

mobility and economic opportunity. They resented monopoly power wherever it might appear, but especially in government.

Sacrificing Principles

Yet between North and South, an issue was building that some men foresaw as a danger to this American concept of limited and diffused power. Long before the Civil War, John Randolph warned: "The people of this country, if ever they lose their liberties, will do it by sacrificing some great principle of government to temporary passion. There are certain great principles, which if they be not held inviolate, at all seasons, our liberty is gone. If we give them up, it is perfectly immaterial what is the character of our sovereign; whether he be King or President, elective or hereditary, — it is perfectly immaterial what is his character — we shall be slaves — it is not an elective government which will preserve us."⁴

Randolph spent his life insisting that power must be limited, and that the surrender of power to a centralized administration was all too often a one-way street. As he once commented, "Asking one of the states to surrender part of her sovereignty is like asking a lady to surrender part of her chastity."

⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 12th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 184-85.

Northern opponents of the institution of slavery, such as John Quincy Adams, also recognized that even such a moral evil as slavery must be allowed to die from its own economic weaknesses rather than be killed with a weapon forged by a great centralization of national power.

But with the passing of the older generation, a new breed, the direct ancestor of the modern social reformer, appeared on the scene. Such abolitionists as Senator Sumner, Wendell Phillips, and William Lloyd Garrison were so assured of their own moral rectitude and their capacity for running the affairs of all mankind, that they were willing to gather and exercise any amount of power to pursue their goal. Perhaps it is such men that Ambrose Bierce had in mind in *The Devil's Dictionary* when he defined a conservative as "a statesman who is enamoured of existing evils, as distinguished from the liberal who wishes to replace them with others."

Even the coming of the Civil War demonstrated a basic acceptance of the American federal tradition on the part of most Americans, both North and South. Yet, there can be little doubt that some "progress" was being made toward the kind of centralization that could ultimately prove harmful to

the American federal tradition. Some advocates of states' rights have a valid point when they suggest that the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment opened the door to changes in our federal system.

Yet the greatest impact upon the American tradition of federalism that occurred in post-Civil War nineteenth century America probably sprung from the one-party domination that was in effect almost without interruption until the twentieth century. Nationally, the Civil War had produced a monopoly situation for the Republican party. In the repressed and resentful South, local politics came to be a monopoly of the Democratic party. Even some places in the North (for example, Boss Tweed's New York City) came also to be Democratic backwaters due, in large part, to the reaction against the monopoly situation of the Republican party in national politics. The age of machine politics thus stemmed from an undue centralization of political control.

Monopoly in Political Power

One-party domination of American political life, of course, robbed the Republic of that flexibility and variety that had traditionally been its strength, producing in effect the very sort of monopoly

situation in political power that our tradition tries so hard to avoid. A time of tremendous building in industry, communication, and transportation across our rich American continent followed the war. Yet something else came with this building. The story of the spoilsmen in politics and the exploiters in economic life working hand in glove to take the American people for a ride is so well known as to be a commonplace.

Advocates of centralized authority and economic control in the twentieth century look back to the so-called era of Reconstruction and Big Business to point out its evils with great glee and to suggest that those evils are a *prima facie* case for the necessity of more political control of business. The very reverse is actually the case. It was a monopoly of political power, and an exercise of that power by one element of society, that did the damage.

A half-century of abuses stemmed from this monopoly situation. Boss Tweed and Jim Fiske were all too symbolic of their era. The people began to grow restless in the face of a repressed South and an all-too-often exploited North and West. A generation of reformers began to grow up who misread the problem as one of too little political power rather than one of too much political power.