formula to quicken the start of Reconstruction.

President Lincoln seemed to favor self-Reconstruction by the states with little assistance from Washington. To appeal to poorer whites, he offered to pardon all Confederates; to appeal to former plantation owners and southern aristocrats, he pledged to protect private property. Unlike Radical Republicans in Congress, Lincoln did not want to punish southerners or reorganize southern society. His actions indicate that he wanted Reconstruction to be a short process in which secessionist states could draft new constitutions as swiftly as possible so that the United States could exist as it had before. But historians can only speculate that Lincoln desired a swift reunification, for his assassination in 1865 cut his plans for Reconstruction short.

Andrew Johnson Reconstruction Plan

The looming showdown between Lincoln and the Congress over competing reconstruction plans never occurred. The president was assassinated on April 14, 1865. His successor, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, lacked his predecessor's skills in handling people; those skills would be badly missed. Johnson's plan envisioned the following:

- Pardons would be granted to those taking a loyalty oath
- No pardons would be available to high Confederate officials and persons owning property valued in excess of \$20,000
- A state needed to abolish slavery before being readmitted
- A state was required to repeal its secession ordinance before being readmitted.

Most of the seceded states began compliance with the president's program. Congress was not in session, so there was no immediate objection from that quarter. However, Congress reconvened in December and refused to seat the Southern representatives.

Reconstruction had produced another deadlock between the president and Congress.