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## THE DOWNFALL OF THE RADICALS IN TENNESSEE

BY J. A. SHARP

Radicalism reached the zenith of its hectic career in Tennessee politics in 1869. Receiving its power by extra-legal means, it was destined to lose it in the same way.

In January, 1865, a group of Unionists, representing a minority of the people of Tennessee, met in Nashville and declared null and void the acts of the secession government and established in its stead a *de facto* government of Union men. William G. Brownlow, the nemesis of "Rebels", was installed as governor.<sup>1</sup> Under the "Parson's" leadership the legislature of 1865 disfranchised all who were suspected of rebel sentiments, passed a sedition act, and organized bands of Union men to aid in suppressing "unreconstructed rebels".<sup>2</sup> Unionists of less radical sympathies than Brownlow disapproved of these acts and the result was a division of the Union party into two groups, the Conservatives and the Radicals.<sup>3</sup> Ex-Governor William B. Campbell led the former and, with other Conservatives, was elected to Congress in 1865. These five were from Middle and West Tennessee. Only three Radicals, all from East Tennessee, were elected.

The results of this election were disappointing to Brownlow and the Radicals, and they sought to make it impossible to elect Conservatives again.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the legislature in 1866 passed an act which disfranchised all who had not consistently opposed secession and the Confederacy, and could not prove the same to a county commissioner of registration. The same legislature enfranchised the ex-slaves. The gubernatorial campaign of 1867 followed. Brownlow was the Radical candidate for reelection and the Conservatives nominated Emerson Etheridge. No less than Brownlow, Etheridge was adept in the art of ridicule, slander, and personal abuse of his enemies and the campaign proved exciting, especially to the negroes who voted for the first time. Evidently the commissioners of reg-

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Tennessee*, 1865, pp. IV-V, cited hereafter as *Acts*.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts*, 1865, p. 32. The same legislature offered \$5,000 reward for the arrest of Isham G. Harris. *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Memphis Argus*, June 30, July 7, 1865. Hereafter cited as *Argus*.

<sup>4</sup> *Argus*, Aug. 18, 1865.

istration did their duty; Brownlow was reelected by a sizeable majority. The new franchise act did not work to the complete satisfaction of the Radicals, however. In the Congressional election of 1868 Conservative candidates won in two districts. Acting under authority granted him by the legislature,<sup>6</sup> Brownlow declared the elections in these districts illegal and awarded the certificates to men of Radical persuasion.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after his second inauguration, Brownlow was elected to the United States Senate, but was not to take office until March 4, 1869. The interval was used to carry to completion the Radical work of reconstruction. Negro suffrage had given birth to the Ku Klux Klan which was organized by a group of ex-Confederates at Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866. It was used to intimidate negro voters and carpetbaggers and was doubtless carried to the extreme.<sup>8</sup> To protect the negroes and their "votes", a special session of the legislature in 1868 made membership in the Klan a felony and empowered the governor to declare martial law.<sup>9</sup> Thus authorized, Governor Brownlow, on February 20, 1869, proclaimed martial law in nine Middle and West Tennessee counties where the Ku Klux Klan was particularly active.<sup>10</sup>

Five days later Brownlow turned the affairs of Tennessee over to the speaker of the senate, DeWitt C. Senter, but only after assuring himself that the "rebels" were thoroughly "reconstructed". With disfranchisement, negro suffrage, and martial law, Brownlow hoped that the hated "Rebel" Democratic element was forever removed from power and position. Feeling that he was entrusting the state to one who would continue his policies, he said: "Mr. DeWitt C. Senter is a loyal man, capable, tried and trusty who is sound in his principles, and will steadfastly adhere to them upon the platform of the Union Republican Party of Tennessee."<sup>11</sup>

Brownlow's statement was based upon his knowledge of Senter's past record. Senter was an East Tennessean and before the Civil War had served two terms in the lower house of the General Assembly. In 1861 he was reelected for a third term. Tennessee had joined the Confederacy and Senter was a Unionist, but with other East Tennessee Unionists he took his seat in the legislature and

<sup>6</sup> *Acts*, 1866-67, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Acts*, extra, 1866, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> *Knoxville Daily Whig*, Feb. 11, 1869. Hereafter cited as *Whig*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1869; *Nashville Press and Times*, Jan. 14, 1869; Jan. 20, 1869.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua W. Caldwell, *Constitutional History of Tenn.* (Cincinnati, 1907), 294.

