

Fifty-Second Congress

Dec. 7, 1891-Mar. 3, 1893

Administration of Benjamin Harrison

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Historical Background

Much of the major work of the 52nd Congress focused on American industrial conflicts. Although Congress in 1868 had established an eight-hour day on public works projects, private industry had never followed suit. Industry had moved from twelve- and thirteen-hour days early in the nineteenth century, to ten-hour days and a fifty-eight to sixty-hour week by 1890, but many still felt such concessions were insufficient, and considerable agitation for the eight-hour day continued. In August 1892, nearly two decades before most American workers were to gain any additional concessions, Congress enacted an eight-hour day for all government employees. Though not the first law of its kind to be passed by Congress (the first was passed in 1868), the original law did not achieve the desired results.

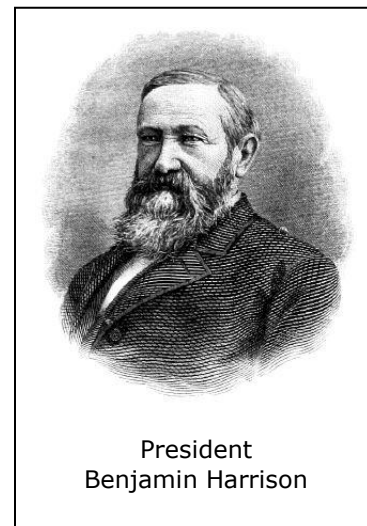
The Railway Safety Appliance Act of March 1893, designed to assure greater safety of railroad employees as well as passengers, was likewise adopted with the bipartisan approval of a Democratic House and a Republican Senate. Other major pieces of legislation approved by the 52nd Congress extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for another ten years and provided that the President might appoint ambassadors instead of ministers.

Source:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

War or Peace?

Crisis in Chile



House	Senate
Majority Party: Democrat (238 seats)	Majority Party: Republican (47 seats)
Minority Party: Republican (86 seats)	Minority Party: Democrat (39 seats)
Other Parties: Populist (8 seats)	Other Parties: Populist (2 seats)
Speaker of the House: Charles Frederick Crisp	President Pro Tempore: Charles F. Manderson

In 1884, as it triumphed over the Bolivian-Peruvian alliance in the War of the Pacific, the Chilean Navy emerged as a new threat to U.S. hegemony in the western hemisphere. In 1889, political disagreements between the government of President José Manuel Balmaceda and members of the Chilean Congress had deteriorated to such an extent that the Congress became openly hostile to the President. According to Chilean custom at the time, no minister could remain in office without the support of a majority of Congress. This put President Balmaceda in the difficult position of appointing cabinet ministers who could count on the support of majorities in both houses of Congress while at the same time supporting the politics and policies of the President. On January 1, 1891, with the crisis mounting, Balmaceda published a manifesto to the nation, in which he explained that due to the intractability of the Congress, the budget of 1890 would be considered the official budget of 1891. Members of Congress, viewing Balmaceda's move as an illegal power grab, issued a proclamation appointing a new commander of the Chilean navy and declaring that the navy would not recognize the authority of Balmaceda as long as he continued to act in contravention of the law. The move was supported by majorities in both houses of Congress, which proceeded to sign an Act of Deposition against Balmaceda. The Chilean Civil War, which transpired between January and September 1891, pitted the President and the Army of Chile, which was loyal to him, against the Congress and the Chilean Navy that allied with it. The United States backed Balmaceda in the conflict and therefore initiated a ban on exports by the congressional side. When a Chilean cargo ship was suspected of illegally loading a shipment of arms in San Diego, the United States dispatched a small naval contingent to force the ship to return to San Diego. Moreover, during the war, Balmaceda ordered a U.S.-owned company, the Central and South American Cable Company, to restore the submarine telegraph cables between Santiago, Chile and Lima, Peru, while rendering useless the cable connecting to the headquarters of the congressional faction.

