1865 ★ 1890

The Gilded Age Committee

Following the creation of separate committees on appropriations and banking in 1865, the jurisdiction of the Committee of Ways and Means was primarily the area of revenue. In the postwar period, the committee was affected by the forces of modernization and professionalization. Chairmen tended to be appointed on the basis of experience and expertise. The committee began to hold hearings on a routine basis, often conducted by subcommittees, to obtain information on tax and tariff measures. It even conducted two important investigations into allegations of Gilded Age government corruption. Membership grew from nine to 13 to accommodate an increased workload as the committee was inundated with demands from lobbyists as well as private citizens. The committee's importance in the majority leadership was strengthened in 1885 when the chairman was appointed one of the three majority members of the Rules Committee.

"There are two places of interment in this House in which all legislation looking to reform in our revenue and customs duties is buried. One is the gorgeous mausoleum of the Ways and Means Committee. . . ." (Representative James A. McKenzie, 1880)[1]

The image of the United States in the postwar period has been taken from the title of an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age,* in which the authors satirized the nation as a land of corruption and materialism. Accurate or not, the label has stuck. The period has become one characterized by dishonest lobbyists, weak or corrupt Presidents, and a Congress dominated by crass politicians for sale to the highest bidder. Congressman James McKenzie's 1880 criticism that the Committee on Ways and Means was a legislative mausoleum for revenue reform reflected this prevailing pessimism.

The idealism of the Civil War as a crusade to save the Union and to free the slaves was also a casualty of the conflict. Postwar America sought escape from that horrendous bloodbath through tangible material progress. Although politicians waved the "bloody shirt," and popular culture produced other examples of "patriotic gore" in the form of novels, poetry, and songs, most Americans sought to forget the painful memories of the harsher realities of war. Lincoln's plea that the dead shall not have died in vain was answered with bigger factories and more railroads. The cynicism of Twain, Warner, and McKenzie about business and politics was a result of the changed cultural atmosphere. Society and government were not as corrupt as

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those critics thought, but both were convinced that Americans saw economic success as both a personal and a social panacea.

Congress in the Gilded Age

Historian Henry Adams, a contemporary observer, once described congressional government in the Gilded Age as "poor in purpose and barren in results." In fact, Adams noted, "one might search the whole list of Congress, Judiciary, and Executive during the twenty-five years 1870–1895 and find little but damaged reputations." [2] Adams' cynicism about Congress was shared by scholars, journalists, and even by some representatives themselves. During these years the House chamber, nicknamed the "Bear Garden" because of its raucous and contentious atmosphere, was plagued by periodic political scandals, bogged down by outdated legislative procedures, and hampered in its effectiveness by the obstructionist tactics of minority members from both parties. By the late 1870s the popular image of the legislature as a corrupt and inefficient institution had become so widespread that humorist Mark Twain was prompted to remark: "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly American criminal class except Congress." [3]

In spite of such a negative public image, the period was not without its accomplishments. The organizational experience gained through the mobilization of the Union Army carried over to the professionalization of government service. All aspects of American life, from industrial combinations to labor unions, participated in the organizational revolution of the postwar period. Change was accompanied by the usual abuses, and some areas lagged behind, including congressional procedure, which necessitated reforms in the 1880s and '90s. Traditionally, for example, government employees had obtained their positions through the patronage of members of Congress or the President. A number of public scandals, most notably the corruption of many Grant Administration officials, aroused a movement to reform the Civil Service. During the Hayes and Arthur Administrations (1877–1885), the liberal wing of the Republican Party led the reform effort that culminated in the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883, which established competitive entrance examinations for prospective government employees. By the turn of the century the act had been amended several times to improve its enforcement provisions. Congress also recognized the need to regulate certain industrial practices with the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. This statute, enacted during the Democratic Cleveland Administration, created a five-member commission whose primary function was to regulate railroad rates. Congress also approved the appointment of several presidential commissions to evaluate the nation's tax structure. The

PARTY RATIOS IN THE COMMITTEE AND THE HOUSE
1865–1890

CONGRESS	COMMITTEE	HOUSE	PRESIDENT
Thirty-ninth (1865–1867)	7 R–2 D	149 R–42 D	Johnson (R)
Fortieth (1867–1869)	7 R–2 D	143 R–49 D	
Forty-first (1869–1871)	7 R–2 D	149 R–63 D	Grant (R)
Forty-second (1871–1873)	6 R–3 D	134 R–104 D [5]	
Forty-third (1873–1875)	8 R–3 D	194 R–92 D [14]	
Forty-fourth (1875–1877)	7 D–4 R	169 D–109 R [14]	
Forty-fifth (1877–1879)	7 D–4 R	153 D–140 R	Hayes (R)
Forty-sixth (1879–1881)	8 D–5 R	149 D–130 R [14]	
Forty-seventh (1881–1883)	8 R–4 D [1]	147 R–135 D [11]	Garfield (R) Arthur (R)
Forty-eighth (1883–1885)	8 D–5 R	197 D–118 R [10]	Arthur
Forty-ninth (1885–1887)	8 D–5 R	183 D–140 R [2]	Cleveland (D)
Fiftieth (1887–1889)	8 D–5 R	169 D–152 R [4]	

R—Republican D—Democrat

[Numbers in brackets refer to independents or members of third parties.]

most significant was the Tariff Commission of 1882, which held hearings throughout the country and presented a comprehensive report to President Arthur. Several of the commission's recommendations were subsequently incorporated in the Mongrel Tariff of 1883.[4]

The forces of modernization and professionalization also affected the structural evolution of Congress in the quarter-century following the Civil War. Four developments reflected the first halting steps toward the modern Congress: 1) the rudimentary beginnings of a seniority system, 2) the increasingly routine use of legislative hearings to gather information, 3) the institution of subcommittees to allow for greater specialization, and 4) the professionalization of lobbying as an

adjunct to congressional procedure. None of these characteristics emerged fully developed in this period, but their appearance suggested that more was at work in the Gilded Age Congress than greed and corruption.

The seniority system had developed in the Senate before the 1870s. This system allowed members to remain on a committee as long as they wished, and gave committee chairs to the member with the longest consecutive service. While the House lagged behind the Senate, by the last two decades of the century, seniority accounted for nearly two-thirds of all committee chair appointments. Moreover, there was a slight but decided movement toward longer tenure of congressional service. There had been a high turnover rate in congressional membership during the antebellum era. After the war, length of service increased, suggesting a growing orientation among members toward a career in congressional service. Members who entered the House in the 1850s and 1860s, for example, averaged only two terms of service, while those who entered in the 1870s averaged three, and those in the 1880s averaged four.

This tendency toward professionalization was counterbalanced by institutional growing pains in both chambers. Federal jurisdiction had expanded into unprecedented areas during the Civil War, creating new administrative complexities. The House of Representatives also grew in size from 212 to 325 members between 1870 and 1890. Many of the existing House rules and procedures, originally devised for a smaller legislative body, had not yet undergone extensive revision. Consequently, for much of this 25-year period, effective management of legislation and floor debate were beset by difficulties stemming from outmoded rules.[5]

Both the House and the Senate made tentative efforts to modernize internal operations. Committees began to conduct legislative hearings on a regular basis. This practice was based upon the authority of both Houses to call for persons or papers to assist in their deliberations. In the 18th century the House's investigative function was largely confined to the consideration of disputed elections and breaches of conduct by public officials, but it also included legislative oversight, a concept formalized through the annual budgetary review process. The House originally conducted most of its hearings in the Committee of the Whole House, but gradually delegated this task to standing committees. In the decades immediately following the Civil War, most House hearings concerned ethics violations. As the period progressed, standing committees routinely held hearings on individual bills and employed methods of gathering testimony and presenting information similar to those utilized by presidential commissions.[6]

Although the growing significance of congressional hearings is well documented, the role of subcommittees is more conjectural. During the Civil War, for example, the Committee of Ways and Means

Lobbyists in an 1860 magazine illustration swarm outside a congressional committee room. The business of influencing government officials by representatives of special interest groups reached professional status during the Gilded Age. At times, the technical information that lobbyists supplied to Congress actually enhanced the efficiency of government during this era. Entrusted with power over revenue matters, Ways and Means was a prime target for lobbying.

had used jurisdictional subcommittees—those with regard to the broad areas of revenue, appropriations, and banking and currency—but the division of the committee in 1865 removed the need for such bodies. In the 1870s and '80s there are references to select subcommittees for purposes such as hearings on specific topics. It could be argued that the division of the committee in 1865 along the lines of its three subcommittees reflected the same concern for specialization that prompted the creation of subcommittees. This was especially true in the area of finance. Not only did the House divide financial jurisdiction among the Committee of Ways and Means, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Committee on Banking and Currency, but the Senate also created a separate Committee on Appropriations in 1867. In the 1880s, the House further subdivided the appropriations function among several standing committees, to the point that by 1900 the control that once had been exercised by the House Committee of

Ways and Means and the Senate Committee on Finance had been distributed among nearly 20 committees.[7]

Democracy passes through dangerous waters in an 1880s cartoon that portrays Ways and Means Chairman William R. Morrison of Illinois and Appropriations Chairman Samuel J. Randall of Pennsylvania tugging the helmsman of the ship of state in opposite directions. Morrison advocated tariff reform, steering the nation away from the shoals of a protectionist tariff (Scylla). Randall steered a course toward protectionism and away from the whirlpool of free trade (Charybdis). Monopoly poses another peril ahead, while civil service reform lies adrift. Throughout the period, issues of revenue and tariff were prime concerns of Ways and Means.

Lobbying

As congressional hearings became more commonplace and committee functions ever more specialized, the activities of lobbyists, the so-called "Third House" of Congress, underwent a significant change. Representatives of special interests had sought to influence legislation from the earliest days of the republic, but these efforts accelerated as the government grew in size and scope. In the postwar era, lobbyists descended upon the Capitol in ever increasing numbers at the beginning of each session. The story of Gilded Age congressional politics is punctuated by the sometimes scandalous methods, including bribery and sexual favors, that some lobbyists employed to inform, persuade, influence, or even buy support.