<sup>11</sup> *Memphis Public Ledger*, Sept. 17, Oct. 12, 1868; *Whig*, Feb. 20, 1869.

s reelected by a sizeable majority to the complete satisfaction of the Congressional election in two districts. Acting under the authority of the Reconstruction Act,<sup>6</sup> Brownlow declared the certificates to men

Brownlow was elected to the office until March 4, 1869, to complete the Radical Reconstruction. He had given birth to the Ku Klux Klan, a group of ex-Confederates used to intimidate negroes, which carried to the extreme.<sup>8</sup> At a special session of the General Assembly, the Klan a felony and embezzlement law.<sup>9</sup> Thus authorized, Brownlow proclaimed martial law in counties where the Ku Klux

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voted against secession. He remained in the "Rebel" legislature throughout its sessions of 1861 and went with it to Memphis, and stayed with it there until its adjournment *sine die* on March 20, 1862. This term in the legislature of "Harris and Company" gave his Radical enemies a good campaign issue in 1869. After the Memphis adjournment Senter started home, but was captured and imprisoned by the Confederates because of his Union sympathies. Later he was released on bond and on oath not to bear arms against the Confederacy. Nevertheless, he was driven from his home by Confederate guerillas. He escaped to Louisville, Kentucky, where he remained until after the war. In 1865 he returned to Tennessee and was a member of the Union convention that reestablished the state government. On March 4, 1865, he was elected state senator from the Fourth Senatorial District.<sup>12</sup> When division appeared in the ranks of the Unionists, Senter became a Radical and voted for "Rebel" disfranchisement and martial law, but opposed negro suffrage.<sup>13</sup>

In his inaugural address Senter was noncommittal on his political views. He commended Brownlow's "restoration of law and order", and perhaps significantly added that he expected the "cooperation of all good citizens of all classes, sects, and parties".<sup>14</sup> At least it is hard to imagine Brownlow calling for the cooperation of "Rebels" and Conservatives. The Knoxville *Daily Whig*, formerly Brownlow's "evil Genius", but now edited by the "Parson's" ministerial successor, Dr. T. H. Pearne, declared that Senter was a man of "marked ability, unquestionable loyalty, and of unswerving integrity".<sup>15</sup> However, under its new management the *Whig* was not to be the "fabled dragon, with forked tail, and cloven hoofs, and fiery tongue, whose only delight was in scattering fire brands, arrows and death".<sup>16</sup>

Senter was faced with the problem of continuation, abolition, or modification of the Radical policies instituted by Brownlow. To discard entirely the "Rebel" annihilation program of Brownlow would have been to admit defeat for the Radical Union party which Senter represented.<sup>17</sup> But to continue it unmodified was not for men less radical than Brownlow. Senter resolved to modify the Radical policy of his predecessor.

<sup>12</sup> Claude A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of Tenn.* (Nashville, 1890), 227.

<sup>13</sup> *Whig*, Feb. 24, 28, 1869.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1869.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1869.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 9, 1869.

<sup>17</sup> *Whig*, in *Memphis Evening Post*, May 17, 1869.

er cited as *Whig*.

<sup>18</sup> *Whig*, Jan. 14, 1869; Jan. 20, 1869.

<sup>19</sup> *Tenn.* (Cincinnati, 1907), 294.

<sup>20</sup> *Whig*, Feb. 20, 1869.

Soon after his inaugural Senter issued a statement that martial law was not to supersede civil law, but to supplement it. In pursuance of this and upon the recommendation of General Joseph A. Cooper, commander of the militia, civil courts were reestablished and the duties of the troops were restricted to the assistance of the sheriffs in capturing offenders.<sup>18</sup> Martial law, although not abolished, was in this way made less severe and met the approval of ex-Confederates and Conservatives. Furthermore, Senter promised a Giles county delegation that as soon as fugitives were caught and brought to justice the militia would be disbanded.