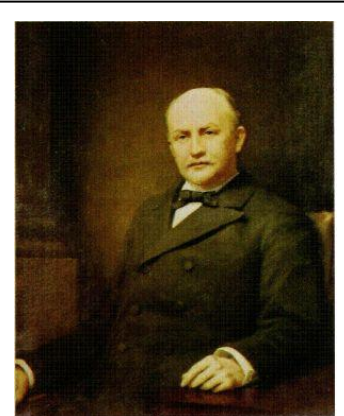
Thus, when the congressional faction ultimately prevailed in the civil war, it came as little surprise that they harbored certain resentments against the United States. It was in this environment that a group of sailors took their shore leave from the *USS Baltimore* in the Chilean port city of Valparaíso on October 16, 1891. A fight broke out when one of the sailors purportedly spit on a picture of Chilean national hero Arturo Prat. When the dust settled, two sailors were dead and more than a dozen others wounded. The incident invoked fury and demands for immediate redress from the United States, all of which were met with initial refusal on the part of the Chileans. During his 1891 State of the Union Address, President Harrison condemned the incident and called on Congress for "decided action." Diplomatic relations were strained so tightly that the U.S. and Chile nearly came to the brink of war. However, by February 1892, the new Chilean government had backed down and agreed to pay \$75,000 in reparations.

Kingdom of Hawaii

In Hawaii, the imposition of the Bayonet Constitution in 1887, which stripped the King of much of his authority had led to a protracted period of crisis in the island kingdom. Lili'uokalani, the sister of King Kalākaua, was mortified by the humiliating treaty and the ease with which Kalākaua signed



President Pro Tempore
Charles F. Manderson



Speaker of the House
Charles Frederick Crisp

away their ancestral heritage. As a result, she actively sought to depose her brother and assume authority. An organized plot to overthrow Kalākaua and install Lili'uokalani in 1888 was inadvertently revealed a matter of days before it was to be put into effect. On more than one occasion, members of the Missionary Party, who had drafted and imposed the Bayonet Constitution on Kalākaua, offered to install Lili'uokalani on the throne, but she refused these offers, fearing that she'd be a powerless figurehead, just as her brother had become. In September 1891, Kalākaua traveled to San Francisco due to his deteriorating health, where he died on January 20, elevating Lili'uokalani as Queen.

Lili'uokalani's ascension to the throne coincided with an economic crisis touched off by the passage of the McKinley Tariff Act. The Act, while raising tariffs on overall imports to an average of nearly 50%, also removed the tariffs on imported sugar. The act, in effect, wiped out the advantage bestowed upon Hawaiian sugar producers by the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875, effectively crippling the Hawaiian sugar industry. Lili'uokalani floated a number of proposals for curtailing the crisis, including organizing a lottery and licensing opium production, but all of these were rejected. The new Queen was most concerned, however, with undoing the indignity of the Bayonet Constitution and Kalākaua's abdication of his duty as steward of the office. Lili'uokalani drafted a new constitution that would have restored the authorities stripped by the current constitution, while extending suffrage by reducing some of the property requirements and rescinding the franchise from many American and European resident aliens.

To generate support for her new constitution, Lili'uokalani toured several of the islands on horseback and talked to people about her proposed constitution, sparking enthusiasm among her subjects for their new Queen. However, when Lili'uokalani briefed her cabinet on the new draft constitution and her plan to submit it for approval, they refused to support the plan, setting up a standoff between Queen Lili'uokalani and her supporters, and the largely white agricultural interests allied with the Reform Party of Hawaii. Moreover, the Reform Party, was at this point conspiring to depose Queen Lili'uokalani. When detectives informed Marshal of the Kingdom, Charles B. Wilson, of the coup plot, he contacted the attorney general and requested warrants for the arrest of the plotters and for martial law to be declared. However, upon learning that U.S. Minister John L. Stevens supported the conspirators, the attorney general blocked the request out of fear of escalating the crisis, refusing to support the Queen against the wishes of the United States government. On January 17, 1893, the plot was set in motion and Queen Lili'uokalani was placed under house arrest at 'Iolani Palace. With Lili'uokalani dispatched, the coup organizers dissolved the monarchy and the kingdom was briefly replaced by the short-lived Republic of Hawaii. The overarching goal of the conspirators, however, was formal annexation of Hawaii by the United States, which would occur in 1898, culminating, in 1959, with Hawaii's accession as the 50th U.S. state.

