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ANDREW JOHNSON AS A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR

By HARRY WILLIAMS

In an atmosphere of gloomy despondency the Thirty-seventh Congress opened its second session in December, 1861. The preceding months had seen the secession from the Union of eleven southern states, the beginnings of civil war, and the failure of the government's attempts to subdue the Confederacy by force of arms. Within the dominant Republican party, a bitter factional struggle threatened to disrupt the administration of Abraham Lincoln. The extreme wing of the party, the "Radicals," men like Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, Benjamin F. Wade, and Zachariah Chandler, were in direct and angry disagreement with the leadership of the President. Ardent and long-time foes of the slavery system, the Radicals expected upon the outbreak of war that the administration would adopt an emancipation policy aimed at the offending South. But Lincoln, fearful of the effects of such a measure upon northern conservatives and the loyal border states, proclaimed that the war was being waged for the one purpose of restoring the Union. The disappointed Radicals seethed with sullen irritation as the President almost ignored the subject of emancipation and filled the important military positions with conservative Democratic officers. They resented in particular the secrecy with which the masters of the army shrouded their plans for the future.¹

The radical chieftains were resolved to force the administration onto anti-slavery ground. But they felt that they could not initiate a struggle without definite information concerning the intentions of the President and his military advisers. Were the generals planning an early forward movement? Was the inactivity of the armies the result of a secret sympathy for the South on the part of Democratic commanders George B. McClellan, Henry Halleck, and Don Carlos Buell? Why did the military authorities return fugitive slaves to their

¹For examples of Radical condemnation of Lincoln, see E. L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (Boston, 1894), IV, 38-39; *Congressional Globe*, 37 Cong., 2 Sess., 78, speech of Representative T. D. Eliot; Thaddeus Stevens to G. Smith, December 14, 1861, Thaddeus Stevens MSS. (in Library of Congress); Senator James W. Grimes to Mrs. Grimes, November 6, 13, 1861, William Salter, *James W. Grimes* (New York, 1876), 153-154, 156-157; *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), December 14, 1861; J. H. Bryant to Lyman Trumbull, December 5, 1861, Lyman Trumbull MSS. (in Library of Congress); George W. Julian, *Speeches on Political Questions* (New York, 1872), 202-204.

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masters? The suspicious Radicals wanted the answers to these ques-
tions. They determined to establish a congressional investigative
committee which could probe the secrets of army administration, sup-
ply the Radical cabal with reliable reports, and act as the faction's
representative in conferences with Lincoln. Soon after Congress con-
vened, the Radicals pushed through a resolution creating a joint com-
mittee endowed with broad powers "to inquire into the conduct of
the present war." The speeches of the sponsors of the measure
bristled with hostility toward the administration, which was censured
for inefficiency in the direction of the war. The proposed committee,
predicted one senator, would "keep an anxious, watchful eye over all
the executive agents who are carrying on the war. . .", while another
declared that in the future Congress would not be "easy" with the
errors of military men.²

Thus was born the famous Committee on the Conduct of the War
which was to exercise a potent and dramatic influence in the coun-
cils of the government for the next three years. The committee was,
in the bold words of its chairman, more than a mere investigative
body: it was an agency to "ferret" out any delinquency in the prosecu-
tion of the war, "apprise the administration of it, and demand a
remedy."³ The committee was a constant and irritating thorn in
Lincoln's side. It investigated the principal military campaigns,
strove to undermine officers opposed to the radical war aims, interfered
with the plans of commanders, and tried to bully Lincoln into accept-
ing the radical program.⁴

From the beginning, the Radicals dominated the membership of
the committee. The chairman, Senator "Bluff Ben" Wade of Ohio,
Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, Representative George W.
Julian of Indiana, John Covode of Pennsylvania, and Daniel Gooch
of Massachusetts were leading figures in the Radical faction. The
Democratic members were Moses F. Odell of New York from the
House and Senator Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. Johnson played a
unique role in the history of the committee. He was the only Demo-
cratic member of the Senate to enjoy the confidence of his radical
colleagues and to take a prominent part in the work of the com-
mittee. Johnson resigned from the committee in March, 1862, to be-

¹*Cong. Globe*, 37 Cong., 2 Sess., 16-17, 29-32.