The ex-Confederates made real efforts to cooperate with the soldiers and quell Ku Klux disorders.<sup>19</sup> These efforts were successful and order and peace were restored. Senter was true to his promise and about the first of May he disbanded thirteen companies of militia and their officers, including General Cooper. Only five companies were left in the field. Ex-Confederates and Conservatives were unanimous in approval of disbandment, and Radical East Tennesseans were pleased because the militia was expensive, and they were not very much interested in protecting loyal Middle and West Tennesseans.<sup>20</sup> However, it was difficult to convince the colored voters of Middle and West Tennessee that Senter had acted in their interests.<sup>21</sup> After martial law was removed only disfranchisement remained to keep the ex-Confederates from resuming their rightful place in the commonwealth.

That Senter did not favor immediate enfranchisement of the "Rebels" was proven by the judicial election on May 27, 1869. In 1865 Brownlow had assumed the power of appointing chancellors and supreme court judges. Protests and objections were soon heard against this infringement of the people's constitutional rights. Therefore, on February 13, 1869, the legislature passed an act which empowered Governor Senter to call a special judicial election. This election gave conclusive proof that Senter was determined to enforce the Radical franchise law. Ex-Confederates who had hoped for relief from Senter were disappointed.<sup>22</sup> The Radical commissioners of registration did their full duty and the Radical candidates were easily elected.

Radical exultance over the victory in the judicial election was considerably lessened by the gubernatorial convention as Nashville

<sup>18</sup> *Whig*, March 3, 13, 1869.

<sup>19</sup> *Press and Times*, Feb. 27, 1869.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 29, Feb. 10, 18, 1869.

<sup>21</sup> *Memphis Appeal*, Jan. 28, 1869. Hereafter cited as *Appeal*.

<sup>22</sup> *Press and Times*, April 30, May 1, 1869.

a statement that martial law, although not abolished, met the approval of the courts. Furthermore, Senter promised that fugitives were caught and punished.

to cooperate with the soldiers. The efforts were successful. Senter was true to his promise and thirteen companies of soldiers were sent to Cooper. Only five companies of Conservatives and Radical East Tennesseeans were expensive, and they were loyal Middle and West Tennesseeans. Senter had acted in their interest and only disfranchisement was resuming their rightful

disfranchisement of the people on May 27, 1869. In the appointment of chancellors and elections were soon heard of constitutional rights. Thereupon they passed an act which provided for a judicial election. This was determined to end the efforts of the moderates who had hoped

The Radical committee had the Radical candidates

the judicial election was held at the convention as Nashville

on May 20 which split into bitter and warring factions. Senter, like most governors, was a candidate to succeed himself. Other Radicals, including General Joseph A. Cooper, General John B. Rogers, General William B. Stokes, Horace Maynard, and O. P. Temple, received some support before the convention, but the field was soon narrowed down to Senter and Stokes.

William Brickly Stokes was a native of North Carolina, but early moved to Tennessee where he became a farmer. Becoming interested in politics, he was elected before the war to represent DeKalb county in both houses of the General Assembly. In 1858 he was elected as a Whig to represent the Third Congressional District in Congress. He served in Congress until the eve of the Civil War in 1861, and after the war he was reelected to Congress where, in 1869, he was serving his fourth term.

In February, 1861, Stokes made a speech in Congress in which he opposed the constitutional right of secession, but at the same time defended the right of every state to appeal to the extra-constitutional and "inalienable right" of revolution to protect itself against "oppression and tyranny". He deplored the action of Southern states in seceding, but he opposed federal coercion to bring them back into the Union. Instead, he advocated a compromise which would assure the South that slavery would not be endangered. In this position, Stokes was following John Bell, the illustrious Constitutional Unionist, and the majority of the Tennessee delegation in Congress, including T. A. R. Nelson and Emerson Etheridge. When Tennessee by the "right" of revolution allied herself with the Confederacy, these men were faced with the difficulty of divided allegiance. They were opponents of secession and staunch supporters of the Union. They were also ardent believers in slavery and opposed to federal intervention which might endanger this time-honored institution.<sup>23</sup> Stokes, like many others, went through a period of indecision, and for a short time was inclined to support the Confederacy and oppose coercion. In fact at one time he appears to have definitely cast in his lot with the "Rebels". Rather conclusive proof of this is his "Duncan Letter", written May 10, 1861, to John Duncan of McMinnville, which is quoted here because of its importance in the gubernatorial campaign of 1869.<sup>24</sup>

I have just learned that there is some misrepresentation going the rounds of your section in regard to my position in this trying crisis, and for the benefit of yourself and

<sup>23</sup> *Congressional Globe, Appendix*, 1861, pp. 133-138.

