

Primary Source: Republican Rule ^[1]

After voters ratified the state's new constitution in April 1868, William W. Holden was again elected governor. Republicans also won majorities in both houses of the General Assembly. The new constitution had enfranchised (given the vote to) African Americans, who nearly all voted Republican — the Republicans were, after all, the party that had liberated them from slavery — and the presence of the U.S. Army enforced black suffrage. The opposition — now calling itself the Conservative Party because it wanted a return to the Old South, but without slavery — immediately began working to undermine Republican rule.

The Republican majority tried to make government more active in the lives of citizens, extending the ideas of antebellum Whigs. They built railroads and turnpike roads, rebuilt public schools (separate schools for each race) and a state prison, and passed laws giving relief to debtors. To pay for this they spent nearly \$18 million, an amount of money far beyond anything spent by the state before the war. All that spending, of course, meant heavy taxes, which Conservatives resented. (Yes, the Republicans were the "tax and spend" party in 1868.)

The state also took on debt, lending money to men who promised to build railroads. Not surprisingly, some of these men were friends of Republican leaders, and some of the railroads were never built. Some of this borrowing was also unconstitutional, and Conservatives pounced on this evidence of Republican corruption. Conservatives succeeded in painting Republican rule as a period of wild spending, fraud, and corruption, and in 1870, they regained control of the state legislature.

The Legislature has adjourned and its labors are before the people. The captions of the laws show how onerous ^[2] were the duties of that body, and how well they were performed.

In the front rank of its good works was the passage of a liberal homestead law, which will hereafter be a lasting monument to its fame, and a tower of strength to the people.

The amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure are numerous and dictated by experience.

The school law is not in all respects perfect, but it is the commencement of a republican system of free education which will send the light of knowledge streaming through the minds of all the children of the old North State.

Besides the leading acts, numerous railroad charters were granted, which, by a judicious ^[3] system in the collection of revenue, will open the remotest parts of our grand commonwealth to the intercourse and markets of the world.

The revenue law is as good as could be devised. Owing to the numerous restrictions of the Constitution, imposed for the benefit of the people, it was difficult to frame a new system of taxation which would answer in all particulars to the preconceived opinions of men; but we believe that as the law now stands, sufficient revenue will be raised to defray both the ordinary and extraordinary expenses of the Public Treasury.

The public charities of the State were remodeled on the liberal basis provided for in the Constitution, and sufficient means appropriated to support them for the ensuing fiscal year. In the same manner the University has been placed upon a stable foundation.

The commercial ^[4] interests of the State were not neglected, while the numerous acts of incorporation for cities and associations show a reviving spirit in all ranks of society.

A general law was passed conferring the requisite corporate powers upon townships, and these corporations will soon be called upon to organize and govern themselves.

Relief was granted numerous officials and persons whom the calamities ^[5] of the past had reduced to the necessity of applying to the Legislature for aid.

Altogether, we think the General Assembly did well. Day by day its good works, which live after it, will become more apparent and more appreciated. Its revilers will be hushed by the hum of wheels that its laws have called into motion, and the entire people will yet applaud its liberality and independence. In our opinion the Legislature needs no elaborate defence. A fair statement of what it has done is sufficient for the present while the future will entirely vindicate ^[6] the annual session of 1868-'9.

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