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Harrison, Benjamin. [*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress. With the Annual Message of the President.*](#) House, Dec. 9, 1891. 52nd Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1 (Pr23.1:891). ProQuest Congressional, 2920 H.exdoc.1/1

Proctor, Redfield. [*Report of the Secretary of War; being part of the message and documents communicated to the two Houses of Congress at the beginning of the first session of the Fifty-second Congress.*](#) Department of War, Nov. 3, 1891. 52nd Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1/3 (W1.1:891/v.1). ProQuest Congressional, 2921 H.exdoc.1/3

Economic Trends and Conditions

President Benjamin Harrison announced in his 1892 State of the Union that “the general condition affecting the commercial and industrial interests of the United States are in the highest degree favorable,” with the country’s wealth amounting to \$62,610,000,000, a 287 percent increase from 1860. Investment, foreign commerce, and industry were all growing, allowing Harrison to further proclaim that “there never has been a time in our history when work was so abundant or when wages were as high.”

But even as President Harrison was extolling the great successes of U.S. commercial interests, tensions remained over the rapid industrialization of the economy in the post-Civil War era and the profound changes it was imposing on American life. In the years leading to this moment, the Congress and the President worked to address some of the more egregious abuses of industrial interests. To curtail the massive accumulation of power by the new railroad companies and the anti-competitive practices they employed to maintain it, Congress enacted the Interstate Commerce Act. The Act established the independent Interstate Commerce Commission with authority to investigate and prosecute the improper use of rebates and other inducements to attract the business of trusts at the expense of smaller businesses and private individuals who were forced to pay whatever the railroads demanded due to a lack of competition. Previously, the 51st Congress had enacted the Sherman Antitrust Act to empower the Federal government to regulate interstate commerce and prosecute cases in which interstate commerce and foreign trade are restrained by anticompetitive practices. Taken together, the two acts established the foundation for a vigorous regulatory regime to oversee an increasingly sophisticated and complex economy.

Homestead Strike

Though these programs were envisioned as tools to fight all of the many potential abuses of monopolistic industrial combinations, including abusive labor practices, in practice, the regulatory tools they created were chiefly used to curb anticompetitive business practices which harmed consumers and curtail competition. The new regulations, however, did little in the way of protecting workers and addressing the pronounced uptick in labor stoppages and other actions. In June of 1892, workers affiliated with the Amalgamated Association of Iron & Steel Workers (AA) employed at Andrew Carnegie’s Homestead Steel Works near Pittsburgh organized a work stoppage. The AA was coming off a string of successes at the Homestead plant, having organized a strike in 1882 preventing management from

introducing a non-union clause in the workers' contracts and successfully battling away attempts to break a strike organized in 1889, when negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement broke down. Though the union made some concessions in the latter example, the victory emboldened the AA, whose members became increasingly belligerent, poisoning the relationship between workers and management. Meanwhile, the Carnegie Steel Company had developed a series of technical innovations to their steelmaking processes, allowing for a great expansion in capacity at the Homestead plant, leading to a marked increase of hiring mainly unskilled workers. The rapid influx of large numbers of unskilled workers caused uneasiness among the plant's original, largely skilled, workforce represented by the AA.