<sup>24</sup> *Whig*, June 20, 1869.

others, I write this. I have been a zealous advocate of the Union up to the time of Lincoln's Call for seventy-five thousand troops; that being in violation of the law, and for the subjugation of the South, I commend Governor Harris for his courage, and for Arming the State, and for resisting Lincoln to the point of the bayonet, and have enrolled my name as a volunteer to resist his usurpation. I have in Congress and out opposed Coercion—and all forcible measures believing that it was better to recognize the independence of the "Southern Confederacy" than to attempt to coerce them back.

I have always opposed secession, but I claim the right of revolution and the right to resist the oppression of the Federal Government and to throw off their allegiance to the same when that oppression becomes intolerable—that time has now come. I have been and am now for standing by the border slave states, for they are to be the great sufferers during the conflict. I am opposed to being tacked on to the Southern Confederacy, at present, except as a military league. But when peace is restored, if the two nations cannot live in peace, let all the fifteen states elect delegates, meet in Convention, form their Constitution and submit it to the people for ratification.

I had announced myself as a candidate for re-election but on receiving Lincoln's proclamation for troops, I abandoned the canvass at once, and I am no candidate. I claim to have done my duty in trying to heal our difficulty and restore peace. That having failed I shall now march forward in the discharge of my duty in resisting Lincoln, regardless of false charges, or what not, by them who are trying to put me down. Time will tell where we all stand and who have been faithful.

"Time" did "tell", and it found William B. Stokes entering the Union army on May 15, 1862, more than a year after he wrote the above. Presumably, the interim was spent in the interest of the Confederacy. His enemies charged that upon the fall of Fort Donelson, in February, 1862, Stokes deserted the Confederate service and joined the Federal army, but there is little proof for this. More probably his vacillation was caused by Middle Tennessee sentiment which was decidedly pro-Southern in 1861. Then Federal military successes in Tennessee and the establishment of military government gave Stokes a chance to ally himself with the Union

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where the most of his sentiment at least belonged. He served throughout the war and rose to the rank of major general. But the fact that he almost became a “Rebel” made good campaign material for his enemies in the gubernatorial canvass of 1869.

In East Tennessee, the stronghold of Radicalism, Stokes was somewhat the favorite before the convention. His military record was more convincing than Senter’s term in the “Rebel” legislature and confinement in a Confederate prison, because the “boys in blue” from East Tennessee respected the fighter.<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that Senter, an East Tennessean and the successor of the idol of East Tennessee Radicals, was without honor in his own section. Several counties endorsed him and in April the *Whig*, the central organ of Radicalism, hoisted his name to its column head, asserting that Senter was a “gallant, true, and tried Republican”, an East Tennessean, and an opponent of “sectional proscription”.<sup>26</sup>

All was not harmony in the Radical camp before the convention. Even rock-ribbed Sevier county, of unanimous Union sentiment and a hot-bed of Radicalism, failed to agree upon a candidate for state senator and nominated two candidates and discussed a third, the “Soldiers Candidate”. In Blount, Cocke, and Greene counties there was similar lack of Radical concert. The Radical Clarksville *Patriot* mournfully and aptly described the Radical division: “Petty jealousies, individual ambition, narrow-minded selfishness, and criminal ignorance have combined to disrupt the party. . . It is quarrel, scratch, and bite from the Holston to the Mississippi”.<sup>27</sup> Indeed this seems to have been the real situation. Radicalism was intent upon preserving itself, but its over zealous leaders defeated their own purposes by dividing their support between two men.