The contemporary public image of lobbying was synonymous with corruption and greed. One popular novelist depicted lobbyists as unsavory influence peddlers: "Men of unwholesome skins, greasy garments, brutish manners, filthy minds, and sickening conversation . . . decayed statesmen, who were now, indeed, nothing but unfragrant corpses."[8] Another contemporary observer argued that lobbying was "legitimate and honorable." This journalist emphasized that most of the agents seeking to influence Congress "would not think of trying to buy votes."[9] In spite of this negative image, lobbying was a necessary, legitimate, and at times beneficial function. There were occasional instances of bribery and corruption, but lobbyists performed a needed informational role by serving as a means of communication between private interest groups and Congress. Governmental efficiency was actually enhanced by the developing technical expertise and statistical information supplied by the more circumspect lobbyists.[10]

The most notorious lobbying scandals occurred during the Grant Administration (1869–77). The worst scandal was the Crédit Mobilier (1872), in which 18 members of Congress, including Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax and Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means Henry L. Dawes, were alleged to have accepted gifts of stock to influence contracts for the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. (Dawes and several of the others were absolved.) Another scandal involved allegations that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had engaged in bribery to obtain a federal subsidy. The Committee of Ways and Means investigated the case in 1875, and as a result, Ellis H. Roberts (R-NY) reported the committee's bill to create the first system ever to regulate lobbying. The committee's plan required all "agents and attorneys prosecuting claims or demands before Congress and the Executive Departments" to register with the clerks of the House

and the Senate, as well as the clerks of the committees with which they dealt. Moreover, the bill required lobbyists—although that term was conspicuously avoided—to disclose their expenditures. The Roberts bill was adopted by the House, 113 to 31, on the last day of the Forty-third Congress, but the Senate had no time to act upon it. The House adopted a resolution the following year to require agents and attorneys to register, but it applied only to the House; it was limited to the duration of the Forty-fourth Congress; and it did not require financial disclosure. Congress did not adopt a system of registration as sweeping as that recommended by the Committee of Ways and Means until 1946.[11]

The Speaker and Committee Chairmen

In addition to the origins of seniority, the development of legislative hearings, and the growing sophistication of lobbying, the postwar decades also witnessed a consolidation of the Speaker's powers and the

CHAIRMEN OF THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
1865–1890

Justin S. Morrill (R-VT)	Thirty-ninth Congress, 1865–1867
Robert C. Schenck (R-OH)	Fortieth—Forty-first Congresses, 1867–1871
Samuel D. Hooper (R-MA)[1]	Forty-first Congress, 1871
Henry L. Dawes (R-MA)	Forty-second—Forty-third Congresses, 1871–1875
William R. Morrison (D-IL)	Forty-fourth Congress, 1875–1877
Fernando Wood (D-NY)	Forty-fifth—Forty-sixth Congresses, 1877–1881
John R. Tucker (D-VA)[2]	Forty-sixth Congress, 1881
William D. Kelley (R-PA)	Forty-seventh Congress, 1881–1883
William R. Morrison (D-IL)	Forty-eighth—Forty-ninth Congresses, 1883–1887
Roger Q. Mills (D-TX)	Fiftieth Congress, 1887–1889

[1] Schenck resigned on January 5, 1871, to accept a diplomatic appointment to Great Britain. Hooper, the ranking majority member, served the remainder of the term.
[2] Wood died in office on February 13, 1881. Tucker served as chairman until the end of the session on March 3.

increasing importance of committee chairmen. These latter two developments worked at cross purposes. The increased number of committees and the power of their chairmen seemingly decentralized congressional procedure, which was counteracted by the control exercised by the Speaker.

The consolidation of party leadership in the speakership somewhat overcame the inertia and decentralization attendant to the committee structure. Candidates for the speakership were selected by the party caucuses; the Speaker was subsequently elected by ballot in the House chamber. Through his continued power of appointment, the Speaker was able to appoint members who were sympathetic to his policies to important committees, and thereby influence the content of legislation.

Most of the Speakers in this period were competent leaders. Schuyler Colfax (R-IN, 1865–71), James G. Blaine (R-ME, 1871–75), Samuel J. Randall (D-PA, 1877–81), John G. Carlisle (D-KY, 1883–89), and Thomas Brackett Reed (R-ME, 1889–91) were all able parliamentarians and party leaders. Only Michael Crawford Kerr (D-IN, 1875–77) and J. Warren Keifer (R-OH, 1881–83) were disappoint-

ments. During the 1880s the efforts of Randall, Carlisle, and Reed to revise the House rules resulted in a strengthening of the majority's ability to control the flow of legislation and to command party loyalty in committee and on the House floor. These reforms were particularly aimed at the minority's delaying tactics, including the "disappearing quorum," a procedure to prevent floor action by refusing to answer quorum calls.

The influx of new members and territories as well as the presence of administrative details left over from the war prompted the creation of additional committees. Thirteen new standing committees were established and the jurisdiction of some of the existing ones were changed to meet new needs. This development streamlined House procedure to a certain extent, but it also had the effect of creating jurisdictional rivalries between committees.

Some contemporary observers, such as Woodrow Wilson in his pioneering study *Congressional Government* (1885), saw only decentralization resulting from the changes in the standing committee system. "Power," Wilson wrote, was "divided up, as it were, into forty-seven seignorities, in each of which a Standing Committee is the court-baron and its chairman lord-proprietor. These petty barons . . . exercise an almost despotic sway within their own shires." Wilson concluded that chairmen were prevented from cooperating by their mutual jealousies.[12]

House committees were not at their productive peak in this period. Compared to the Civil War and the early years of Reconstruction, when standing committees had operated effectively and produced much substantive legislation, committees during the 1870s and early '80s were hindered by territorial chairmen, obstructionist minority tactics, and outmoded procedures. Committee chairmen had the ability to pigeonhole legislation they opposed or to expedite measures they favored. In addition, because the rules made them floor managers of their bills, chairmen controlled the House debate on all legislation emanating from their committees. Thus the "little legislatures" acquired a reputation as "legislative cemeteries" where chairmen accumulated personal power to the detriment of the parent body.

For legislative cemeteries, standing committees were appropriately housed in mausoleum-like rooms in the Capitol. New House and Senate wings had been constructed in the late 1850s and completed during the war. Key committees were given conveniently situated rooms near their respective chambers. Although the Senate rooms were more gaudily and lavishly ornamented by European artisans, including Italian-American artist Constantino Brumidi, the House committee rooms were also appointed in the grand style. The Committee of Ways and Means, for example, met in two rooms that are today the Speaker's office (H-209 and H-210). Located just outside the House chamber on the East Front of the second (principal) story of the Cap-

itol, the committee's rooms had originally been intended for the House Post Office and the Sergeant at Arms. The committee occupied H-210 in 1867 and H-209 from 1870 to 1908. From 1901 to 1908 the committee had both rooms. These rooms were constructed as fireproof masonry vaults with fireproof cast iron trim and encaustic tile floors. Rococo-style marble mantels and intricately painted ceilings with shields, emblems, and other decorative designs adorned the room. Illuminated by gas lighting, these rooms understandably evoked funereal images. It was probably only coincidental that a former member, Thomas Brackett Reed, collapsed and later died in 1902 shortly after meeting with his old colleagues in the committee room.[13]

The secluded location of these club-like sanctuaries protected members from the chaotic commotion of the House chamber and halls crowded with lobbyists, journalists, office seekers, and curious constituents. Since the House did not construct a separate office building until the early 1900s, most congressmen conducted business at their desks in the House chamber or in committee rooms. As length of service increased, a spirit of camaraderie developed, at times bizarrely manifested. During the 1880s, for example, the death of a member occasioned a funeral party characterized by expensive meals and heavy drinking. A train was chartered to carry the deceased home, accompanied by a select delegation of his colleagues, liberally lubricated with champagne. Both the funerals and the funeral junkets were held at government expense. The bills for silk scarves and gloves for the pallbearers, caskets, and undertakers, as well as the trip and its refreshments, were scattered throughout the miscellaneous expenses of the House to conceal the total amount.[14]

These congressional funeral processions provided an apt metaphor for the Gilded Age. On the surface they might have appeared scandalous, just as so much of government and society seemed marked by corruption. But on a deeper level, the death of a colleague was to a congressman—like the deaths of so many thousands during the Civil War had been for the nation—a numbing reality from which a recourse to material pleasures was a welcome escape. If congressmen seemed obsessed with career, organization, and material gain, both individually and collectively, it should not have come as a surprise—so was almost everyone else.

Beneath the veneer of corruption and materialism, Congress was an institution in transition. Hearings, lobbying, rules changes, and the increasing specialization of membership and committees indicated an institutional response to changed circumstances. In addition, the Republican domination of the House ceased with the end of Reconstruction in the mid-seventies. An active two-party system characterized the remainder of the period, providing a further dimension to the history of Congress and its committees.

An elaborate advertisement sent to Ways and Means attests to the pride businessmen took in their products during the Gilded Age. In this period, big business flowered under the protection of high tariffs. Ways and Means received many letters, petitions, and ads from companies eager to praise the committee's Republican majority for its support of American industry.

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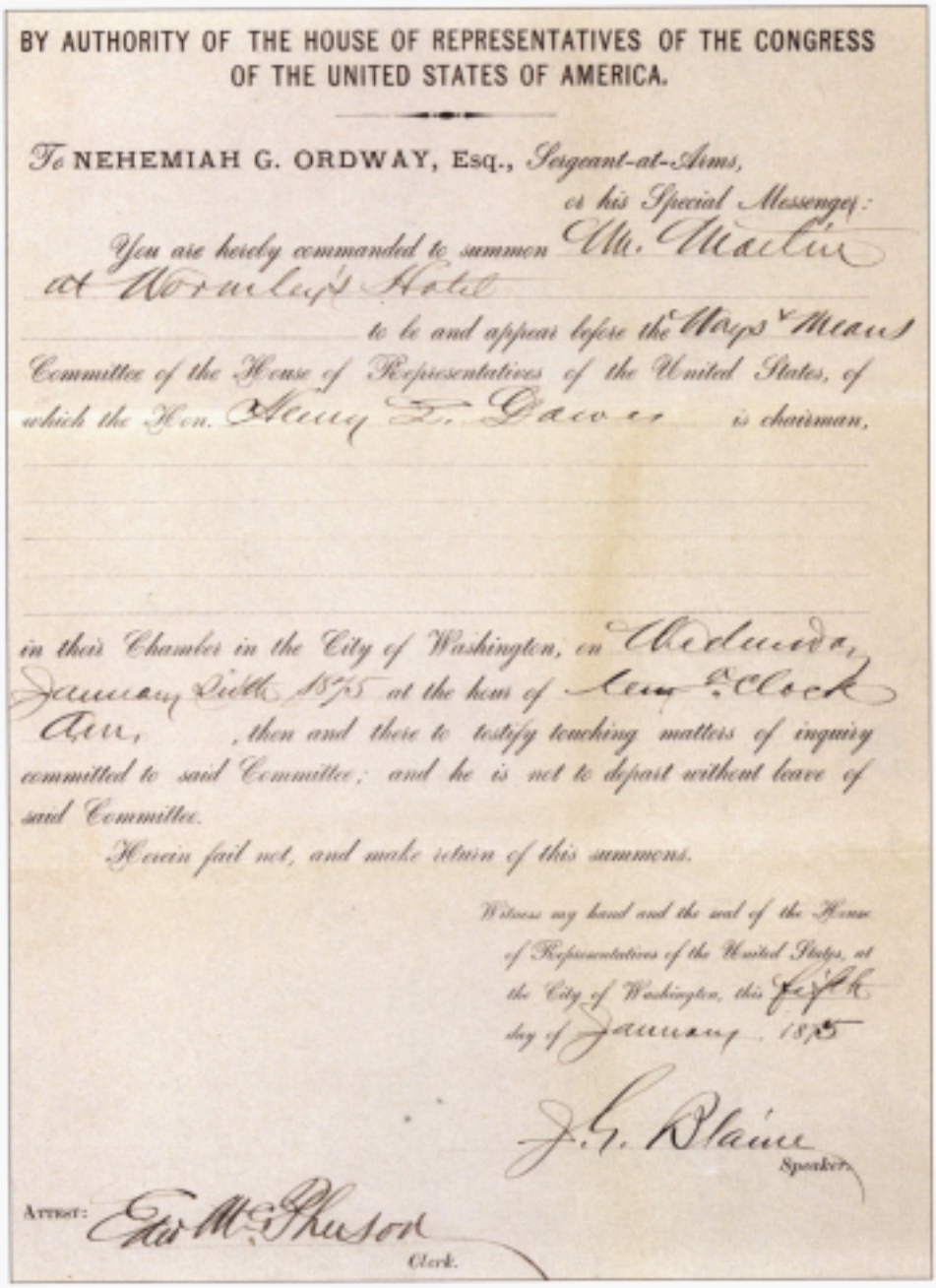


BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

To NEHEMIAH G. ORDWAY, Esq., Sergeant-at-Arms, or his Special Messenger:

You are hereby commanded to summon Mr. Martin at Worrall's Hotel to be and appear before the Ways & Means Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States, of which the Hon. Henry L. Dawes is chairman, in their Chamber in the City of Washington, on Wednesday, January 6th 1875 at the hour of Ten O'Clock A.M., then and there to testify touching matters of inquiry committed to said Committee; and he is not to depart without leave of said Committee.

Herein fail not, and make return of this summons.