With the Homestead plant's collective bargaining agreement set to expire on June 30, 1892, negotiators from the local AA chapter, who represented roughly 800 of the nearly 4,000 workers employed at Homestead, entered talks to draft a new agreement. In 1881, Andrew Carnegie, who publicly supported labor unions, had appointed Henry Clay Frick to oversee the company's operations. Frick was decidedly anti-union and was committed to breaking the AA at Homestead. As negotiations began, union representatives, citing the strength of the current business climate, asked for a pay raise for their employees, which Frick countered by offering a 22% wage decrease that would apply to roughly half of the union's workers at the plant. Frick had the support of Carnegie who, while generally in favor of labor unions, believed that AA was an elitist organization representing only a small number of the plant's workers. On April 30, 1892, Frick indicated that he would continue to bargain for 29 days, after which, if there was no new contract, Carnegie Steel would no longer recognize the union. On June 29, the day before the current collective bargaining agreement expired, Frick locked the AA workers out of the Homestead plant. The next day, union leaders announced that Frick's action broke the contract by locking workers out a day before their contract expired. Frick's high-handed tactics generated sympathy for the AA workers, leading to the Knights of Labor, who represented transportation workers at Homestead, agreeing to join the strike. Moreover, workers at Carnegie plants in Pittsburgh, Duquesne, Union Mills, and Beaver Falls also went on strike in sympathy with the Homestead workers.

The striking workers were intent upon shutting the plant down and keeping it down for the duration of the strike. Frick responded by advertising for replacement workers. As strikebreakers arrived in town to replace the striking workers, strikers were there to prevent them from reaching the plant. Determined to reopen the plant, Frick turned to the Pinkerton Detective Agency, who sent 300 Pinkertons to Homestead with a plan to get them onto the factory grounds and reopen the plant on July 6. Because access to the plant was obstructed by the strikers and their sympathizers, the Pinkertons planned to reach the plant via the river. However, the strikers were informed of their plans and were ready to intercept the strikebreakers. The Pinkertons were armed and loaded onto two barges roughly five miles downriver from the plant. When the strikebreakers attempted to land at 4:00 that morning, union members and their sympathizers tore down the

barbed-wire fence Frick had installed at the beginning of the crisis and flooded the plant grounds. Shots rang out as the Pinkertons made an attempt to land, though the source of the first shots remains a matter of dispute. The cycle would be repeated several times throughout the morning, with the Pinkertons attempting to land and generating a fresh exchange of fire. Frick was convinced that the longer the chaos continued the more likely it was that Pennsylvania Governor Robert E. Pattison would intervene, effectively bringing an end to strike. Homestead Sheriff William H. McCleary telegraphed the Governor at 10:00 am, describing the situation and formally requesting intervention.

This situation continued throughout the day until 5:00 pm, when the Pinkertons, having been given assurances that they'd be escorted safely out of town, surrendered and were escorted to the opera house, which was serving as a temporary jail. The next day, union members unsuccessfully tried to convince the Governor that order had been restored. Unconvinced, the Governor ordered the Pennsylvania militia to Homestead to pacify the situation and reopen the plant on July 12. Frick immediately began hiring strikebreakers and restarting production, but the strike would have a negative impact on Republican electoral candidates. Then, on July 23, the crisis took a new turn when Alexander Berkman, an anarchist activist from New York, arrived in Homestead to carry out an assassination plot with his lover, fellow anarchist Emma Goldman. Berkman managed to gain entrance to Frick's office, shot and stabbed him, although the industrialist ultimately survived. The assassination attempt turned public sentiment against the union, heralding the end of the strike. The union voted to return to work on Carnegie's terms—Frick had succeeded in breaking the Amalgamated Association of Iron & Steel Workers. In total 12 men had died during the struggle, however, the strike's significance would continue for many years. Not only did the Homestead strike bring down a union that had been among the most effective and confrontational in the field of organized labor, it also signaled the end of a series of victories on the part of labor organizers and the inauguration of a period of industry blowback and retrenchment.