Real pre-convention issues were few. It was reported that both Senter and Stokes had liberal opinions on the franchise law, but the *Whig* vigorously denied that Senter would oppose a law that he had voted to enact. Stokes stated that after Ku Klux disorders had ceased he would favor gradual enfranchisement by the legislature.<sup>28</sup> Senter was not as definite as this, and as a Radical East Tennessean and successor to Brownlow he was believed to be less likely to hold liberal views on the suffrage question. Besides, he had demonstrated his simon-pure Radicalism in the recent judicial election by enforcing the franchise law. If further proof was lacking of

<sup>25</sup> *Appeal*, May 14, 1869.

<sup>26</sup> *Whig*, April 24, 1869.

<sup>27</sup> *Patriot*, quoted in *Whig*, April 25, 1869.

<sup>28</sup> *Press and Times*, June 7, 1869.

Senter's Radicalism, Brownlow furnished it by supporting his successor for the gubernatorial nomination. Thus, neither candidate gave the ex-Confederates much hope that their disabilities would soon be removed.

There was no openly organized pre-convention canvass for either of the candidates. But county delegations to the convention were instructed and Radical newspapers announced for their favorite candidate. There was little discussion of issues and neither candidate showed much liberality toward the disfranchised. Therefore, the division that occurred in the convention was not the result of any belief that Senter favored enfranchisement. It was merely the result of a factional rivalry within the Radical party.

On May 20, 1869, the Radical hosts of Tennessee assembled in Nashville to nominate a standard bearer to maintain the "loyal" government which had protected their homes and their property from the depredations and ravages of the wicked and heartless "Rebels". But alas, this task was well-nigh hopeless. Disagreement first resulted over the election of a temporary chairman. Each faction desired this position because of the chairman's power to appoint committees. The Stokes faction had a decided advantage because A. M. Cate, a Stokes supporter, was chairman of the Republican State Central Committee and as such called the convention to order and conducted the temporary organization. Cate did not fail to take advantage of his strategic position to the great discomfiture of the Senter faction.

After Cate had called the convention to order, Judge L. C. Houk, a Senter supporter, nominated Reverend T. H. Pearne for temporary chairman. Cate refused to accept the nomination on the ground that he had not stated that nominations were in order. Pearne was again nominated, but Cate still refused to accept the nomination. Cate now announced that nominations were in order and almost immediately recognized a Stokes partisan who nominated R. R. Butler for temporary chairman. Thereupon Judge Houk mounted a convenient desk, called for a vote on Pearne, and declared him elected. Cate at the same time declared Butler elected. There were now two temporary chairmen. Both Pearne and Butler proceeded to the chair but Cate refused to leave it. The convention was soon turned into a bedlam fit only for lunatics. Champions of Senter and Stokes disputed together for the doubtful honor of making the most noise and confusion. Whiskey flowed freely, and drunken yells, curses, jeers, and catcalls furnished enjoyment only

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to the Democrats in the galleries. Even a colored delegate advised  
his dusky brothers to "be more respectful than these white men".<sup>29</sup>  
The clamour continued until a motion to adjourn until the after-  
noon was made. Cate declared that the motion carried, but Pearne  
ruled that it did not carry, and undertook to organize the Senter  
group. The Stokes group, however, remained in the hall and  
prevented Pearne from organizing Senter's followers.<sup>30</sup>

Reassembling in the afternoon with Pearne, Cate, and Butler still  
claiming the chair, the convention again failed to organize. The  
afternoon session lasted three hours with the same vociferous dis-  
cord of the morning. In fact it was worse because the police had  
to prevent a fight between R. R. Butler and Colonel D. M. Nelson  
who had drawn their pistols. The convention again adjourned to  
meet the next morning.

Before daylight the next morning Pearne was secreted into the  
convention hall, and when Cate came in he was nonplussed for  
"there sat, bolt upright, the imperturbable Pearne, with the cool and  
placid air of a matronly hen on a nest".<sup>32</sup> Apparently, both fac-  
tions realized that the convention was a failure, because a motion  
to adjourn *sine die* was carried unanimously and both Cate and  
Pearne pronounced the convention adjourned.<sup>33</sup>

It was at this juncture that Butler rushed to the chair and or-  
ganized the Stokes faction. Stokes was declared to be the regular  
nominee with the support of fifty-four county delegations. In a  
speech Stokes stated that he had forty thousand colored votes be-  
fore starting the canvass. He had support for this statement be-  
cause gaudily attired colored citizens were prominent in the conven-  
tion and showed preference for Stokes, as, said one, "the man that  
wears the blue". Senter's disbandment of the militia made him  
less desirable than Stokes to the newly enfranchised black men.