Witness my hand and the seal of the House of Representatives of the United States, at the City of Washington, this Fifth day of January, 1875

J. G. Blaine
Speaker.

Attest: Geo. M. Pruson
Clerk.

A congressional summons signed by the Speaker and the Clerk of the House commands a businessman named Martin to appear before the Ways and Means Committee on January 6, 1875. During the Gilded Age, Ways and Means began to hold hearings on a routine basis. The committee listened to testimony from witnesses and traveled around the country to gather information on tax and tariff measures. Also during this period, Ways and Means conducted two hearings to examine the conduct of government officials and employees. In the early 1870s, the committee rooted out malfeasance in the Treasury Department and inquired into alleged bribery of congressmen by lobbyists.

The Committee in the Gilded Age

The forces at work in the development of the House were also evident in the evolution of the Committee on Ways and Means in the Gilded Age. Although the committee's functions were reduced by the creation of separate committees with jurisdiction over appropriations and banking and currency, the original committee was now able to specialize in revenue matters. The size of the committee expanded as

the workload increased, and it regularly held hearings to obtain needed technical tax and tariff data. Chairmen, though not strictly appointed because of seniority, did tend to possess greater fiscal expertise than some of their antebellum counterparts. All of the chairmen in this period played a significant role in majority party leadership, some as floor leaders and others as members of the Rules Committee.

Although the committee surrendered some of its jurisdiction, it lost little prestige. In 1865, both the Committee of Ways and Means and the Committee on Appropriations, for example, were granted the privilege of reporting bills at any time for consideration by the Committee of the Whole House. The 1880 rules revision further granted precedence to revenue and appropriations measures over other bills. The chairman of the Committee on Appropriations tended to become floor leader of the House in the period from 1865 to 1896. The floor leader, or the majority leader, was not an official position, but rather a function usually performed by the committee chairman presenting the most pressing legislation, either in terms of quantity or importance. The Speaker, by virtue of his appointment of chairmen, thus also selected the floor leader.

Before the Civil War, the chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means had performed that function. But after the creation of the Committee on Appropriations, Thaddeus Stevens in effect took the majority leadership with him when he became chairman of the new committee. Subsequently, the majority leadership alternated between the two chairmen in this period. Chairmen of the Committee on Ways and Means who served as floor leader included William R. Morrison (1875 and 1883), Fernando Wood (1879), William D. Kelley (1881), and Roger Q. Mills (1887).[15]

In 1880, Speaker Samuel J. Randall appointed a standing Rules Committee consisting of five members (three majority, two minority). This committee had previously been a select body appointed at the beginning of each Congress to report changes in House rules and procedures. Speaker John G. Carlisle in 1885 appointed the chairmen of the Committee on Ways and Means and the Committee on Appropriations to serve with him as the majority members on the Rules Committee. This bolstered the status of the revenue committee chairman as a key majority party leader. By packing this committee, the Speaker and the two most powerful chairmen were able to control the flow of legislation on the floor, as well as influence the revenue and appropriations process.[16]

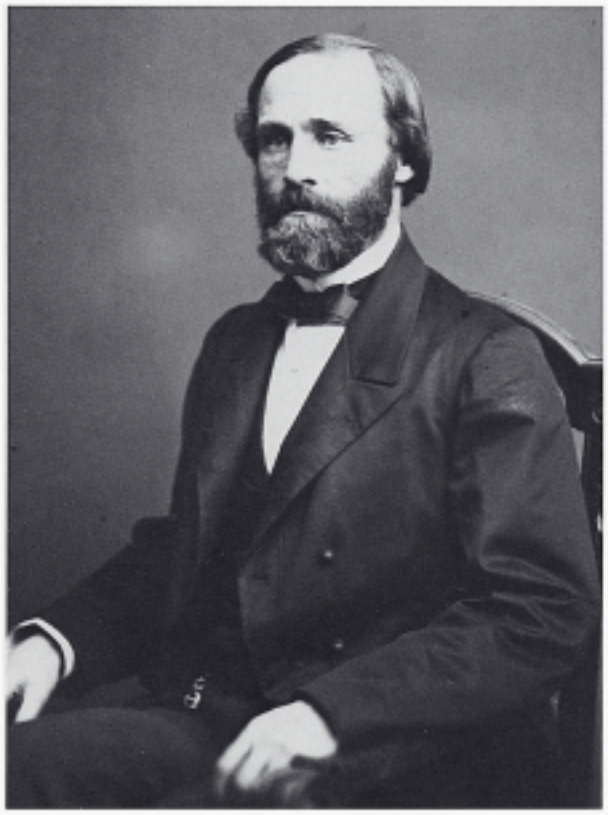
The composition of the Committee on Ways and Means also underwent several changes, not the least of which was the name of the committee itself. Before the 1870s, its title had always been the Committee of Ways and Means. In the '70s, "of" was often replaced with "on" in committee reports and documents. The rules revision of 1880 standardized the names of all standing committees by the use of "on."

Thus, for example, the Committee of Accounts became the Committee on Accounts, and likewise the Committee of Ways and Means became the Committee on Ways and Means.[17]

With its name standardized, the committee's membership was also altered to accommodate a growing workload and the increased membership of the House. Membership increased from the nine of the Civil War period to 11 in 1873 and to 13 in 1879. The Northern and Republican domination likewise evaporated. The Republican Party controlled the House and the committee for only half of the 12 Congresses from 1865 to 1889. The first Southern member since before the Civil War, Lionel A. Sheldon (R-LA), did not take his seat until 1873, but in the following Congress the new Democratic majority included three members from the states of the former Confederacy. The majority party continued to maintain comfortable majorities on the committee, no matter how slim their margin was in the House. The Republicans in 1881, for example, had an overall majority of only 12 seats in the House, but named eight of the 13 members to the Committee on Ways and Means.[18]

Committee appointments remained in the hands of the Speaker in the postwar period. In 1882, the House considered a proposal presented by Representative Godlove S. Orth (R-IN) to entrust a standing board of 11 members chosen by party caucuses with the nomina-

Prominent Republicans Robert C. Schenck of Ohio (far left), James A. Garfield, also from Ohio (left), and Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts (right) sat on Ways and Means after the Civil War and guided programs to strengthen the nation's war-ravaged financial structure. Nicknamed "Poker Bob" for his expertise at cards, Schenck served as chairman of Ways and Means from 1867 to 1871. Destined for the Presidency, Garfield enjoyed an 18-year career in Congress. He hungered to be Ways and Means chairman, but to his dismay the post repeatedly went to others. In 1871, the Speaker of the House bypassed Garfield and named Dawes chairman.



tion of all committee members. The proposal was defeated by a wide margin, but committee selection criteria shifted noticeably as experience and specialization in a particular field became more important. The chairmanship of the Committee of Ways and Means before the Civil War had been an honor customarily reserved for the runner-up in a speakership contest, or as a reward for a key supporter. Most of the ten chairmen who served between 1865 and 1890, on the other hand, were primarily known for their expertise in tax issues. William D. Kelley (R-PA), who chaired the committee from 1881 to 1883, was a good example of the rule of specialization and expertise. He served on the committee for an unprecedented 20-year period (1869–1889) as a strong advocate of protective tariffs, especially for the iron industry of his home state. Nicknamed "Pig-Iron" Kelley, he had a monomania about the tariff, a subject he had studied his entire life. "Mr. Kelley thinks tariff, talks tariff, and writes tariff every hour of the day;" one journalist noted, "a roommate of his tells me that he mumbles it over in his dreams during the night." [19] The appointment of Henry L. Dawes (R-MA) in 1871 was the exception that proved the rule. Dawes had not served on the committee, and he had no special claim to expertise. He wrote to Speaker Blaine: "I cannot believe that you will put me on the Committee of Ways and Means against my wishes. . . . I have earned the right to decline a service so against my

wishes—against my habits of thought, and so outside of all my experience in Congress that I shall surely fail." [20]

The future careers of several chairmen reinforced the expertise that they either had brought with them or that they had acquired as a result of their service. Two of the three chairmen of the Senate Finance Committee during this period, for example, were former chairmen of the House committee. John Sherman, who had headed the Committee of Ways and Means before the Civil War, chaired the Senate committee from 1864 to 1865 and from 1867 to 1877. Justin S. Morrill, the first postwar chairman of the House committee, chaired the Senate Finance Committee for all but two Congresses between 1877 and 1898.[21] This heightened emphasis on expertise as an important criterion for the chairmanship of the House's revenue committee further illustrated the general trend in the House toward professionalization of legislative service.

A post-Civil War cartoon depicts a haggard Uncle Sam as he carries the taxpayer's burden while congressmen, wined and dined by lobbyists, merrily grant tax breaks to manufacturers and pass such pork barrel appropriations as the river and harbors bill. As idealism turned to cynicism after the war, the public began to cry out against corruption in Congress. This cartoon captures that public mood; an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, The Gilded Age, *gave the era of excessive materialism its name.*

The committee did not escape the Gilded Age with its reputation untarnished. Two chairmen in particular were linked with corruption. Robert C. Schenck (R-OH, 1867–70) earned the nickname "Poker Bob" after he left the committee to accept a diplomatic assignment in Great Britain. His expertise in cards impressed an English duchess to whom he wrote a letter describing the game of poker. The letter was subsequently published, but far more embarrassing was the use of his name in the sale in Great Britain of stock in a Nevada silver mine. Although a congressional investigating committee uncovered no evidence of wrongdoing, it criticized such endorsements by diplomats. Schenck resigned and returned to Washington, where he published *Draw Poker* in 1880. Fernando Wood (D-NY), who chaired the committee from 1877 to 1881, was even described by a sympathetic biographer as "unquestionably" corrupt. Wood had begun his political career in New York City's notorious Tammany Hall Democratic machine. He was elected mayor three times, but broke with the Tweed Ring to found his own rival organization, Mozart Hall. Graft prevailed in city government in the 1850s and '60s, and Wood and his brother benefited from city contracts. One building he owned was leased to the city for offices, which remained empty but which were then rented on the open market. Wood may have been corrupt, but he was also competent. As a member and as chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, he consistently defended the interests of the New York merchants and financiers he represented.[22]

Until the formal establishment of the seniority system in the 20th century, there appears to have been no set system guiding the appointment of chairmen. As in the "non-system" of the Jacksonian period, in some instances a close political or personal relationship with the Speaker made a difference, but this factor did not necessarily secure success. Some able and powerful representatives were disappointed in their efforts to become chairman. Perhaps the most inter-

esting and revealing example in Gilded Age politics was that of James A. Garfield of Ohio.

Garfield began his long House tenure in the Thirty-eighth Congress (1863–65). After just two terms of service, Garfield evidently considered himself a choice candidate for the chairmanship of the Committee of Ways and Means, yet he declined to actively campaign for the position. Unfortunately, Garfield's hard money stance on currency issues and his lack of parliamentary expertise ultimately removed him from consideration. When committee appointments were handed out at the start of the Fortieth Congress, Speaker Colfax appointed Schenck to the post and put Garfield at the head of the

Military Affairs Committee. Garfield, who considered himself "greatly wronged" by Colfax's decision, nevertheless acquitted himself well as chairman.[23]

Garfield's next opportunity came during the Forty-first Congress (1869–71). After Colfax left the House to become Vice President under Grant, James G. Blaine of Maine assumed the speakership. Garfield now had every reason to expect that the chairmanship of the vaunted Committee of Ways and Means would be his. The Ohio congressman had even struck a gentleman's agreement with Blaine that he would be named chairman in exchange for his support in the speakership contest. Blaine nevertheless once more bypassed Garfield in favor of Schenck. One year later, Garfield's prospects again brightened when Schenck was defeated in the midterm congressional elections and the chairmanship of the committee was once again vacant. For an entire year, Garfield actively lobbied for the position until he was "about as certain as he could be" of the appointment. The seat remained open until the beginning of the Forty-second Congress. In spite of Garfield's confidence, and although his friends applied pressure upon Speaker Blaine, the chairmanship went to Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts. Garfield was appointed chairman of the Committee on Appropriations. He was finally appointed to the Committee of Ways and Means in the Forty-fourth Congress—although as a minority member.