²Benjamin F. Wade, *Traitors and their Sympathizers* (Washington, 1863), 2.

³The reports and testimony of the committee fill eight volumes, *Reports of the Committee on the Conduct of the War*, hereafter cited as *C.C.W.* For a description of the committee at work, see Harry Williams, "Fremont and the Politicians," *Journal of the American Military History Foundation*, II (1938), 179-191.

come military governor of Tennessee. The Radicals disregarded his three Democratic successors, who rarely attended a committee meeting, were not apprised of important decisions made by the Republican members, and exercised no influence in the deliberations of the agency.⁵ Johnson, on the other hand, engaged actively in the committee's investigations, in close cooperation with the Radicals. Even after his resignation he maintained an interest in the committee's labors. When he became president in 1865, the committee descended upon him with welcoming arms, convinced that their former associate would espouse the radical plan for the reconstruction of the South.

Undoubtedly the Radicals selected Johnson for service on such an important committee because of his outstanding record as a War Democrat. In December, 1860, he had made his famous Union speech in the Senate which brought him the plaudits of Republicans and the epithets of the southern hot-spurs.⁶ He continued to uphold the cause of the Union, while denouncing secession in the strongest terms and demanding that force be used against the Confederacy.⁷ The Republicans heard his vigorous speeches with high approval.⁸ In July, 1861, in the special session of Congress, he declared his approval of Lincoln's call for volunteers and the measures taken by the President to suppress the rebellion. He announced that during the nation's crisis he would forget previous party ties.⁹

Johnson welcomed his assignment to the committee, because he hoped to use his position on this powerful agency to prod the government into sending an army to expel the Confederate forces which occupied his beloved East Tennessee. His friends and neighbors, many of whom had fled their homes at the approach of the southern army, continually besought Johnson to make his influence felt with the military authorities that East Tennessee might be freed from southern rule. Many of them criticized the administration for failing to render military assistance to their section. "I think the

⁵Johnson was followed on the committee by Joseph Wright of Indiana, Benjamin F. Harding of Oregon, and Charles Buckalew of Pennsylvania. Odell, a War Democrat, remained a member until the committee terminated its existence in 1865. He played an active part in its labors.

⁶*Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 116-143; R. W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 165-168; G. F. Milton, *The Age of Hate: Andrew Johnson and the Radicals* (New York, 1930), 103; E. M. Coulter, *William G. Brownlow, Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 146.

⁷George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Chicago, 1884), 189.

⁸*Cong. Globe*, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 1351; Winston, *Johnson*, 179-185.

⁹Winston, *Johnson*, 212-215. Another probable cause of Johnson's appointment to the committee was the fact that he and Wade had long been associated as supporters of a homestead bill.

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¹⁶Letter of Decen *Armies* (Washingto "Our people are opp must come to our re ern Kentucky.

'unknown policy' of the administration is daily weakening the union men," wrote I. Fowlkes to Johnson. Fowlkes feared that the state would become reconciled to secession, because there was "something fixed & definite South; while all is doubt hesitation & uncertainty with our Northern friends."¹⁰

J. H. Jordan bitterly denounced the "neglect or delay, on the part of the Government, in sending arms and assistance into East Tennessee."¹¹ R. I. Staples informed Johnson, "We need help and must have it or we are lost."¹²

Johnson worked vigorously for the redemption of East Tennessee. In June he went to Washington to make a personal appeal to Lincoln, who became impressed with the necessity of sustaining the strongest Union region in Tennessee.¹³ The Senator, in cooperation with Horace Maynard, maintained a constant pressure upon the War Department and the generals to move a force into his section.¹⁴ He visited the army camps in Kentucky where recruits, many of them from East Tennessee, were receiving military instruction. To these men he spoke cheerfully of the coming liberation of their homes and families.¹⁵ Early in December he and Maynard addressed a strongly worded letter to General Don Carlos Buell, commander of the Army of the Ohio, demanding military assistance for the hard pressed people of East Tennessee.¹⁶

But Johnson's efforts to stimulate a forward movement were fruitless. Buell insisted his situation was too hazardous to risk throw-

¹⁰Fowlkes to Johnson, March 21, 23, 1861, Andrew Johnson MSS. (in Library of Congress). All citations to the Johnson MSS. are to those in the Library of Congress.