Sources:

Harrison, Benjamin. [*Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress, with the Annual Message of the President, December 5, 1892.*](#) House, Dec. 6, 1892. 52nd Congress, 2nd Session, H.exdoc.1/1 (Pr23.1:892). ProQuest Congressional, 3076 H.exdoc.1/1

Oates, William Calvin. [*Employment of Pinkerton Detectives.*](#) Committee on Judiciary. House, Feb. 7, 1893. 52nd Congress, 2nd Session, H.rp.2447. ProQuest Congressional, 3142-1 H.rp.2447

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

In re Ross (Ross v. McIntyre), holding that a vessel being American is evidence that the seamen on board are American and subject to American law, 140 U.S. 453 (1891)

Counselman v. Hitchcock, concluded that a law that grants limited immunity to a witness compelled to testify does not satisfy the Constitutional protection against self-incrimination since evidence found using information provided in the testimony can be used to prosecute the witness, 142 U.S. 547 (1892)

Field v. Clark, concluded that the Tariff Act of 1890, which established certain tariff rates and gave the President the authority to suspend or amend those rates in response to changes made by a trading partner, did not constitute an unconstitutional abrogation of Congress's legislative authority to the President, but rather that the authority to adjust the stipulated tariff rates was discretionary, 143 U.S. 649 (1892)

Illinois Central Railroad v. Illinois, holding that navigable waters are of special interest to the public and are held in trust by the state and reaffirmed that each state in its sovereign capacity holds permanent title to all submerged lands within its borders, 146 U.S. 387 (1892)

Source:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America, Analysis and Interpretation](#). Senate, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6. ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1891 Events

- **Jan. 16:** The 1891 Chilean Civil War breaks out
- **Jan. 29:** [Liliuokalani is proclaimed Queen of Hawaii](#)
- **Mar. 9–Mar. 12:** A powerful storm off England's south coast sinks 14 ships
- **Mar. 15:** Jesse W. Reno patents the first escalator at Coney Beach
- **Mar. 18:** Official opening of the London-Paris telephone system
- **May 1:** Troops fire on a workers' May Day demonstration in support of the 8-hour workday in Fourmies, France, killing 9 and wounding 30
- **May 5:** The Music Hall in New York (now known as Carnegie Hall) has its grand opening and first public performance
- **June 1:** The Johnstown Inclined Plane, a funicular capable of carrying passengers and automobiles, opens in Johnstown, Pennsylvania
- **Aug. 29:** [Chilean dictator José Balmaceda is driven from office following the Chilean Civil War](#)
- **Oct.:** Eugène Dubois finds the first fragmentary bones of *Pithecanthropus erectus* (later redesignated *Homo erectus*), or 'Java Man'
- **Oct. 28:** [An 8.0 earthquake strikes the village of Utsuzumi in rural Gifu, Japan, killing over 7,000](#)
- **Nov. 11:** The Jindandao Incident breaks out in the Juu Uda League, Inner Mongolia, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 150,000 Mongols, before being suppressed by government troops in late December