Committee Hearings

The committee began to hold hearings in this period on a routine basis, appointing subcommittees, subpoenaing witnesses, taking testimony, and even traveling around the country to gather information. An undated newspaper clipping in the committee's records, for example, states that Schenck's committee traveled from Sacramento to Omaha on the Pacific Railroad "with as much comfort, convenience and sense of safety as they ever traveled over any road in the Eastern states." The article, by committee clerk George Bassett, also reported that four subcommittees had been appointed to consider tariff duties on various classifications of goods.[24]

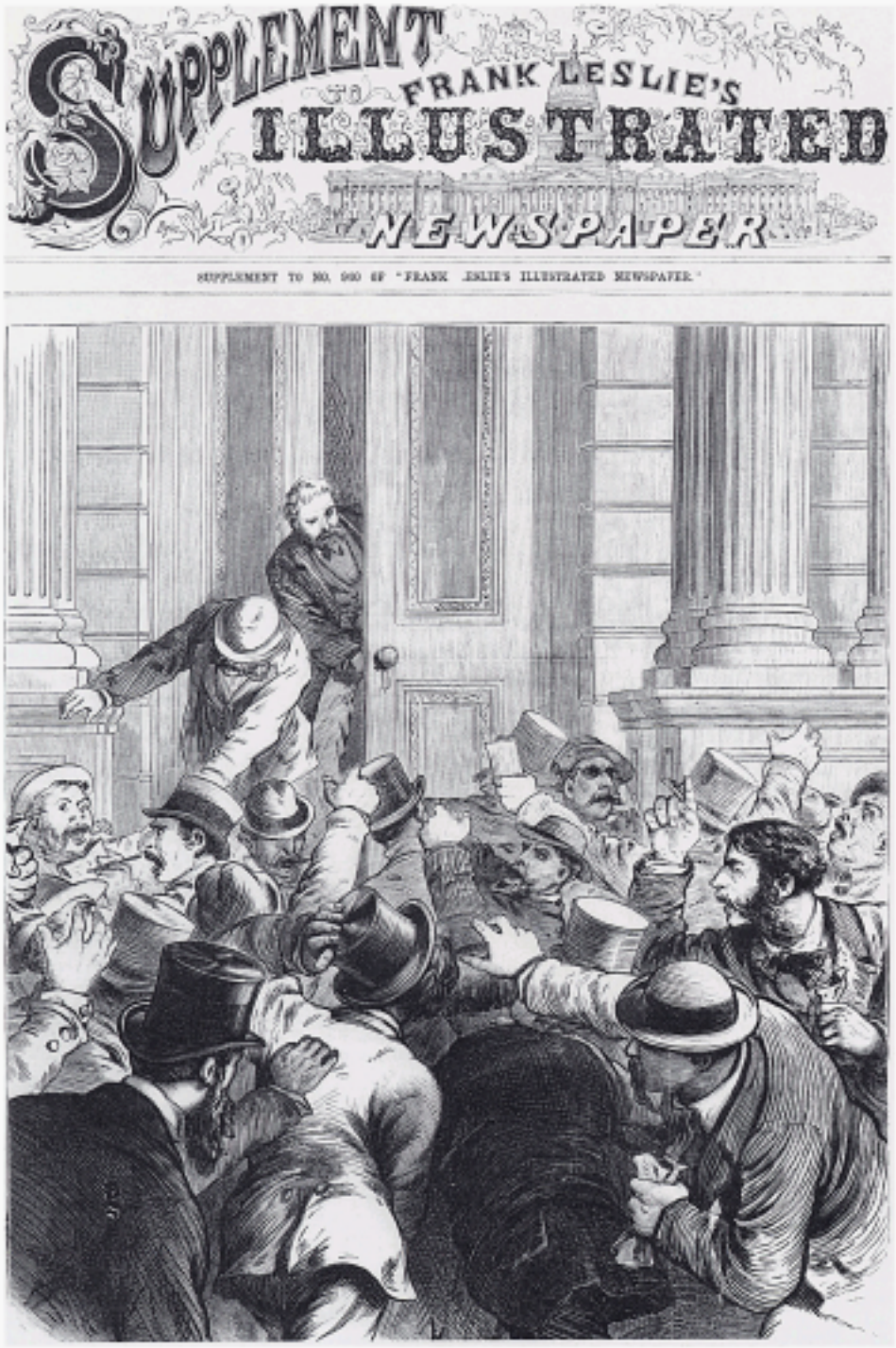
Although most hearings dealt with customs duties, two important investigations into government corruption were conducted by the Committee of Ways and Means in the 1870s. In 1873, the committee investigated the moiety system of the Treasury Department. The moiety system, which had existed since the 1790s, authorized informers to collect a percentage of delinquent customs revenues recovered through their efforts. The practice was repealed in the Forty-second Congress (1871–73), but the Secretary of the Treasury was allowed to appoint three persons to assist the government in cases of tax evasion

SELECTED COMMITTEE HEARINGS
1874–1886

1874	Customs Revenue Laws
1878	Refunding and Savings Deposits
1879	Tariff on Sugar
1880	Duty on Hoop Iron Duty on Paper and Wood Pulp Duty on Steel Rails Internal Revenue Refunding the National Debt
1881	Duties on Sugar
1882	Adulteration of Wine Drawback on Flour Duty on Jute and Manufactures Thereof Duty on Barley and Malt Hoop Iron and Cotton Ties Oleomargarine
1884	Morrison Tariff Bill Woolen Manufactures Metals and Metal Ores Manufactures of Cotton Wool Pottery and Glass Refunding the Bonded Debt Internal Revenue Tobacco and Fruit Brandy
1886	Hawaiian Treaty Tariff Revision Mackerel Fishing Bonded Warehouse System Pottery Iron and Steel Pig Iron and Iron Ore Flax Bituminous Coal, etc.

and delinquency. One of the agents appointed by Secretary William A. Richardson was John D. Sanborn, who collected over $400,000 and pocketed a commission of approximately $200,000. The House instructed the Committee of Ways and Means to investigate the revenue laws, the moiety system, and Sanborn's contract with the Treasury Department, which the committee determined violated the spirit of the law. Sanborn not only assisted in the recovery of revenue, he even collected funds, a practice the repeal of the moiety system prohibited.[25]

The committee examined Sanborn, Richardson, and others implicated in the case. The Treasury Secretary disclaimed responsibility: "I



Doors of the New York Stock Exchange close in the face of stockholders during the Panic of 1873. Failure of several northeast investment firms touched off the crisis, which ushered in a five-year depression, one of the worst yet suffered by the nation. The hard times fueled demand for inflationary monetary policies, and Congress responded. Legislators approved the circulation of an additional 18 million dollars in greenbacks. Later, the Resumption Act sanctioned unlimited circulation of national bank notes and the gradual reduction of greenbacks. Ways and Means reported tax and tariff legislation in this period designed to help soften the blow of the depression.

do not know the least thing about it any more than about ten thousand other things that are done in the different divisions of the Department. . . . I sign without reading." [26] The committee condemned the Sanborn contract, but it did not discover any evidence of criminal intent. Two of Richardson's subordinates resigned, and President

Grant appointed the Treasury Secretary to the Court of Claims.

The following year the House instructed the committee to investigate allegations that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had bribed members of Congress to secure a lucrative mail subsidy. A subcommittee, chaired by Horatio C. Burchard (R-IL), conducted hearings at the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City from December 28, 1874, to January 2, 1875, before returning to Washington to continue the investigation. The committee discovered that the company had disbursed through its agent, Richard Irwin, over $800,000 in his lobbying effort. Of that sum, $125,000 had been paid to William S. King, the postmaster of the House of Representatives. Although King denied that he had received any money, it was believed that he had channeled it to members of the House to influence their votes. King sought refuge in Canada, and the president of the company remained on an extended vacation in Europe. Since Irwin steadfastly denied any wrongdoing, the committee was unable to make a case against any of the principals, but it did recommend tighter restrictions upon lobbying. The authority of congressional committees to conduct similar hearings was curtailed by the Supreme Court, which ruled in 1880 that Congress was not empowered to investigate the affairs of private citizens unless information was provided necessary to enact a law.[27]

Most hearings concerned customs duties. In 1880, for example, the committee held hearings on the duty on steel rails. Several representatives of railroads testified, including Henry A. Poor, editor of the *Railway Manual*, who appeared on behalf of the Illinois Central "and a large number of other railroad companies." William H. Grace, on the other hand, prefaced his testimony with the statement: "I have the honor to appear before you, not as the professionally retained attorney of any railroad or corporation, but as the unpaid advocate of the workingmen of America." [28] Most of the testimony in these hearings were arguments for or against protective tariffs, often accompanied by statistical evidence. Some testimony was simple, direct, and informative, such as that provided by Isaac Cook of St. Louis on a proposed tax on native wines to prevent the production of adulterated wine. Cook presented a detailed description of how to make adulterated champagne through the use of alum, gelatin, and carbonic acid, "which have the effect of disorganizing alike the wine and the consumer's stomach. Nausea and headache are among the ill results." The committee promptly concluded its report with the recommendation that the bill "do pass." [29]

The committee's clerk handled the administrative details accompanying the hearings. He arranged for travel when necessary, took notes on the meetings, and corresponded with witnesses. The committee continued to employ one permanent clerk in this period, who was appointed by the chairman, subject to the approval of the committee, and paid at public expense. Sometime between 1880 and

1907, an assistant clerk and a stenographer were added to the staff. To judge from the noticeable improvement in the quality of committee records in the Forty-ninth and Fiftieth Congresses (1885–89), this development probably took place in the late '80s.

The clerkship was a political appointment. When party control of the committee changed, the previous clerk was dismissed or resigned to be replaced by the new chairman's selection. In January 1876, Chairman William Morrison (D-IL), the first Democratic chairman since before the Civil War, appointed Dr. James P. Hambleton to replace George A. Bassett. Some members of the committee objected to the choice since Hambleton had served as a surgeon in the Confederate Army, but Morrison insisted that Bassett be dismissed. The chairman argued that Bassett had sold confidential information about the committee's proceedings to a correspondent of the *New York World*. Hambleton, however, was forced to resign within a few weeks when it was alleged that he had named a son after John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln.[30]

The committee's clerk also acted as the chairman's personal secretary. In this era before congressional office buildings, the chairman used the committee room in the Capitol as his office. The existing committee records contain several items that illustrate the clerk's

The specter of federal surpluses grows into a dragon-size problem for Congress in this Puck *magazine cartoon of the early 1880s. With the public till embarrassingly fat, it became harder for congressmen to convince voters of the need for high tariff duties. The possibility of federal surpluses and the potential headache of trying to justify them alerted Ways and Means in the 1870s to begin reevaluating the nation's tax structure. Initiatives by the committee moved Congress to repeal the Civil War inheritance tax. The committee's proposals to reduce income tax rates met heavy resistance. Eventually, in 1872, Congress allowed the legislation authorizing the income tax to expire.*

function. George Bassett, the clerk appointed in 1860, continued in his position through Dawes' chairmanship (1871–75). Bassett took dictation in shorthand from the chairman and transcribed his correspondence as both congressman and committee chairman. The clerk was obviously overworked. The files contain items that do not pertain to the committee, such as the chairman's letters to his constituents on patronage matters, and even the clerk's own personal correspondence. One letter to Bassett from an ailing friend thanked him for a bottle of whiskey. "It came very opportunely," the friend wrote, "as the Dr had ordered milk punch, and *good* whiskey is *the* essential ingredient." [31]