¹¹Jordan to Johnson, July 15, 1861, *ibid.*

¹²Staples to Johnson, August 16, 1861, *ibid.* See also C. Bryan to Johnson, July 9, and George Blakely to Johnson, August 22, *ibid.*

¹³Coulter, *Brownlow*, 165; J. W. Fertig, *The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee* (Chicago, 1898), 30; Winston, *Johnson*, 218-219.

¹⁴See Johnson to J. P. Wilson, September 4, 1861, Johnson MSS.; Horace Maynard to Johnson, November 13, *ibid.*

¹⁵The military authorities did not always welcome Johnson's presence in the camps. General Schoepf, in command at Crab Orchard, Kentucky, complained to Joseph Holt about "Ex-Gov. Johnson of Tennessee having of late made himself very troublesome about our camp, using language calculated to incite the men and officers of my command to insubordination. . . ." Schoepf to Holt, November 18, 1861, Holt MSS. (in Library of Congress).

¹⁶Letter of December 7, 1861, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1881-1901), Series II, Vol. I, 898. The letter declared, "Our people are oppressed and pursued as beasts of the forest. The Government must come to our relief." Buell was in charge of operations in central and eastern Kentucky.

ing a force into East Tennessee.¹⁷ At the same time, and as Johnson assumed his position on the committee, the complaints and criticisms of his constituents redoubled. They denounced the slowness of the western generals, while many believed "the government is either a failure, or it cares nothing for the East Tennesseans."¹⁸ One indignant correspondent urged Johnson to call the army to account. Had the nation, he asked, "no champion in her Legislative halls, who is possessed of moral courage sufficient to lay bare the misconduct of military chieftains, or is the Nation afraid to chastise West Pointers?"¹⁹ J. R. Mott exhorted Johnson "to pitch into all the commanders from Washington to Louisville and see if this masterly inactivity cannot be stopped and something done to save our country from utter ruin."²⁰

As soon as the committee started its investigations, Johnson proceeded to follow the advice of his friends. Numerous officers from the Army of the Potomac, summoned by the committee as witnesses, appeared before the agency to answer its interrogations. To them Johnson addressed the question: Should the armies advance immediately or remain in winter quarters and take the field in the spring? ²¹ His purpose was to place on record a body of military opinion favoring aggressive action which would include as part of its objective the liberation of East Tennessee. Johnson's questions left no doubt but that he considered an early forward movement imperative. He wanted the generals to say that a winter of inactivity would weaken the morale and discipline of the soldiers. "Does not inactivity—remaining in quarters—have a tendency to demoralize troops?" he asked General John A. Dix.²² Johnson felt that the

¹⁷Buell to General G. B. McClellan, *Official Records*, Series II, Vol. I, 901. Some East Tennesseans believed that Buell was a traitor. George Blakely informed Johnson, "If it should be known that Genl Buell is to command I presume he could raise a strong army of traitors as I find he is quite a favorite with them." Blakely to Johnson, August 22, 1861, Johnson MSS. Buell was known as a conservative general who was opposed to a war for emancipation. See M. Warner to Johnson, February 4, 1862, *ibid.*; New York *World*, August 12, 1864; Boston *Traveller*, quoted in New York *Tribune*, May 31, 1862, p. 1; *Ohio State Journal*, quoted in New York *Tribune*, October 13, 1862. Johnson later came to believe that Buell had strong southern sympathies. Johnson to Edwin M. Stanton, April 5, 1864, Edwin M. Stanton MSS. (in Library of Congress).

¹⁸L. C. Houk to Johnson, December 7, 1861, Johnson MSS. See also Elisha Smith to Johnson, December 17, Emerson Etheridge to Johnson, December 19, *ibid.*

¹⁹R. L. Stanford to Johnson, December 31, 1861, *ibid.*

²⁰Mott to Johnson, January 5, 1862, *ibid.* See also Andrew Winter to Johnson, January 14, J. H. Jordan to Johnson, January 24, Elisha Smith to Johnson, February 3, *ibid.*

²¹*C.C.W.*, 1863, I, 116, 129, 142, 154-155, 177, 211-212; *ibid.*, II, 281-282.

