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The Civil War Income Tax and the Republican Party 1861-1872

Christopher Shepard

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A flat tax? Tax cuts? Complete elimination of the income tax? These ideas have most certainly been advocated by members of the Republican Party during the past few decades. Party leaders such as George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich expressed disdain for the income tax and utilized their power to remove it as a revenue source. Few people, however, realize that the economic principle of income tax elimination among Republicans can be traced back at least to the Civil War and Reconstruction. Initially used to finance that war, the Federal income tax became a hotly-debated issue at a time when America was trying to put back together a fractured nation. The issue split the party, with Midwestern and Southern Republicans wanting to continue the income tax, and Northern and Western Republicans championing its demise. In the end, the anti-income tax wing took control of the Republican Party and shaped its economic principles for the future. The book is an in-depth look into how the Republicans in Congress dealt with the creation of the United States' first income tax and how it affected the party for the future. The author argues that the anti-income tax faction of the Republican Party won the debate and took over the party - and to this day, the Republican Party typically promotes either cutting taxes or eliminating them altogether. The author gives a brief history of the formation of the Republican Party and how they developed their economic views in distinction from the declining Whig Party, who mostly sought to fund the federal budget through tariffs and not by taxing the people directly. The second half of the book looks at the different income tax legislations and how Republicans in Congress responded to them. Each chapter begins with a brief historical context at the time when an income tax bill was being discussed in Congress.

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