If the clerk was overloaded, so too was the committee. The volume and sophistication of demands increased in the Gilded Age. Not only were private petitions from individuals and printed circular petitions still received, but the committee was also flooded with telegrams, advertisements, and pamphlets, all requesting that attention be given to a particular subject. The aftermath of the war provided the impetus for much of the correspondence. Schenck, for example, like all members of Congress, was inundated with requests for government jobs by former Union soldiers. He answered one request, "on file among hundreds of others," by cautioning the veteran that the horde of job seekers was "far beyond the number of places to be supplied." [32] An advertising pamphlet from Jewett's Patent Artificial Leg Company, submitted to support extra duties on artificial limbs, was equally moving—and more pertinent to the committee's function. Every soldier who had lost a limb in the war was entitled to an artificial one at government expense. Since the recipient had to bear the cost of repair or replacement, the pamphlet argued that their product deserved protection because of its superior design, durability, and ease of maintainence.[33]

The telegraph allowed witnesses and lobbyists to stay in close touch with the committee. Several examples are included in the committee's records. One witness telegraphed the chairman in 1868, for example, to urgently ask: "Have not heard from you. When will I be wanted?" [34] A U.S. attorney in Brooklyn asked the committee to excuse a witness whom he had subpoenaed as a witness in a court case.[35] And the treasurer of the Boston Elastic Company, concerned over a tariff provision on "webbing, gallouses etc.," followed up a morning telegram with a longer letter claiming that the measure would bring "utter ruin to the elastic weaving industry." [36]

Most of the correspondence from companies was similar—self-confident, even boastful, both in form and content. The very stationery that companies used indicated their pride—in large bold letterheads often featuring impressive engravings of the company's factory or headquarters. The traditional deferential language of petitions—"your petitioner prays [or begs] the attention of"—disappeared in the Gilded Age, replaced by more businesslike statements of economic

self-interest. Emor E. Smith, manufacturer and sole proprietor of Smith's Greenback Bitters, an alcoholic tonic, pointed out the inconsistency of taxing him as a distiller—or rectifier—when all he did was to add ingredients to previously distilled spirits. "I don't rectify," Smith protested, "I only mix." [37] Businessmen felt little reluctance to offer their opinions, even on issues unrelated to their industries. Frank Adams, President of the Akron Sewer Pipe Company, for example, wrote to Garfield on the match tax and the stamp tax on bank checks. "Undoubtedly you have your mind made up what in your judgment ought to be done with both," he stated, "but I propose to give *my* ideas, which may possibly clash with yours." [38]

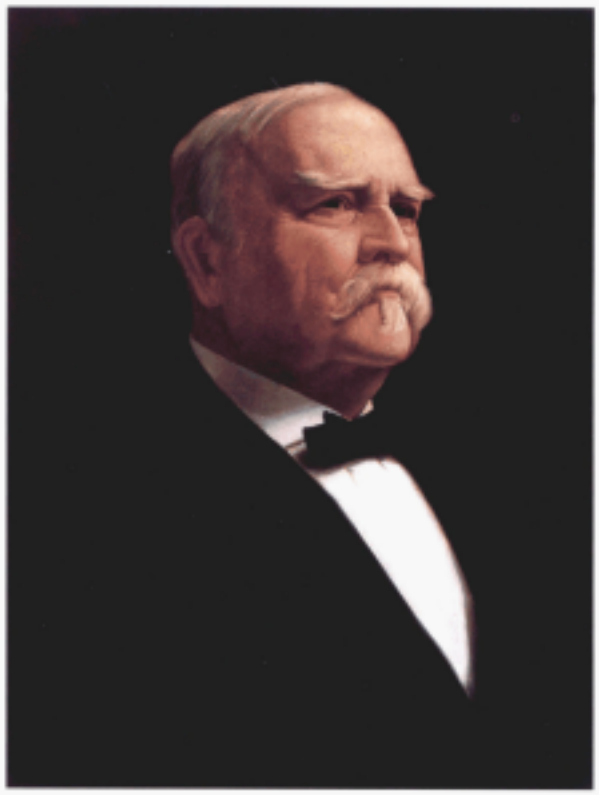
These few examples can provide only a sampling of the informational overload that descended upon the committee from hearings, lobbying, and correspondence. It was ironic that although the committee's jurisdiction had been reduced, its workload had increased. Even as the Committee on Ways and Means considered the revenue and tariff issues of the Gilded Age, it was confronted with the internal obstacles of its own workload and lack of adequate staffing. The committee, moreover, had to function within the framework of the House, and increasingly in this period, it was compelled to react to a more active Senate in revenue matters.

John G. Carlisle of Kentucky (immediate right) drew praise for his knowledge of parliamentary law. Speaker of the House from 1883 to 1889, and later Secretary of the Treasury, Carlisle served as ranking minority member on Ways and Means in the Fifty-first Congress (1889–1891). As Speaker, he and fellow Democrat and Ways and Means Chairman Roger Q. Mills (far right) fought hard but in vain to thwart Republican protectionists with the Mills bill of 1888. Carlisle's penchant for fairness in an age of extreme partisanship supports his reputation as one of the ablest Speakers of the House.

Postwar Financial Reconstruction

Between 1865 and 1879, the House of Representatives wrestled not only with the terms and procedures for the reconstruction of the Union, but also with restoring the nation's finances. The House Committee of Ways and Means was deeply involved in the latter campaign in the early postwar period. Congress inherited a complex and problematic financial legacy from the Civil War. The postwar debt in March 1865 amounted to approximately 2.9 billion dollars in a bewildering variety of notes and bonds. The primary issue associated with the debt was how to refinance the many forms of indebtedness at equitable terms without creating a shortage in federal gold reserves. As government expenditures declined after the war, legislators also faced the prospect of lowering the public's tax burden while raising enough revenue to meet its immediate needs. Finally, Congress had to decide how best to restore the nation's currency on a sound basis. The public debt, federal revenues, and currency matters were all interwoven into this tangled financial web.

The committee's first postwar initiatives concerned revenue. After 1865, the question of tax reduction became an important political issue. In 1866 federal revenues from customs duties and internal taxes imposed during the war amounted to 558 million dollars. Congress authorized a Special Commission on the Revenue in 1865 to study the



problems of postwar taxation. In 1866, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to appoint a special commissioner of the revenue to report to Congress on the existing tax structure. David A. Wells, who had chaired the 1865 commission, was named commissioner. During the life of his office (1865–70), Wells issued a series of four reports recommending a reduction in tariff duties and excise and internal taxes. Although Congress did not lower customs duties substantially, it did pass several internal revenue acts between 1866 and 1870 in which the income tax and most of the excise taxes imposed during the war were either repealed or substantially reduced.

The Republican majority on the Committee of Ways and Means favored the continuation of a protective tariff policy. Subsequently, tariff rates generally remained high, with some downward revision in articles such as pig iron, coal, coffee, tea, and molasses. The early postwar legislation reflected the interests of manufacturers, who favored high duties because they afforded protection to domestic industries. On the other hand, Western farmers were especially hurt by high rates imposed on manufactured articles such as textiles and machinery. While sentiment in favor of tariff reform did not emerge in the House until 1872, as early as the mid-1860s the high tariff policies of a group of representatives from the Eastern manufacturing states stirred opposition among Western members of both parties.

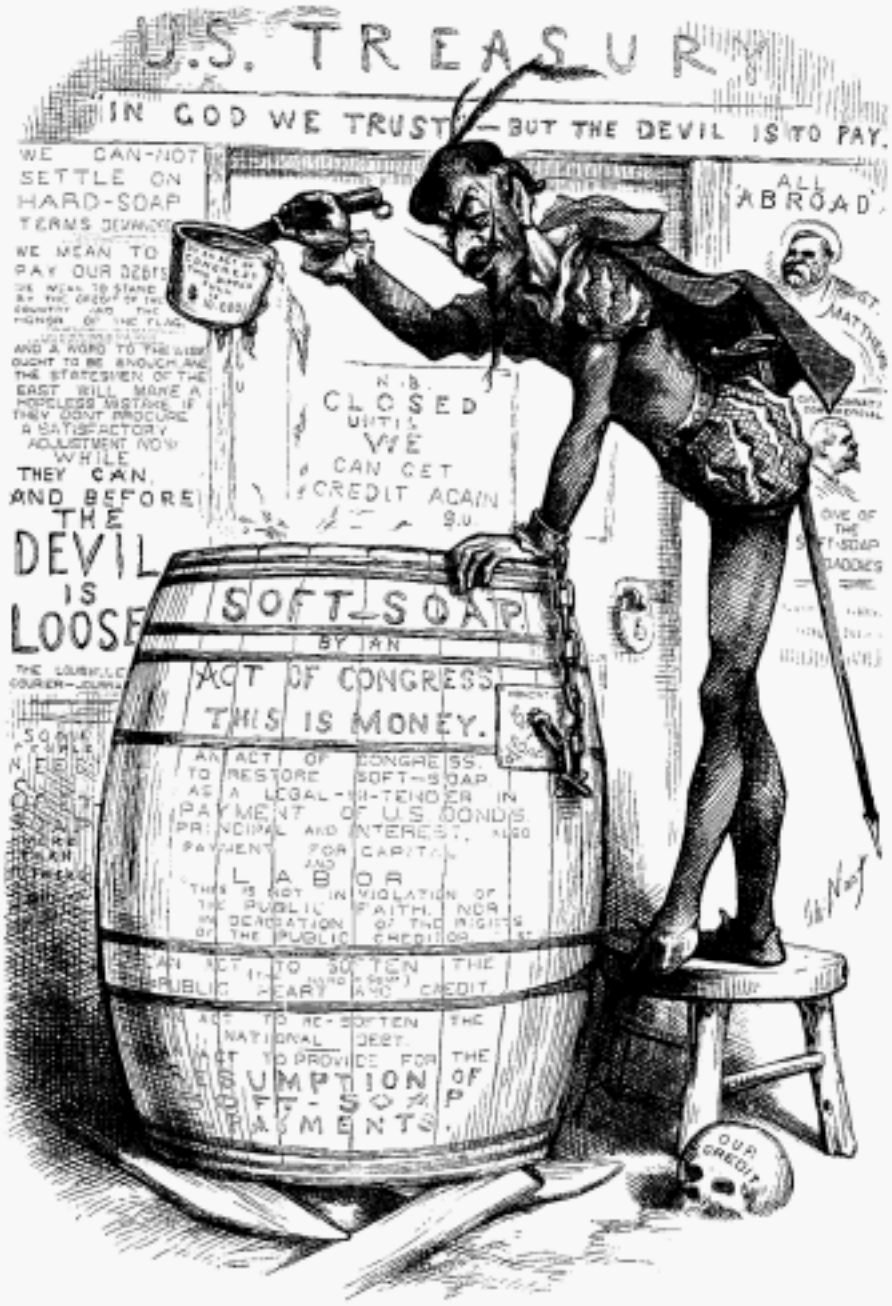
The continuance of the income tax was also complicated by controversy. During the war the income tax had been enormously unpopular throughout the nation. Later, Americans were divided over its future. Eastern manufacturers, who favored the benefits accrued by high tariffs, pressured the government to repeal the income tax. Lower income groups, on the other hand, largely from the West and South, favored retention of the income tax because of tax breaks the legislation provided to incomes below a certain level. As in the case of the tariff, the income tax issue tended to polarize Congress by region as much as, if not more than, by party.

