

The Federalist Party

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The Federalist Party was one of the two original parties which existed after the passing of the constitution. The origin of the party was the movement to ratify the constitution.

George Washington initially led the Federalists, which formed during his first administration. However Alexander Hamilton quickly became the leading force behind the party.

Alexander Hamilton was initially critical of the American revolutionaries, but after time he became one of the most prominent of them. He became Washington's aide, a job which he quit because he wanted a field command. During this period Hamilton began to write papers formulating his ideas for a national bank and a representative government with a strong executive branch. Eventually he was given the command of an infantry regiment, which he successfully led in the battle for Yorktown. After the war Hamilton was highly critical of the Articles of Confederation, and was heavily involved in the creation and ratification process of the Constitution. After the ratification he supported Washington, and received the appointment to secretary of the treasury.

Hamilton's subsequent economic actions essentially defined the platform going forward for the Federalists. The first problem which he addressed was the problem of the national debt from the revolution. Hamilton's first proposal was to redeem war bonds and securities at face value. This was controversial because they had depreciated, and that would make the national debt even larger. His second proposal was to assume all of the states debt into a central government debt pool. His third proposal was to create a central bank which could manage government funds and be responsible for issuing a national

currency. This was controversial because many people felt that this was expanding the federal government beyond its constitutional powers and into the states powers. His fourth proposal was to create a heavy excise tax. These four principles led Hamilton to create the Federalist Party. These economic policies were designed to stable the national debt and economy, promote manufacturing business, and protect American businesses. This lead southerners and agrarians to dislike the Federalists; and lead business owners, bankers, shop owners and in general northerners to support the Federalists. One of the other major beliefs of the Federalists had to do with foreign policy; during the war between Britain and France the Federalists loosely supported the British.

The only president to label themselves as a Federalist president was John Adams. One of his most successful actions was the appointment of John Marshall as chief justice of the Supreme Court, throughout his career Marshall voted along with Federalist policies. Although he tried to implement Federalist policies, and to some extent succeeded, John Adams had a rough presidency. His passage of the alien and sedition acts essentially sabotaged his presidency, restricting his ability to accomplish all that he could have. Adams also had the problem of not getting along with Hamilton who was the true constant leader of the Federalist Party. During Adams's presidency Hamilton used Adams's cabinet as spies who fed information to Hamilton and tried to manipulate policy to his liking. During Adams's presidency tension grew with France, this led to congress increasing the size of the military, and appointing George Washington as the commander. Hamilton convinced Washington to appoint him as the second in command. With this new position Hamilton began to formulate plans to march the army to South America and

create an empire. However, tensions with France decreased and the army was returned to a smaller size, preventing Hamilton from reaching his goals. When Adams found out about all of Hamilton's actions he publicly criticized him. As a result Hamilton broke with Adams. Hamilton went on to attempt to block Adams's reelection in the election of 1800. As a result two republicans tied the vote and the vote went to the House of Representatives. The two republicans were Burr and Jefferson. Hamilton hated Burr and so he pulled to get Jefferson elected and succeeded. However, when Burr found out about some of the things which Hamilton had said about him he challenged Hamilton to a Duel in which Hamilton died.

Although the Federalist Party continued to live on after Adams's presidency and Hamilton's death the Federalists slowly declined. The final blow to the Federalists was the War of 1812 and the Hartford Convention. The Federalists vehemently opposed the war. During the conference Federalists proposed having their New England controlled states succeed and make independent peace with Britain. After the war ended everyone remembered the Federalists' suggestion for succession and their supported died. They did however have a widespread effect during their existence. Hamilton's economic policies were implemented, and eventually the economy stabilized. And the appointment of Marshall as the Supreme Court chief justice led to a long string of court rulings which supported Federalist beliefs, especially the belief that the central government should be powerful.

## References

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