

with undefined powers to reconstruct the State governments. When so appointed, these commanders were empowered with unlimited and absolute authority. They were endowed with legislative, judicial, and executive power. The President himself could give them no instructions. They could abolish charters, extend franchises, stay the collection of debts, levy taxes, impose fines and inflict penalties, authorize the issue of bonds and the contraction of State indebtedness, set aside the decisions of the courts, remove all officers and fill all vacancies without the form of an election, and try persons by commissions selected by themselves.†

President Johnson vetoed the Bill in toto, pointing out that it was an unconstitutional, unnecessary, and vicious piece of legislation. His criticism of it was a masterpiece of logic and truth. It was passed over the President's veto March 2, 1867, thereby becoming an act of Congress. The iron heel was presumably now firmly upon the South, but Congress in its haste had not reckoned with the effect of placing the appointment of the district commanders in the hands of an honest man and true patriot. President Johnson selected the fairest men in the Federal army to fill these posts.

An act amendatory of the original act, likewise passed over the President's veto March 23, 1867, defined the methods of reconstructing the State governments. Before registration the applicant must have subscribed an oath that he had not participated, either directly or indirectly, in any rebellion against the United States, nor given aid or comfort to its enemies. This, of course, debarred most of the Southern white men, and at the same time admitted the freedmen to registration. After the completion of such registration an election should be held prior to September 1st, 1867, of delegates to a convention, the duty of which was the framing of a constitution for the establishment of civil government in the State. Provision was also made for the usual machinery of an election. Inspectors were required to take the "iron-clad oath".^a

In Florida the registration showed 11,148 whites and 15,434 colored entitled to vote in accordance with the rules prescribed.^c The Convention met at Tallahassee January

†"Union-Disunion-Reunion", Cox, p. 480.