The first congressional income tax battle occurred in April 1866, when Chairman Justin Morrill (R-VT) introduced a bill to remove the graduated provisions contained in the 1864 Revenue Act. Morrill, a fiscal conservative and a vigorous champion of protectionism, was a moderate on the income tax. While favorable to high tariffs as a means of protecting domestic industry, Morrill, unlike other more extreme protectionists, did not advocate the repeal of the income tax. He had opposed the principle of progressive tax rates—higher percentage rates on higher incomes—when the tax had been originally imposed, and he seized upon this opportunity to urge the abolition of graduated rates. In his remarks on the bill, Morrill argued that a graduated tax was unfair because it distributed the tax burden unevenly among the general population. As an alternative, the chairman proposed a flat 5 percent tax on all incomes over $1,000.[39]

Morrill's tax proposal did not reflect the current majority sentiment of the House. His plan was opposed by Democrats and by Radical Republicans who wanted to place the tax burden more heavily upon the upper income brackets. The most extreme proposal along these lines was one offered by Lewis Ross (D-IL), who favored a progressive tax scale with a maximum rate of 25 percent on incomes exceeding $60,000. The House finally compromised by passing a bill incorporating a plan advanced by Republican Frederick Pike of Maine. Pike's plan taxed incomes between $1,000 and $5,000 at 5 percent and imposed a maximum rate of 10 percent on incomes exceeding $5,000. Morrill strenuously opposed this proposal, arguing that the principle of progressive taxation "can only be defended on the same ground the highwayman defends his acts," but the bill was amended and passed in spite of his objections.[40] In July 1866, the Senate Finance Committee reported to the House that since time was running out in the current session and the bill required many changes, the income tax should remain in its current form. The House agreed to the Senate's recommendation, and the tax, with only a few minor changes, was continued until 1870.

In November 1866, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue recommended that the amount of exemption be raised from $600 to $1,000. Morrill introduced the committee's bill in February of the fol-

Controversy over currency inspired noted cartoonist Thomas Nast to pen this drawing. It implies congressional soft-soaping of issues behind the Resumption Act of 1875. The legislation stemmed from a struggle between inflationists who wanted to keep greenbacks in circulation and those who wanted to place currency on a sound specie basis. The Resumption Act gave Secretary of the Treasury John Sherman, former chairman of Ways and Means, authority to pay hard currency for any greenback worth under $50. The public preferred greenbacks because they were easier to obtain than coin. Fears that the redemption value of paper currency would be less than money backed by specie subsided in 1879 after Sherman built up the nation's gold reserves and brought the greenback to par.



lowing year, again stressing the necessity of lowering taxes. The bill proposed a flat 5 percent rate on incomes over $1,000. The elimination of the progressive taxation principle, it was estimated, would reduce government revenue by more than 36 million dollars. Several amendments were introduced to restore graduated rates, but none succeeded. Garfield perhaps best illustrated the House's changing mood. Previously a champion of the Civil War measure, he now argued that the progressive income tax was unethical, unsocial, and

A silver certificate from the Gilded Age recalls the push of cheap-money advocates and silver producers to restore the free coinage of silver. Gold proponent John Sherman backed a compromise, the Bland-Allison Act of 1878. Its provisions included the nation's first subsidies for silver producers, called for limited coinage of silver, and allowed exchange of the coin for silver certificates valued at $10 or higher.

unconstitutional because it discriminated between rich and poor. The Senate experienced a similar transformation and passed the bill in less than three days on March 2, 1867.[41]

The Committee of Ways and Means was also preoccupied with currency matters during the Thirty-ninth Congress. The currency was part of the committee's responsibilities by virtue of its connection to Treasury bonds and the federal debt, subjects remaining under the committee's jurisdiction. During the Civil War, the federal government had authorized the issue of nearly 450 million dollars in paper currency. The value of this currency was less than that of coin or currency backed by gold. Paper money was popular with the general public because it was easier to obtain for liquidating debts. On the other hand, fiscal conservatives favored withdrawal of the greenbacks from circulation to restore the national currency standard to a specie basis, a policy known as contraction. The resumption of specie payments by the Treasury Department and the redemption of the federal debt in gold were measures favored by holders of high-interest-bearing government bonds and by bankers, who, under the existing system, regulated the flow of currency.[42]

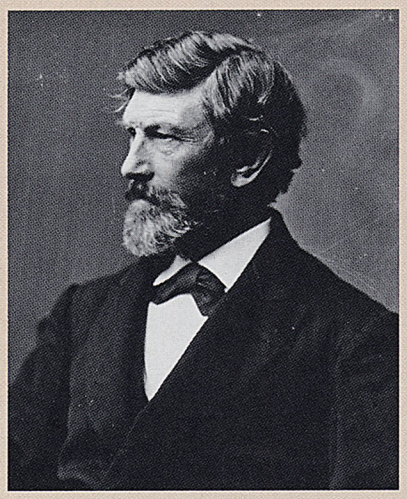
The postwar currency controversy began in 1866 when Congress granted Treasury Secretary Hugh McCulloch wide discretionary powers over the debt. McCulloch favored a policy of contraction and resumption. The first postwar refunding measure, prepared at the Treasury Department, gave McCulloch the power to convert short-term securities into long-term bonds and also provided for the partial withdrawal of greenbacks from circulation. The House defeated the bill in its original form and referred it to the Committee of Ways and Means for further consideration. The committee reduced the amount to be withdrawn from circulation, and in this form the House passed the bill. The Senate also agreed to the measure over the objections of Senate Finance Committee Chairman John Sherman, who thought that it gave McCulloch excessive power to disrupt the nation's flow of currency. The Refunding Act was signed into law on April 12, 1866.[43]

Shortly after the passage of the Refunding Act, the Committee of Ways and Means led a congressional revolt against Secretary McCulloch's policies. During the first session of the Fortieth Congress (1867), Chairman Schenck reported a bill to prohibit the Secretary from any further contraction of the currency by retiring greenbacks from circulation. The bill passed the House by an overwhelming majority and met very little resistance in the Senate. This bill was supplemented by other Refunding Acts, one reported by the Senate Finance Committee in 1868 and the other by the Committee of Ways and Means in 1869. These measures provided means to refund the debt on the specie standard without having to resort to contraction of the currency.[44]

By the start of the Forty-first Congress, the national debt was steadily declining and federal revenues, bolstered by high protective tariffs, were steadily increasing. The prospect of a Treasury surplus prompted Congress once again to evaluate the tax structure. A surplus created many problems for the federal government. First was the obvious dilemma of justifying to voters the continuation of high tariff duties and other taxes in a time of budget surplus. Second was the problem of how to spend a surplus. During the postwar era, proposals for distribution to the state governments resurfaced, but none were seriously considered. Instead, Congress preferred to allocate funds through generous veterans pension bills and through pork barrel legislation. Finally, a few politicians argued that Congress was obligated to make the surplus directly accessible to the public, either through the sale of government bonds or through general circulation as currency. Owing to the complex nature of federal banking and the political volatility of the currency question, it was not surprising that the House steered away from this option as well.

Two important sources of federal revenue, the income and inheritance taxes, were scheduled to expire in 1870. As the expiration date approached, opposition to the taxes increased. Fearful that Congress might renew the income tax, banking and manufacturing groups organized an Anti-Income Tax Association, which lobbied for an immediate repeal. The *New York Tribune* reflected this growing repeal sentiment in a February 5, 1869, editorial: "The Income Tax is the most odious, vexatious, inquisitorial, and unequal of all our taxes."[45]

Chairman Schenck introduced a bill in May 1870 to reduce some internal taxes and to repeal the wartime inheritance tax. The latter move met with almost universal support, but the committee's income tax recommendations were more hotly debated. Schenck proposed that the tax be lowered by raising the minimum exemption to $1,500 while retaining the flat 5 percent rate. Several members of Congress argued that the income tax could be abolished altogether. One of the strongest repeal advocates was Pig-Iron Kelley, who reasoned that the revenue lost from the repeal of the income tax would provide an even



ROLLING MILL
CLOSED
ON ACCOUNT
OF THE
TARIFF

Protectionists and reformers squared off on the tariff issue during the 1870s and '80s. Democrat Samuel J. Randall (top, far left) and Republican William D. Kelley (top, left), both of Pennsylvania, spoke out for a high tariff. Randall, later Speaker of the House, served on Ways and Means from 1881 to 1883. Kelley chaired Ways and Means during the Forty-seventh Congress. Democrats William R. Morrison of Illinois (below, far left) and Roger Q. Mills of Texas (below, left) championed reduced duties and tariff reform. Morrison headed Ways and Means in 1884 when the committee presented its first important postwar tariff measure under Democratic leadership. The bill, calling for a 20 percent cut in rates, failed. Mills succeeded Morrison as Ways and Means chairman and unsuccessfully worked to move a tariff reduction bill through Congress. Throughout much of this era, Republicans controlled the House, and their protectionist views prevailed. The cartoon portrays their fears of low duties and free trade: Cheap foreign goods drive down prices, close factories, and put the working man out on the street.

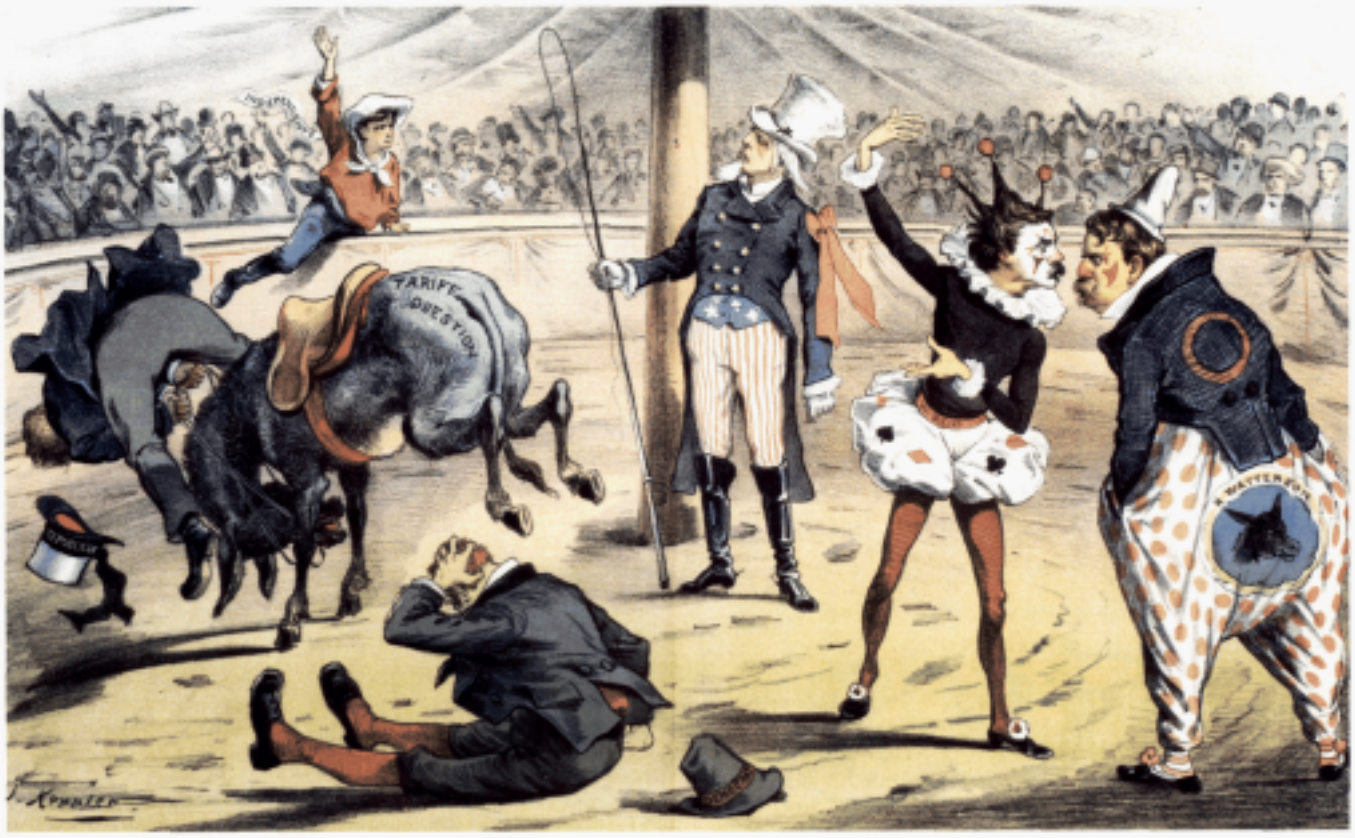
stronger case for the necessity of a high tariff to supply revenue. The House nevertheless retained the income tax, though further lowering it to a 3 percent rate on incomes above $2,000.