²²*Ibid.*, I, 226. See also *ibid.*, 130, 158.

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army should initiate some campaigns, such as one into East Tennessee, for other than purely military purposes. When General Irvin McDowell told him that Washington's victory at Trenton in the Revolutionary War possessed more political than military value, Johnson approvingly observed, "There is a political element connected with this war which must not be overlooked."²³

Johnson had definite ideas concerning the prosecution of the war. Like most civilians, he could not understand why the generals talked about the impossibility of fighting the enemy on disadvantageous ground. He believed in compelling the foe to give battle rather than withdrawing from the field.²⁴ Johnson agreed with his colleagues that General George B. McClellan's plan to attack Richmond from the east by way of the peninsula between the York and James rivers promised slight chance of success; he favored an advance southward from Washington in order to protect the capital better.²⁵ The Tennessee Senator, however, had a scheme of his own to subdue the Confederacy. This he put before the generals for their approval.

He proposed to station a defensive force of 35,000 or 50,000 men around Washington. Then he would advance a column toward Manassas, where the Confederates were encamped, and another upon the left of Manassas. Still a third column starting from the York or James rivers or Ft. Monroe would move southward to cut Richmond's railroad connections with North Carolina. "Then we should have the blockade complete clear around Baltimore to Galveston, or approximating completion." A fourth army, held ready in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, would then prepare to march into Kentucky and East Tennessee for the purpose of taking possession of the Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, and Little Rock railroad. He then summarized the advantages of his plan:

This railroad, beginning at Richmond and running to Lynchburg, and down through Georgia and Alabama, and connecting with several roads running west to Memphis, and down into Mississippi—this railroad and its connections are the great artery, the vital source that keeps this southern Confederacy together. Now, with the Potomac safe; the blockade complete; with the column at Ft. Monroe; with western Virginia all safe; if a column should march into East Tennessee and take a position upon that great railroad, what would prevent us from winding up this southern Confederacy in six months?²⁶

²³*Ibid.*, I, 142.

²⁴*Ibid.*, I, 158, to General F. J. Porter.

²⁵*Ibid.*, I, 142, to General McDowell.

²⁶*Ibid.*, I, 125-127, to General Franklin, December 26, 1861.

The generals were cool toward Johnson's proposal, but he continued to stress its advantages. "I know that military men have their own plans," he told one officer, "and perhaps they are right." But the railroad from Richmond to Chattanooga must be cut before the South could be crushed. A Union army in East Tennessee could easily accomplish this important task. "That would be like taking two or three joints out of a backbone, or shutting our hand upon an artery and stopping the circulation." It would enable the government to "bag the whole Confederacy."²⁷

Johnson worked closely with the Radicals of the committee as they endeavored to dictate to Lincoln his choice of generals and his war policies. His cooperation even extended to the point where he apparently indorsed chairman Wade for reelection to the Senate. The spectacle of the Democratic Johnson supporting the Radical Republican Wade puzzled the former's admirers in Ohio. Of the reported indorsement, one Buckeye Democrat asked Johnson to say "whether the enclosed from Forney, which is just now flooding Ohio, is in consonance with truth and whether you desire the election of Mr. Wade."²⁸ Another Democrat told Johnson he had been informed that Wade was "working faithfully with yourself for the common good of the country," but queried, "Is it consistent to support Mr. Wade or any other man of his political antecedents?"²⁹

During the time that Johnson served on the committee, his Radical colleagues were using all their influence with Lincoln to discredit General McClellan, and, if possible, to secure his removal as general-in-chief of the Union armies. Wade and Chandler believed that McClellan was a traitor who had no intention of using force to crush the Confederacy. This, they thought, was the real reason why the general insisted that his men were not ready for a winter campaign.³⁰ The basis of the Radicals' suspicions of McClellan lay in the fact that before the war he was known as a Democrat. Johnson belonged to the same political faith, yet he joined with the Radicals in their war against McClellan. His action, and his general friendliness with his radical associates, call for explanation.

