



## FLORIDA VOTING, THE STOLEN ELECTION 1876, AND HENRY GEORGE

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The voting mess in Florida recalls the disputed presidential election of 1876, and the corrupt deal that resolved it: the Democrats let Hayes win upon his promise to end Reconstruction, abandon the black freedmen, and turn the South back to its former masters.

Who brokered this corrupt deal? A key figure was Abram S. Hewitt. Georgists know Hewitt mainly as the politician who left Congress ten years later to contest George's run for Mayor of New York in 1886. But who was this Hewitt? A nobody?

In 1876, Hewitt was Tilden's campaign manager, at the very center of the deal that let Hayes steal the election. At that time, Democrats controlled the House; Hewitt was the majority leader. He was Presidential timber himself. The plutocracy threw a crack general into the fight against George, and his mission was clear. He said, "I am a candidate for Mayor for only one purpose. I regard the election of Henry George as Mayor of New York as the greatest possible calamity. ... For that reason and that only did I take this nomination." Academic historians and economists have gone far towards wiping out our collective memory of the Georgist phenomenon, so even most Georgists have little idea of its force. We may measure that by the force that was marshaled against it.

What were Hewitt's goals and views before he went home to block George? His personal goal was to become U.S. President, and he was considered eligible. His major business in Congress was repealing the basic measures of Radical Republican Reconstruction. It was the Democrats' interest to disenfranchise blacks, who were voting Republican. Hewitt, a major steel producer and mine owner, was also concerned lest Radical Republican ideas about redistributing land should start a contagion that might spread northwards.

Another sectional issue was transportation. The Mississippi and other southern rivers had been blocked by wartime measures, and were not repaired or reopened for many years. Shipping was diverted to New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Northeastern shippers also got bounties.

Northern Democrats, led by Tilden and Hewitt, were responsible for steering Federal money to northern ports and rails, starving southern internal improvements. Tammany was in on it: NY got big Federal money to improve its harbor. All that contributed to high freight rates in the southeast, adding to the miseries there. It helped lead southern Democrats away from Tilden, to acquiesce in the deal to make Hayes President.

When the voting in three southern states, including Florida, was disputed, Congress selected an electoral commission to make the call. The swing vote was one Joseph Bradley. Hewitt, as Tilden's campaign manager, accepted him as "entirely satisfactory." Bradley then voted for the Hayes electors, straight down the line. An honest mistake? Not likely. According to Nicholas Murray Butler, Hewitt was bucking for the Presidency himself, and Tilden finally felt betrayed.

A breach between Hewitt and Tilden grew during the weeks when Hewitt was working on the appointment of the Electoral Commission that was to determine the election results. Butler quotes Hewitt as saying, to a group of rich men plus himself, that "Tilden would, at that time, have gone to any lengths to obtain the Presidency and that he, Mr. Hewitt, was one of the powerful restraining forces which kept Mr. Tilden from precipitating a conflict ... " This was to protect his own chances at a future nomination.

Evidence of the breach came out when Hewitt was to be nominated by Democrats for Governor in 1882, thence to run for U.S. President in 1884. Operators had it all settled, and went to call on Tilden, who "flew into a rage and announced that he would never support Mr. Hewitt, that Mr. Hewitt had been untrue to him in 1876 and 1877 and that if Mr. Hewitt were nominated, he, Mr. Tilden, would write an open letter against his election." That queered the deal, and the Democrats nominated Cleveland; but our main interest here is that Tilden thought Abram Hewitt, his own campaign manager, betrayed him in 1876 to advance his own career. (continued on page 9)