The tax bill then moved on to the Senate, where it was endorsed by the Finance Committee but was stalled on the floor by Roscoe Conkling (R-NY) and Charles Sumner (R-MA). Conkling hoped to eliminate the income tax completely and managed to persuade the Senate to strike out any reference to it in the bill. Eventually, after parliamentary manueverings back and forth, the Senate voted 26–25 to reconsider the vote against the income tax. In the final debate on the bill, Senator Sherman made an eloquent appeal for the tax and swayed some crucial undecided votes. The tax was salvaged, but in an amended version that further reduced the tax rate to 2.5 percent on incomes over $2,000. The final version of the bill incorporated this provision and also stipulated that the tax would be expressly limited to the years 1870 and 1871, "and no longer." [46]

By 1871, the nation's finances were improving so rapidly that the income tax lay open to further repeal initiatives. During the third session of the Forty-first Congress (1870–71), the antitax forces launched yet another campaign, and this time their efforts succeeded. The Grant Administration was divided on the income tax. The President's choice for Commissioner of Internal Revenue, Gen. Alfred Pleasonton, recommended repeal in a letter to Samuel Hooper (R-MA), who had succeeded Schenck as chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means. The Secretary of the Treasury, George S. Boutwell, contradicted Pleasonton in another letter to Hooper, arguing that repeal would seriously disrupt the government's revenue. The chairman and the committee recommended the repeal of the income tax on February 7, 1871, but the House refused by a vote of 117–91 to suspend the rules to allow for consideration of the bill.[47]

The Senate in the meantime had considered its own repeal proposal in the second session of the Forty-first Congress. On July 14, 1870, the next to last day of the session, the Senate passed a bill to repeal the income tax by a vote of 26–25. The House refused to consider the bill, simply returning it to the other body on the grounds that under the Constitution revenue measures could not originate in the Senate. With no income tax legislation adopted in 1871, the income tax was allowed to expire in 1872.[48]

After the expiration of the income tax, the currency once again became a hotly contested political issue. The Panic of 1873 and a subsequent depression increased popular agitation for inflationary monetary policies. Viewing the currency issue as a means for partisan gain, congressional Democrats also became more unified in their demands to stop further contraction of the currency. Faced with a choice between contraction and the resumption of specie payments, the Senate Finance Committee presented a measure in 1874 that provided for



the circulation of an additional 18 million dollars in greenbacks. Soon after this bill was enacted, the Republicans lost control of the House and maintained a narrow majority in the Senate. In the lame duck session of the Forty-third Congress, the Republicans engineered passage of the Resumption Act, which sanctioned the unlimited circulation of national bank notes and the gradual reduction of greenbacks to 300 million dollars. After January 1, 1879, greenbacks worth under $50 would be redeemable in coin.

In 1877, President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed John Sherman as Secretary of the Treasury. Sherman's primary task was to prepare for the resumption of specie payments. He did so by building up the nation's gold reserves and by selling newly issued Treasury bonds. But Hayes and Sherman had to deal with a House of Representatives with a 153–140 Democratic majority. In the Forty-fifth Congress, a bill to repeal the Resumption Act nearly passed. Opposition to resumption lessened after passage of the Bland-Allison Silver Purchase Act of 1878. This statute authorized the government to purchase a limited quantity of silver for general circulation. On January 2, 1879, resumption by the government of payments for Treasury notes in gold was finally achieved.

"Who Can Ride the Mule?" asks Uncle Sam in a cartoon from an 1883 issue of Puck *magazine. The sketch lampoons the tariff question, a bucking issue that has thrown both Democrats and Republicans. The frustration of trying to saddle-break the tariff along party lines pinches the faces of two humorless clowns. Glaringly at odds, the caricatures represent tariff protectionist and editor of the Republican* New York Tribune, *Whitelaw Reid, and tariff reformer and editor of the Democratic* Louisville Courier-Journal, *Henry Watterson.*

The Committee of Ways and Means and the Tariff, 1870–1888

The tariff in the 1870s and '80s reemerged as the controversial political issue that it had been before the war. The Panic of 1873 and the resulting economic depression provided the Democratic Party with the opportunity to offer alternatives to the prevailing Republican economic policies. Downward tariff revision, many Democrats argued, would both stimulate domestic consumption and encourage other nations to lower their tariff barriers.

The Committee of Ways and Means' jurisdiction over tariffs was complicated not only by partisan politics, but also by the Senate's more aggressive role in the Gilded Age. A sense of greater prestige had always been attached to service in the Senate, but not perhaps to the degree stated by former chairman Justin Morrill, who spent the last 21 years of his life there. "There is no gift, no office to which I could be appointed," Morrill remarked, "that I would accept in preference to a seat in the United States Senate. I consider that the highest honor that could be bestowed on me, and its duties the highest function I could perform." [49] In part because of the Finance Committee's greater stability—it had only two chairmen for 25 out of the 31 years between 1867 and 1898—the Senate was more assertive in amending revenue bills, even on at least two occasions substituting its own bill for the House measure.

The House had refused to act upon the Senate-drafted version of the income tax repeal in 1871. In 1872, the House similarly opposed the Senate's attempt to dictate tariff policy. The Committee of Ways and Means, chaired by Dawes, had introduced two bills, one on tariff duties generally, and a second repealing duties on tea and coffee. Both bills passed the House, but the Senate Finance Committee reported only the latter measure, with its own comprehensive tariff bill tacked on in the form of amendments designed to reduce rates by 10 percent. A bill that had left the House only four lines long, returned with 20 pages of amendments. The House erupted in outrage at the Senate's action. Dawes offered a resolution, overwhelmingly adopted, that the substitution of a new measure exceeded the Senate's constitutional authority to amend revenue bills. Incredibly, the House by a parliamentary manuever then recommitted its own bill to Dawes' committee with an amendment incorporating the 10 percent reductions of the Senate bill. It was this bill that the House passed and that became the Tariff of 1872.[50]

The Republicans were able to quiet the demand for tariff revision with the meager reductions of the 1872 act, but the Panic of 1873 created the need to increase federal revenues. Dawes, still chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, introduced a bill in February 1875 to repeal the 10 percent reductions and to increase rates on

several items. The Senate made no amendments to the House bill, and it was signed by the President on March 3, 1875.

There was no significant tariff legislation from 1875 to 1883 in spite of the fact that the Democrats controlled the House for six of those eight years. Moreover, the Democratic chairmen, William R. Morrison (IL) and Fernando Wood (NY), were both champions of downward revision. The Senate, however, remained Republican for four of the six years of the Democratic House. The Democrats were also far from united behind tariff reform, as several important Eastern leaders favored protectionism.

Morrison's attempt to reduce rates failed in the Forty-fourth Congress (1875–77), as did Wood's efforts in the following session. Roger Q. Mills (D-TX), who would chair the committee from 1887 to 1889, introduced a resolution in the Forty-fifth Congress "that the Committee of Ways and Means be instructed to so revise the tariff as to make it purely a tariff for revenue, and not for protecting one class of citizens by plundering another." [51] Although this particular resolution failed because of its wording, Wood's committee prepared a reduction of the tariff. The chairman, according to one source, initiated the practice of assigning responsibility for preparing tariff bills to a subcommittee composed of the majority party members of the full committee. The bill failed to pass the House, even though Wood defended it as an effort "to resuscitate American commerce." [52]

The nation's finances were on a more stable basis by the end of the Hayes Administration in 1881. The debt was refunded, the currency question was temporarily resolved through specie resumption, and the sluggish economy of the 1870s had been stimulated by an upswing in industrial productivity. As a result, federal surpluses again reached embarrassing proportions. These surpluses prompted a campaign for reform in which the tariff resurfaced as the nation's preeminent political issue.

The reform element was represented in Congress by Democrats, primarily from Southern and Western states, and by the liberal wing of the Republican Party. Both protectionists and reformers agreed on the need to reduce federal surpluses, but differed over the nature and degree of those reductions. Politicians and the public were not the only groups interested in the outcome of tariff legislation. Each time a revenue measure was to be considered, lobbyists swarmed around the Committee of Ways and Means' room "like flies on a molasses barrel." [53]

The first major tariff battle of the postwar era occurred during the Forty-seventh Congress. In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur appointed a Tariff Commission whose duties were "to take into consideration and to thoroughly investigate all of the various questions relating to the agricultural, commercial, mercantile, manufacturing, mining, and industrial interests of the United States, so far as the

The Committee on Ways and Means in session, as illustrated in an 1888 Harper's Weekly, *conveys the clublike atmosphere of committee rooms during the Gilded Age. In the House, this was an era of powerful committee chairmen who had the ability to bury legislation they opposed or to expedite measures they favored, causing such panels as Ways and Means to earn reputations as "legislative cemeteries." One representative, peeved by dilatory tactics, humorously referred to Ways and Means as "a gorgeous mausoleum." The illustration is of today's Room H–209, located directly off the House Chamber. Among those pictured here with Chairman Roger Q. Mills, seated at far right, are: a future Speaker, Thomas B. Reed; a future President, William McKinley, standing at center; a future chairman, William Wilson; and a past chairman, William Kelley.*

same may be necessary to the establishment of a judicious tariff, or a revision of the existing tariff, upon a scale of justice to all interests." The commission was empowered to hold hearings and to report its findings by the first Monday of December 1882, when Congress would begin its short session. The Tariff Commission was headed by John L. Hayes of Massachusetts, Secretary of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers. Several other commissioners had a personal interest in a protected industry, and all favored high tariffs, at least in principle.[54]

In its report, the Tariff Commission reaffirmed protectionism. The document recommended a reduction in duties, but did not substantially alter existing schedules on manufactured articles. Instead, the commission suggested lower duties on raw materials and on some commonly consumed articles such as sugar and molassses. Not surprisingly, the report not only failed to satisfy tariff reformers, but it also managed to offend extreme protectionists. When the report reached Congress, the Republican majority members on the Committee of Ways and Means, led by Chairman William D. Kelley, roundly denounced its findings and drafted an alternative tariff measure.

The Senate Finance Committee had been considering its own tariff measure at the same time. In a repeat performance of the 1872

episode, the Senate tacked on its bill in the form of 103 pages of amendments to a three-page House bill reducing some internal revenues. In spite of constitutional objections, the House was compelled to consider the Senate bill when it could not bring the Committee of Ways and Means' measure to a vote.