The Senter faction also assembled and with Pearne as chairman  
an organization was effected. Resolutions were passed which de-  
clared Senter to be the regular nominee of the "National Republican  
Party". Senter accepted the nomination and said that he hoped for  
Tennessee "a condition of quiet, security, liberty, equality, progress  
and developement".<sup>34</sup> But Senter was not yet ready to extend the

<sup>29</sup> *Memphis Evening Post*, May 24, 1869. Hereafter cited *Post*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, May 21, 1869.

<sup>31</sup> *Appeal*, May 21, 1869.

<sup>32</sup> *Whig*, May 21, 1869; *Post*, May 28, 1869.

<sup>33</sup> *Appeal*, May 22, 1869; *Post*, May 24, 1869.

<sup>34</sup> *Press and Times*, in *Press and Messenger*, May 26, 1869.

suffrage to the late "Rebels", and stated that he did not favor this change in the Radical policy of his predecessor.

After the Nashville fiasco charges and counter-charges were forthcoming from both factions of the Radical party. Each charged the other with having "packed" the county delegations, and with sending "bogus" delegations to secure the nomination of their favorites. These charges were doubtless true and one faction was as guilty as the other. The *Nashville Press and Times*,<sup>36</sup> a Stokes organ, charged that the administration office-holders, "school-funders", and "railroad rings" were all supporting Senter, and that they were planning to manipulate the ballot-box to elect him. The Senter faction claimed that Cate had attempted to organize the convention in the interest of Stokes. It was obvious that Cate had done this. In proof of this charge Senter's friends cited an attempt that Cate had made to expel Senter from the state Senate. On November 12, 1868, as a senator from Hamilton county, he introduced a resolution to expel Speaker Senter because he had served in the "Rebel" legislature, and was thus ineligible for office by provision of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>37</sup> The resolution failed to pass, but it was sufficient reason for the charge that Cate had a personal grudge against Senter, and therefore had attempted to control the convention for Stokes.

During the campaign of 1869 an attempt was made to connect Stokes with Cate's proposal to expel Senter from the Senate. In 1868 Stokes was a candidate for Congress from the Third Congressional District and stopped at Cate's home. While there Cate asked Stokes if the Fourteenth Amendment did not disqualify Senter for office. Stokes replied that it did unless Senter's disabilities should be removed by a two-thirds vote of Congress. A. G. Sharp, mayor of Chattanooga, who was present during the conversation, testified to the truth of this. It was after this conversation that Cate introduced the expulsion resolution, but Stokes denied advising Cate to introduce it. Besides, he said he had voted in Congress to have Senter's disabilities removed.<sup>38</sup> Whether true or not, this "Cate-Stokes Conspiracy" furnished many a text for Senter's speakers during the gubernatorial campaign.

The attitude taken by the Conservatives toward the Radical candidates is interesting. They announced their intentions to support

<sup>35</sup> *Press and Times*, May 21, 1869.

<sup>36</sup> May 26, 1869.

<sup>37</sup> Section three of that amendment denied the right to hold office to anyone who had "previously taken an oath, . . . to support the Constitution of the United States", and had then "engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof".

<sup>38</sup> *Whig*, May 25, 1869.

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es thereof".

neither candidate unless one wing of the divided party should promise  
a policy of liberality toward the disfranchised. They nominated no  
candidate of their own, and thus threatened to hold the balance of  
power between the two Radical candidates. Some were inclined at  
first to look with favor upon Stokes because he was a Middle Ten-  
nessean and was not connected with "Brownlowism" as closely as  
Senter. Furthermore, they feared that Senter would use the franchise  
law, as Brownlow had used it, to perpetuate the "loyal" govern-  
ment.<sup>39</sup> The Conservatives soon gave their support to Senter, how-  
ever.

