

The Election of 1876 in the United States

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The Contested Presidential Election of 1876

The 1876 presidential election remained a tense issue even after the war. The political parties competed fiercely and paralyzed the nation politically, just like the Civil War had paralyzed the military. The disputed presidential election was held between Samuel J. Tilden of New York (Democrat) and Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio (Republican). Tilden got 184 Electoral College votes, which was one short of the votes needed for him to win the election (Rehnquist, 2004; Robinson, 2001). Hayes, on the other hand, had 165 electoral college votes, and there were 20 disputed votes from Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. One vote from Oregon was also disputed because one of the electors was not legally declared. The 20 electoral votes were required by Hayes to win the election, and Tilden needed just one vote to win the elections. It appeared as if Tilden, with 4.2 million to 4 million popular votes from Hayes, would win the election. Furthermore, according to historian James F. Rhodes in "History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850," Tilden's election was based on a true understanding of popular will.

Electoral Commission and the End of Reconstruction

The disputed votes led to the formation of an electoral commission composed of 15 members of Congress and justices of the Supreme Court. The votes by the commission followed their party lines and the 8 to 7 votes gave the Republicans all the disputed 20 votes, increasing the electoral votes to 185 against 184 from the Democrats. The results marked the beginning of the end of the Reconstruction Period (Foley et al., 2016). Disputed elections gave rise to the Compromise of 1877 when the Southern Democrats were promised the withdrawal of the military from the South and the right to govern themselves if they allowed the Hayes to ascend to power. The deal included that Hayes would be granted the presidency, the democrats would be given the right to control the region, and the military would be withdrawn from the South.

Campaign Strategies and Political Division

The campaigns for the disputed elections of 1876 were done on the basis of attacking each other because of the high inflation at the time and corruption in the president's office. Both parties had nominated some of the credible candidates who were not attacked personally because of the clean records they were maintaining. The Republican candidates campaigned for peace on the appeal of

being the party of Lincoln. Democrats in their campaign, however, asked people to vote against the ills and corruption of the Republicans. However, the election result in 1876 disputed, one because Tilden had gained a majority of the popular votes, which indicated an end to the Republican Party (Rehnquist, 2004). Second, it was disputed because Tilden needed only one electoral vote to become president. The results of the election of 1876 divided the nation and party lines into the period immediately after the Civil War when President Andrew Johnson had been impeached for violating the laws of the office.

The Compromise and Republican Victory

After declaring that the 20 electoral votes were disputed, the Republicans struck a deal with the Southern Democrats. Moreover, the press and Tilden, as well as his supporters, questioned the Supreme Court's involvement. The Democrats had control of the House and the Republicans had a majority in the Senate, which deepened the issue. The election was decided by the Electoral Commission that was formed as a compromise. Both parties tried to have the trust of the voters, resulting in division along party lines. The winner took the presidency, but the opposition made sure they won benefits in exchange. Hayes won because Tilden did not protest the decision, and Southern Democrats decided to use the moment for their benefit. Despite anger from some Democrats, Tilden called for the acceptance of Hayes as president to avoid further conflict.

Public Fatigue and Shifting Political Power

Most of the people were tired of the Republican presidents as there was inflation, and corruption had led to the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson earlier. Therefore, there was more inclination toward Tilden, who was a Democrat. Tilden had a majority of the popular votes with the required number of electoral votes and had the support of his party. Because of the distrust and lack of transparency in the electoral process, there was a more likely chance that Tilden would win (Foley et al., 2016). However, he did not protest the commission's result because he considered that peace was essential. The voters questioned both parties, but they accepted the results.

Fraud Allegations and Hayes's Presidency

There were also accounts of fraudulent elections in which Republicans tried to buy votes from Southern states, which showed that the Republicans feared losing the election. They had attacked the Democrats for unfair campaigning. The chance of Hayes winning the election was slim, but Republicans won the election as the Supreme Court gave Hayes the 20 votes in exchange for the peace and the withdrawal of the federal military from the South. Hayes became president but took office amid distrust as newspapers and people suspected the process.

Economic Conditions Civil Rights and Reconstruction's End

The economy also helped the Democrats because Republicans had been in office during inflation and depression. The civil-rights conditions also affected the election. Reconstruction governments were losing support, and violence and intimidation prevented many African Americans from voting freely in Southern states. The compromise that resolved the election led to the withdrawal of federal troops and weakened federal protection of Black citizens. Therefore, the 1876 election not only selected a president but also transformed the political and racial order of the postwar United States.

References

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