The tariff situation in Congress was further complicated when the Republicans lost their House majority in the fall congressional elections. In January 1883, House Democrats tried to block passage of a last-minute protectionist measure by initiating a filibuster against the Committee of Ways and Means' bill. At this juncture, Thomas Brackett Reed (R-ME), a member of the Rules Committee, engaged in some adroit procedural manuevering. The Senate bill was currently tabled in the House. Reed routed the Democrats by securing recognition from Speaker Keifer to submit a privileged Rules Committee report on the Senate amendments, forcing a majority vote and thereby terminating debate on the House committee's bill. The minority party had to agree to send the pending bill to a conference committee controlled by protectionist members from both Houses of Congress—the House delegation was headed by Chairman Kelley. The conference committee bill made some minor reductions but remained highly protectionist in its overall provisions. On the last day of the Forty-seventh Congress, the President signed the bill, now known as the Mongrel Tariff because the effort at tariff reduction ended in a reaffirmation of protectionism.[55]

The Democratic Party, which was generally more receptive to tariff reform, controlled the House between 1883 and 1885. In the Forty-eighth Congress, the reform wing of the party, led by John G. Carlisle of Kentucky, Morrison, and Mills, elevated Carlisle to the speakership. He subsequently appointed Morrison chairman and Mills as the second-ranking member of the Committee of Ways and Means, with the aim of enacting a complete revision of the existing tariff structure. Kelley remained as the ranking minority member on the committee.

In spite of the leadership's efforts, reformers were unable to secure substantive results. Part of the problem lay with a lack of party unity on the tariff. The sectional character of the issue rendered the majority leadership's efforts to enact a reform measure that was agreeable to all Democrats difficult at best. In the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Congresses, an able antireform Democratic element, led by feisty protectionist Samuel J. Randall of Pennsylvania, frustrated several attempts to pass new tariff measures. Inefficient House machinery as well as the obstructionist tactics employed by the minority party also thwarted the majority's efforts. Bills were sometimes delayed in committee or buried in the House calendar, a device commonly used to stall legislation. Representative James A. McKenzie (D-KY), a tariff reformer, cleverly summed up the situation when he remarked:

MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE 1865–1890

1865	Committee of Ways and Means granted privilege to report bills at any time
1866	Refunding Act converted war debt into long-term bonded debt
1870	Income tax reduction provided for abolition of tax in two years
1872	Tariff of 1872 reduced rates by 10 percent
1873	Hearings on the moiety system and the Sanborn contracts scandal
1875	Hearings on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company scandal
1880	Rules revision granted precedence to revenue and appropriations bills
1883	Chairman of the committee appointed to the Rules Committee to strengthen majority leadership
1883	Mongrel Tariff reinforced protective rates
1888	Mills bill to reduce tariff failed

> There are two places of interment in this House in which all legislation looking to reform in our revenue and customs duties is buried. One is the gorgeous mausoleum of the Ways and Means Committee . . . and the other is the Calendar of this House. A member introducing a bill here can decide whether he prefers to have it buried with that sort of splendid interment which the Ways and Means affords, or that it should go to the Calendar, which is the potter's field of legislation. . . . When an ambitious member drafts a measure looking to revenue reform and presents it to the House . . . it is no stretch of the imagination to say that he can detect the dolorous notes of the "Dead March in Saul" as the Clerk sings out, "Ways and Means, and printed." [56]

In 1884, the Committee of Ways and Means presented its first important postwar tariff measure under Democratic leadership. The bill was introduced by Chairman Morrison, and provided general reductions of 20 percent. Morrison advocated across-the-board tariff reductions, which earned him the nickname "Horizontal Bill" among his colleagues. His measure was opposed by protectionists from both parties who favored maintaining the existing tariff schedules. This bill was ultimately defeated in the House by a five-vote margin provided by Republicans and the antireform wing of the Democratic Party headed by Randall.[57]

After the defeat of the Morrison bill, radical tariff reformers in the House demanded that Carlisle remove Randall from his chairmanship, but the Speaker resisted this course of action. Instead, he allowed Morrison to introduce several rules amendments intended to deprive Randall of some of his influence as chairman of the Committee on Appropriations. The amendments included partial distribution of annual appropriations jurisdiction to several committees, a proposal that was subsequently approved.[58] Morrison, the loser in the tariff fight, had at least obtained some measure of revenge against Randall. However, the Pennsylvania congressman still managed to muster enough votes to defeat two more tariff measures sponsored by the Committee of Ways and Means in the Forty-ninth Congress.

A Democrat was elected President in 1884 for the first time in over a quarter of a century. Grover Cleveland favored an extensive revision of the tariff system, but the House did not pass a reform measure until late in his administration. During the Fiftieth Congress, Cleveland surprised the nation by devoting his entire annual message to the Treasury surplus and to the pressing need for tariff reform. Cleveland called protective tariffs a "vicious, unequitable, and illogical source of unnecessary taxation," and he proposed to dispose of the surplus through tariff reduction and the removal of duties on raw materials. These remarks spurred the otherwise "Do Nothing" Congress into prompt action. In 1888, the Committee on Ways and Means drew up a reform measure under the leadership of Roger Q. Mills, who had succeeded Morrison as chairman. Mills continued the practice begun by Wood of excluding the minority from any role in drafting tariff legislation. There were even allegations that this particular bill was framed in a subterranean chamber of the Capitol with no opportunity given to manufacturers to testify. According to Republican protectionists, the Democratic majority allowed free trade pamphleteers and Treasury Department clerks to draft the bill. Mills, on the other hand, claimed that he outlined most of the bill himself. "I worked for six months at home by myself to prepare a bill," the chairman stated.[59] Only after he had presented it to the committee had he realized the need for revisions. Only four House Democrats voted against the Mills bill in July, an improvement in party unity over the two preceding Congresses. While the House considered this bill, the Senate drafted a staunchly protectionist measure, again reflecting the sentiment of its Republican majority.[60]

Congress adjourned before the Senate could consider the House bill. When it reconvened later in the year, Cleveland had lost the Presidency to Republican Benjamin Harrison. Encouraged by this development, the Senate Finance Committee substituted its own bill for the House measure and in this form the "amended" Mills bill, now altered beyond recognition, was returned to the House, where it was recommitted to the Committee on Ways and Means. Chairman Mills

later reported a resolution declaring the Senate's action unconstitutional. Mills also demanded that the bill be returned to the Senate, but these recommendations were never considered by the House. The Mills bill subsequently expired without a formal jurisdictional confrontation between the House and the Senate over the proper origin of revenue bills. The following Republican-controlled Congress would once again reimpose protective rates in the McKinley Tariff of 1890.

Rules Changes and the Chairmanship of the Committee, 1880–1890

During the 1880s the House implemented important rules changes. These revisions had the dual effect of strengthening the power of the Speaker and eliminating some dilatory practices that had impeded the transaction of legislative business. The principal actors in the reform process were the Speaker and the majority members of the Rules Committee, which, from 1885 to 1891 included the chairmen of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Beginning in 1858, the Speaker of the House had been appointed a member of the Rules Committee. The postwar proliferation of standing committees also increased the Speaker's power because of his continued control over committee assignments. By choosing his committee leaders wisely, the Speaker could acquire a group of faithful lieutenants to implement the policies of the majority party. This system made sense in principle, but the flow of legislation in practice was often interrupted by the obstructionist tactics of the minority.

In 1885, Speaker Carlisle appointed the chairmen of the Committee on Ways and Means and the Committee on Appropriations to become, with him, the three-man majority of the five-member Rules Committee. As a majority member on Rules, the chairman of Ways and Means was subsequently involved in the creation of important procedural precedents affecting the House as a whole. The Rules Committee was also authorized in 1883 to report special orders governing the consideration of other committees' bills. Special orders allowed the Rules Committee to set the time and method for consideration of a particular bill, but this power was not exploited until after Thomas Brackett Reed became Speaker in 1889.

The most notable example of the involvement in House operations of the chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means was that of Republican William McKinley of Ohio. Along with Speaker Reed and Joseph B. Cannon of Illinois, McKinley assisted in mapping out a floor strategy in the Fifty-first Congress to eliminate some of the dilatory tactics that had long hindered the House's ability to enact the majority's legislative agenda. Reed masterminded these initiatives and employed his two colleagues on Rules as floor managers. A minority

A powerful orator and innovative Speaker of the House, Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine served as part of the three-man majority of the House Rules Committee along with the chairmen of Ways and Means and Appropriations. In the Fifty-first Congress (1889–1891), Reed threw the House into turmoil. He arbitrarily replaced the traditional "disappearing quorum" with the "counting quorum." Previously, a House member had to cast his vote to be considered present. A group of obstructionists, therefore, could withhold their ballots and halt progress on a bill due to lack of a quorum. The Speaker's bold action eliminated this ploy. In 1896, Reed lost the Republican presidential nomination to William McKinley, the man he had started on the road to the White House by his appointment to the chairmanship of Ways and Means. Reed himself served on the committee in five Congresses.

member of the Rules Committee could not expect to be consulted. As former minority member Benton McMillin (D-TN) recalled:

> The Speaker would send for me and say, "Well, Mac, Joe [Cannon] and McKinley and I have decided to perpetrate the following outrage, of which we all desire you to have full notice." Whereupon he would read and give me a copy of whatever special order had been adopted by the majority of the committee. . . . He never tried to catch us napping; but I can assure you that the Committee on Rules was never a debating society . . . .[61]

The most important Rules Committee campaign of this Congress was launched against the "disappearing quorum," a tactic traditionally used by the minority to obstruct the operations of the House. The House could not conduct its business without a quorum—50 percent of the membership plus one. Since absenteeism was high in this period, members of the minority party could delay House action by simply refusing to vote, thereby preventing a quorum. They would appear on the House floor when a quorum call was issued, but they would not answer—disappear—when the vote on the bill in question was taken.[62]

In 1890, Speaker Reed and his lieutenants on the Rules Committee decided to eliminate this obstacle to the majority's ability to legislate. Their opportunity came on a divided vote in a disputed West Virginia election. For three days, Reed, with able floor assistance provided by Cannon and McKinley, upheld the presence of a quorum by simply counting as present all members in the chamber, in spite of persistent efforts by the Democrats to obtain a point of order against the Speaker's actions. According to one reporter, the House was in a state of bedlam with "such disorder that many words of the participants could not be heard and chronicled by even the official stenographers on the floor, much less by those in the press gallery."[63] Eventually, Reed prevailed and the procedures for counting quorums were rewritten in the rules. Such reforms helped the House to operate more efficiently, and dramatically increased the power of the Speaker and the chairmen of the Committee on Ways and Means and the Committee on Appropriations in their roles as members of the Rules Committee.

Conclusion

With its jurisdiction reduced to revenue- and tariff-related areas, the Committee of Ways and Means helped to revise the Civil War income and inheritance taxes, which were ultimately repealed or allowed to expire in the 1870s. The committee's tariff legislation reflected the protectionist leanings of Congress. Democratic-inspired efforts to reduce the prevailing high tariff rates failed in the mid-70s and again in 1888. Republican protectionists quieted demands for more drastic revision in 1872 with a symbolic 10 percent reduction, but the party's Mongrel Tariff of 1883, which continued in effect for the remainder of the decade, was strongly protectionist.

Congress was the dominant branch of the federal government in the postwar period. Consequently, the House and the Senate, not the President and Congress, were the principal contestants in disputes over revenue. The Senate exercised a more active role in creating tax

policy in the Gilded Age by not only amending House bills, which it had often done in the past, but also by originating entirely new revenue legislation in the form of amendments to often unrelated House revenue bills. While the House opposed this development as a violation of its constitutional prerogatives, it did not consistently curb Senate revenue initiatives during the 1870s and '80s. The content of revenue legislation, especially in the late 1880s, was dictated at times more by the Senate Finance Committee than by the Committee of Ways and Means.

Between 1865 and 1890, the House moved haltingly toward improved methods of administration and legislative procedure. Some changes, especially the evolution of routine legislative hearings, helped the Committee on Ways and Means to operate more efficiently, while rules reforms instituted in the 1880s reinforced the traditional role of the committee's chairman as a party leader. In addition to strengthening the ability of the majority party to govern, these procedural revisions spurred opposition from those who feared that concentrating power in the Speaker and the majority leadership would infringe upon the rights of the minority. These concerns increased during the 1890s, and set the stage for further reforms in the Progressive Era.