It must be remembered that Johnson and Odell were Democrats who supported the war. They detested the peace wing of their party,

the Copperheads, v George Pendleton. chieftains of the They could only co to men whom J traitors.³¹ Further Clellan's friend and treasonable.³² And was his fear tha enough to take co ment," said one o up an anti war spi ment in the defen lion."³³ Johnson's ideal leader for th ambitious general one of the most p candidate for the of McClellan's sus Finally, Johnson c an army into Ea Union forces into activities because

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³⁰M. Warner to J Johnson collection party's candidate in ³¹C.C.W., 1863, I,

²⁷*Ibid.*, I, 212-213.

²⁸N. A. Gray to Johnson, March 1, 1862, Johnson MSS.

²⁹F. J. Burrow to Johnson, March 3, 1862, *ibid.*

³⁰For examples of the Radical attitude toward McClellan, see Benjamin F. Wade, *Facts for the People* (Cincinnati, 1864), 2, 6; Julian, *Recollections*, 203-204; Joseph Medill to Edwin M. Stanton, January 21, 1862, Stanton MSS.

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the Copperheads, who were led by Clement L. Vallandigham and George Pendleton. Yet they saw McClellan cordially receiving the chieftains of the Peace Democracy at his quarters day after day. They could only conclude that the general had delivered himself over to men whom Johnson and Odell considered little better than traitors.³¹ Furthermore, Johnson soon came to believe that McClellan's friend and favorite, Buell, was not only incompetent but also treasonable.³² Another reason for Johnson's enmity toward McClellan was his fear that the Peace Democrats might become powerful enough to take control of the government. "The Breckenridge element," said one of Johnson's northern friends, was seeking "to stir up an anti war spirit, which may go so far as to cripple the government in the defence of its authority, and the suppression of rebellion."³³ Johnson's correspondents warned that McClellan would be an ideal leader for the peace faction which might make the politically ambitious general the Democratic presidential nominee in 1864. As one of the most prominent Democrats in the nation and a possible candidate for the White House, Johnson did not intend that a man of McClellan's suspected principles should seize power in the party.³⁴ Finally, Johnson distrusted McClellan because of his failure to order an army into East Tennessee. The committee wanted to stir the Union forces into action on all fronts; hence Johnson supported its activities because they promised aid for his people.

The committee opened its campaign against McClellan soon after it started its investigations. On December 31, the members held a conference with Lincoln for the purpose of exploring the military situation.³⁵ A few days later, as they became increasingly convinced that McClellan meant to undertake no forward movement, they

³¹Odell said the meetings between McClellan and the Peace Democrats were a "continuing caucus for the consideration of plans of resistance to all measures which proposed to strengthen the army or the navy; to provide means for their pay, sustenance, the munitions of war, and means of transportation; and to devise means of embarrassing the government by constitutional quibbles and legal subtleties." Quoted in W. D. Kelley, *Lincoln and Stanton* (New York, 1885), 6.

³²Johnson to Edwin M. Stanton, March 29, 1862, Winston, *Johnson*, 235.

³³F. W. Bradbury to Johnson, August 17, 1861, Johnson MSS. See also Benjamin Fuller to Johnson, August 17, 1861, *ibid.*: "If a large party is to arise at the North, opposed to sustaining the Government in all constitutional means to suppress the rebellion, the dreadful consequences are too apparent, and who can say that every Northern state will not become the theatre of those terrific, heart rending scenes which now afflict Missouri, Virginia, & your own State to some extent."

³⁴M. Warner to Johnson, February 4, 1862, Johnson MSS. Many letters in the Johnson collection express the hopes of the writers that Johnson will be the party's candidate in 1864.