- **Nov. 15:** The Brazilian Old Republic Constitution is promulgated

1892 Events

- **Jan. 1:** [Ellis Island begins accommodating immigrants to the U.S.](#)
- **Jan. 20:** At the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, the first official basketball game is played
- **Feb. 27:** Rudolf Diesel applies for a patent on his compression ignition engine (the Diesel engine)
- **Mar. 15:** Jesse W. Reno patents the "inclined elevator," the first escalator
- **Mar. 31:** The world's first fingerprinting bureau is formally opened by the Buenos Aires Chief of Police
- **Apr. 15:** [The General Electric Company is established through the merger of the Thomson-Houston Company and the Edison General Electric Company](#)
- **May 28:** John Muir organizes the Sierra Club
- **June 7:** Homer Plessy is arrested for sitting on the whites-only car in Louisiana, leading to the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case
- **June 30:** *Homestead Strike* - [The Homestead Strike begins in Homestead, Pennsylvania](#)
- **July 6:** *Homestead Strike* - [A fight between about 300 Pinkerton detectives and the strikers at Homestead, leaves 12 men dead](#)
- **Aug. 4:** The father and stepmother of Lizzie Borden are found murdered in their Fall River, Massachusetts home
- **Aug. 9:** Thomas Edison receives a patent for a two-way telegraph
- **Oct. 5:** Dalton Gang killed in a shootout after an attempted bank robbery in Coffeyville, Kansas
- **Nov. 8:** Grover Cleveland is elected becoming the only U.S. President to ever serve non-consecutive terms
- **Nov. 10:** Panama Canal financial scandal breaks in France; Builder Ferdinand de Lesseps and his associates are committed for trial for corruption and mismanagement
- **Dec. 17:** The magazine *Vogue* is launched as a weekly newspaper in the U.S.
- **Dec. 18:** *The Nutcracker* ballet with music by Tchaikovsky premieres at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, Russia

Sources:

[Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution. \[...\] June 30, 1898.](#) Smithsonian Institution, Mar. 4, 1899. 55th Congress, 3rd Session, H.doc.309. ProQuest Congressional, 3833 H.doc.309

["Bills, Memorials, and Resolutions."](#) Congressional Record, 52nd Congress, 1st Session (May 11, 1892) Vol. 23, p. 4192. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1892-0511

Blaine, James Gillespie. [Foreign Relations.](#) Department of State, House, Jan. 5, 1891. 52nd Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1/2. ProQuest Congressional, 2920 H.exdoc.1/2

["Employment of Pinkerton Men."](#) Congressional Record, 52nd Congress, 1st Session (July 25, 1892) Vol. 23, p. 6692. ProQuest Congressional, CR-1892-0725

Morgan, John Tyler. [Report on inquiry into whether irregularities have occurred in diplomatic or other intercourse between United States and Hawaii in relation to recent political revolution in Hawaii](#). Committee on Foreign Relations. Senate, Feb. 26, 1894. 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, S.rp.227 (Y4.F76/2:H31/1). ProQuest Congressional, 3180 S.rp.227

Stump, Herman. [Immigration Investigation](#). Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization. House, July 28, 1892. 52nd Congress, 1st Session, H.rp.2090. ProQuest Congressional, 3053 H.rp.2090

Williams, Archibald Hunter Arrington. [Employment of Pinkerton detectives by corporations](#). Committee on the Judiciary. House, July 6, 1892. 52nd Congress, 1st Session, H.misdoc.310. ProQuest Congressional, 2959 H.misdoc.310

Major Acts

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892. Extended the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 for another 10 years and provided regulations for deportation of Chinese not lawfully entitled to remain in the United States. Required that all Chinese laborers entitled to remain in the United States obtain certificates of residence from district collectors of internal revenue. Approved May 5, 1892. ([27 Stat. 25, Chap. 60](#)) Certain provisions of this Act were subsequently held unconstitutional in *Wong Wing v. United States*, 163 U.S. 228 (1896).

Hours of Labor. Limited the hours of daily service of laborers and mechanics employed by the Government of the United States, by the District of Columbia, or by any contractor or subcontractor of a public works. Approved Aug. 1, 1892. ([27 Stat. 340, Chap. 352](#))

Diplomatic and Consular Service Appropriations Act of 1893. Authorized the President to allow certain American envoys accredited to foreign countries as ministers to receive the title of ambassador. Approved Mar. 1, 1893. ([27 Stat. 496, Chap. 182](#))

Railway Safety Appliance Act. Required that all railroads engaged in interstate commerce equip their cars with automatic couplers and continuous brakes and their locomotives with driving-wheel brakes after January 1, 1898. Mar. 2, 1893. ([27 State. 531, Chap. 196](#))

Source:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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