³⁵C.C.W., 1863, I, 72.

asked for an interview with Lincoln and his cabinet. The committee, with Johnson in attendance, met the President and his department heads on January 6. Wade, acting as the spokesman, bitingly condemned McClellan for his dilatory policy and demanded that Lincoln order him to advance.⁸⁶ But the committee's protests failed to persuade Lincoln to interfere with McClellan's plans, and the determined members prepared for another assault. This time they enlisted the aid of Edwin M. Stanton, recently appointed secretary of war. The Radicals, and Johnson and Odell, arranged a series of meetings with Stanton during which they revealed to him the evidence they had secured. They assured him that the army was in fine condition and ready for battle.⁸⁷ Stanton and the committee then joined to urge the necessity of aggressive action upon Lincoln. Their efforts resulted in the President's orders of January 27 for an advance of all the armies, instructions which McClellan was later permitted to disregard.⁸⁸

The committee was particularly irritated by McClellan's failure to break the Confederate blockade of the Potomac River. On February 18 Odell moved that the committee use its influence to force McClellan to act. Chandler suggested that the members discuss the matter with Stanton, but Wade objected that this might be construed as a criticism of Stanton's administration. Finally, the committee decided to see the secretary ostensibly for the purpose of congratulating him upon recent Union victories, but actually to use the occasion for a consideration of the blockade.⁸⁹ Johnson and Wade were selected as the committee's representatives for this important interview. They met Stanton at the War Department the next day. Wade violently denounced McClellan for permitting the siege of the capital, and Stanton replied that he felt the disgrace as deeply as did the committee. During the conversation McClellan came in, and to him Wade repeated his protests. He told the general to take his men over the Potomac, defeat the enemy, or "let them come back in their coffins." Johnson entered the report of this meeting upon the committee's journal:

Mr. Johnson stated that the interview with the secretary had been a very satisfactory one; that the secretary listened attentively to all that the chairman said, and although the chairman sometimes made his statements to Gen-

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, I, 73; Julian, *Recollections*, 201-203; *Cong. Globe*, 37 Cong., 2 Sess., 3390, Chandler's account of the meeting.

⁸⁷*C. C. W.*, 1863, I, 75; Julian, *Recollections*, 204.

⁸⁸*Official Records*, Series I, Vol. V, 41.

⁸⁹*C.C.W.*, 1863, I, 83-84; Wade to Stanton, February 19, 1862, Stanton MSS.

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1862, Stanton MSS.

eral McClellan in pretty strong and emphatic language, the secretary indorsed every statement he uttered. The secretary feels as strongly upon this subject as this committee does.⁴⁰

Early in March Johnson began to absent himself from committee meetings. He was becoming increasingly concerned with Tennessee affairs, and at Lincoln's request he accepted the office of military governor of his distracted state. The committee's journal of March 12, 1862, noted that Johnson had resigned his position.⁴¹ Thus he was not with the committee as it continued its attack upon McClellan, as it pushed the fortunes of Radical generals John C. Fremont, Joseph Hooker, and John Pope, as it saw its enemies McClellan and Buell removed from their commands. Yet he maintained an interest in its work, especially when it concerned the object of his fears, McClellan. In the spring of 1863, the Democrats were booming McClellan, now retired from active duty, as a presidential candidate. They pictured him as the able general who would have won the war had he not been thwarted by Republican interference. The McClellan movement began to assume such threatening proportions that the Republicans became seriously alarmed. The committee, with its vast body of information concerning McClellan's administration of the army, was the obvious agency to destroy his political career and to puncture the Democratic claims that he was a military genius. Accordingly, the members plunged feverishly into the work of preparing a report describing McClellan's tenure as commander of the Army of the Potomac. This document, which appeared in April, was a devastating account of McClellan's many delays, his failure to capture Richmond, his alleged treason in not supporting Pope at Manassas, and his inability to bag Lee's army after defeating it at Antietam.⁴² The Republican press hailed the report as an accurate expose of McClellan's generalship and used it as the basis for telling

⁴⁰*C.C.W.*, 1863, I, 84-85; *Detroit Post and Tribune, Life of Zachariah Chandler* (Detroit, 1880), 227-228. On several occasions Johnson disagreed with his Radical associates. When the committee investigated the Bull Run disaster for which the members blamed General Robert Patterson, Johnson moved that the general be permitted to testify in the form of a prepared statement rather than in response to a rigid cross-examination. *C.C.W.*, 1863, II, 52, 53, 78. During the committee's inquiry into the military career of their favorite officer, John C. Fremont, Johnson moved that Frank and Montgomery Blair, enemies of Fremont, be called to testify. *Ibid.*, III, 80.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, I, 89.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 1863, I, "Army of the Potomac." The first volume of the 1863 *Reports* was devoted almost exclusively to McClellan. The report, excluding the testimony, was 66 pages in length.

editorials.⁴³ But the Democrats, who recognized the document's purpose to destroy McClellan's political availability, were almost frantic in their efforts to tear down its damaging statements. The leading organ of the Peace Democracy denounced the report as "a sustained, minute and malignant attack. . . ." ⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that Johnson helped prepare this Republican campaign document. In March he was in Washington on official business. The committee members were working night and day to whip their report into shape. Johnson came to the committee rooms to aid them. Zachariah Chandler, snatching a few minutes to inform his wife that the forthcoming broadside would deal the final blow to McClellan's ambitions, wrote proudly, "The Committee is all here including Gov Johnson of Tennessee."⁴⁵ Here again, as when he was an active member of the committee, Johnson preferred to cooperate with Republicans to prevent a suspected Peace Democrat from dominating his party.⁴⁶

Johnson's final connection, and his last cordial one, with the committee Radicals occurred after he succeeded Lincoln as president. The Radicals frankly rejoiced at Lincoln's death. They had been infuriated by his attempt to reconstruct the South by executive action and along conservative lines. They knew Johnson favorably through his work on the committee and considered his accession "a god-send."⁴⁷ On April 15, a few hours after Lincoln's assassination, the Radical faction caucused to determine the possibility of inducing Johnson to remodel the cabinet and to adopt "a line of policy less conciliatory than that of Mr. Lincoln."⁴⁸ At the same time, the Radical members of the committee, delighted that their staunch comrade of former days was at the head of the government, were discussing methods by which to make themselves his unofficial advisers. They were sure that Johnson would follow their guidance on the reconstruction issue, that "the presence and influence of the Committee, of which Johnson had been a member, would aid the administration in getting on the right track."⁴⁹ But they feared that

⁴³New York Tribune, April 6, 7, 1863; New York Times, April 6, 7; Detroit Advertiser and Tribune, April 8.

⁴⁴New York World, April 6, 1863. See also New York Herald, April 6, 10, 28; Detroit Free Press, April 8, 9.

⁴⁵Chandler to Mrs. Chandler, March 31, 1863, Zachariah Chandler MSS. (in Library of Congress).

⁴⁶McClellan's leading journalistic champions were Copperhead organs such as the New York World and the Detroit Free Press.

⁴⁷Julian, *Recollections*, 255.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 255.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 257.

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Conservatives in the cabinet might get to Johnson first. Accordingly, Wade addressed a letter to Johnson asking for an interview: "I have been instructed by the Committee on the Conduct of the War to inform you that your old associates upon that committee would be pleased to wait upon you at such time as may suit your convenience. They have just returned from the city of Richmond, where they saw and heard many things which they deem it would be well to make known to you at the present time."⁵⁰

Johnson readily agreed to meet the committee on the following day at his temporary quarters in the Treasury Building. It was at this conference that Wade uttered his oft-quoted statement, "Johnson, we have faith in you. By the gods, there will be no trouble now in running the government." Johnson's conversation "cheered" the committee. He was in that vindictive frame of mind that made his early pronouncements on reconstruction seem so radical. His vigorous declaration that treason and traitors must be punished convinced the members that he was one of them. Wade approvingly advised him to hang a baker's dozen of the rebel leaders.⁵¹ The encouraged Radicals returned from the meeting to record in the committee's journal that they had "waited upon the President yesterday, and had an exceedingly satisfactory interview with him."⁵²

The committee continued to keep themselves at Johnson's side and to influence his policies. The elated Wade reported to the Radicals that the President had condemned the civil government set up by Lincoln in Louisiana.⁵³ Wade believed he had convinced Johnson that reconstruction should be delayed until Congress met; but he could not persuade the President to expel the Conservatives from his cabinet. "... But I have great faith in Mr. Johnson," he assured Benjamin F. Butler, "and believe he is entirely sound on all these subjects; yet I shall never feel safe while he submits to such surroundings."⁵⁴ The Radicals feared that Johnson might ask Secretary of War Stanton to resign from the cabinet, but the committee dispelled their alarms and those of Stanton. One of Stanton's friends after talking with Gooch of the committee, informed the

⁵⁰C.C.W., 1865, I, xxxvi.

⁵¹Julian, *Recollections*, 257; *Detroit Post and Tribune*, *Life of Chandler*, 280-282; A. G. Riddle, *Benjamin F. Wade* (Cleveland, 1886), 268.

⁵²C.C.W., 1865, I, xxxvi. Wade, Chandler, Gooch, and Julian composed the committee at this meeting.

⁵³Charles Sumner to F. W. Bird, Pierce, *Sumner*, IV, 241.

⁵⁴Wade to Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War* (privately issued, Norwood, 1917), V, 617-618.

worried Secretary "that the Committee on the Conduct of the War who are supposed to have influence with him [Johnson] 'were a unit in their desire that no change should be made in the office you hold and that they should probably address him to that effect.'"⁵⁵

Meanwhile Johnson continued to strike the radical note in speeches to visiting state delegations, to a chorus of approval from the Radical press.⁵⁶ While the faction's leaders enjoyed the denunciations of treason in these addresses, they were becoming restless at Johnson's failure to announce his support of the Radicals' plan for the national government to grant the suffrage to the Negroes. On May 12 the Radicals held a caucus at the National Hotel at which Johnson's sincerity was questioned. Wade, however, assured the gathering that the President was sound and that he favored giving the Negro the ballot.⁵⁷ But even Wade was beginning to suspect that the committee had lost its hold upon Johnson. Two days later he observed that the President "talks first rate, but don't just say the word."⁵⁸

Johnson's break with the committee and the Radicals was approaching completion. Although he might talk of punishing the Bourbon leaders of the South, Johnson could have no real sympathy with the radical program of Negro suffrage conferred by the national government and political favors extended to northern industrialists. Fundamentally, he was a representative of the small white farmer class and an advocate of the Jeffersonian doctrine of states' rights. Indeed his split with the Radicals might have come sooner had it not been for the influence which the committee exerted with him. On May 29 he issued an amnesty proclamation and also his proclamation establishing civil government in North Carolina, which was followed by similar documents for the remaining unreconstructed states.⁵⁹ The Radicals objected heartily to Johnson's plan of reconstruction as outlined in the proclamation for North Carolina, even though it was very similar to the Wade-Davis bill which they had

⁵⁵J. H. Clifford to Stanton, April 25, 1865, Stanton MSS.

⁵⁶New York *Independent*, April 27, 1865; *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly Newspaper* (New York), May 6, 1865.

⁵⁷Julian, *Recollections*, 263.

⁵⁸J. W. Schaffer to B. F. Butler, May 14, 1865, quoting Wade. *Butler Correspondence*, V, 619.

⁵⁹J. D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1896-1899), VI, 310-314, the amnesty proclamation and the North Carolina proclamation.

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supported in the previous year.⁶⁰ But by 1865 the Radicals had moved beyond the Wade-Davis measure. They disliked Johnson's scheme because he made no mention of Negro suffrage and because he assumed that reconstruction was the business of the president rather than of Congress.

As Johnson carried forward his activities for the restoration of the southern states, Wade abandoned him to the Conservatives.⁶¹ In the fierce partisan struggles of the next few years, Johnson had no more determined or relentless foes than his once friendly associates of the committee, Wade, Chandler, and Julian.

⁶⁰For pertinent comments on the similarity between Johnson's plan and the Wade-Davis bill, see W. B. Hesseltine, *A History of the South, 1607-1936* (New York, 1936), 592. The machinery for readmission of a state set up by Johnson resembled the Wade-Davis plan more than it did Lincoln's.

⁶¹Wade to Butler, July 19, 1865, *Butler Correspondence*, V, 641-642.