On June 3 the Conservative Knoxville *Press and Messenger* had  
not yet decided which of the Radical candidates to support, but on  
June 9 it came out unreservedly for Senter and declared him to be  
"manly, unequivocal, and statesman-like", while Stokes was describ-  
ed as a "narrow minded, insincere, and driveling demagogue clinging  
for support to the lowest passions engendered by a civil strife now  
four years gone". The reason for this sudden transformation in  
Conservative sentiment was the opening speeches of Senter and  
Stokes in Nashville on June 5. Stokes spoke first and said that he  
favored gradual enfranchisement, and proposed that this be accom-  
plished by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly upon each in-  
dividual disfranchised resident of Tennessee that could prove he was  
peaceful and law-abiding.<sup>40</sup> He devoted the most of his speech to  
a scathing denunciation of Brownlow's and Senter's administration  
of the finances of the state which, he said, had increased the state  
debt from \$16,000,000 to \$40,000,000. "School funders", railroad  
receivers, and Northern office seekers were placed in the same cat-  
egory, and to Stokes all of these were a disgrace to the state.<sup>41</sup>

After Stokes finished his speech Senter advanced to the stand and  
said to Stokes, "William, I am with you until the first Thursday in  
August."<sup>42</sup> He showed some inclination to overlook the suffrage

<sup>39</sup> *Press and Messenger*, May 12, 1869.

<sup>40</sup> *Appeal*, June 6, 1869.

<sup>41</sup> *Press and Messenger*, June 9, 1869.

<sup>42</sup> The following account of this scene is interesting: "As they stood together  
for a moment, the scene was quite affecting. It was worth the pen of a painter....  
There was Senter, young, rotund, fresh, flushing, and handsome. His face was  
plump, rosy, and well set off by dark eyes, whiskers and hair. On the other  
hand, Stokes, very pale and thin, and quite the reverse of handsome. His face  
is as thin as an old hatchet; his nose is long and comes to a sharp point over  
a chin that is not all a chin, for there is very little of it. His head is bald and  
shiny as polished marble, his forehead is high, prominent, and projects out over  
the eyes, and withal, well developed. His ears seem set back an inch or two  
farther than they ought to be. It cannot be denied that he has a head well  
stored with brains. Anyone who is under the impression that Billy Stokes is  
a fool can relieve themselves of the error by taking a look at his head and hear-  
ing him speak. As a rough and tumble speaker he ranks next to A. J. [Andrew  
Johnson]." *Post*, June 11, 1869.

question until he was stopped by Stokes and asked if he favored "universal suffrage". He answered in the affirmative and pledged himself to recommend to the next legislature the removal of the disabilities of all who were tax payers.

This was as sudden and unexpected to many as a thunderbolt from a clear sky would have been. On the same day that Senter made this declaration, the Radical organ in Knoxville was accusing Stokes of favoring "universal suffrage", and published a letter which declared: "Whenever the rebels restore to us the thousands of blue-eyed boys of the mountains who were starved to death in Andersonville and other rebel hells, then and not til then, will people of East Tennessee vote for General Stokes and Universal Suffrage."<sup>43</sup> As soon as the ink dried on this, the *Whig* performed some peculiar journalistic acrobatics, and rather unconvincingly defended the cause of "universal suffrage".

It is not easy to explain this sudden transformation of Senter and his Radical followers. Political expediency seems the most plausible explanation, but perhaps this is not sufficient. Senter's whole career as legislator and as governor had not been such as to indicate that he favored liberalism toward the ex-Confederates.<sup>44</sup> But now in the heat of a political debate in which his opponent had already declared his opposition to wholesale enfranchisement of the ex-Confederates and had thereby made a bid for both colored and white Radical support, little was left for Senter to do except to endorse universal suffrage, and thus gain the support of the great body of the Conservatives and the disfranchised. Besides, the state Supreme Court had recently ruled that Brownlow's free use of proclamations to annul registrations of voters was illegal, and that those who had been disfranchised in this way could again vote.<sup>45</sup> By this decision it was estimated that from twenty to thirty thousand new voters would be added to the electorate. Senter knew that these voters would support the candidate of "universal suffrage". Furthermore, the very fact that a Radical court had thus reversed an act of a Radical administration was sufficient evidence that a more liberal policy had permeated the hearts of at least some Radicals, and Senter knew that he would have some support within his own party. Senter himself might be classed as a liberal Radical because he had disbanded the militia and had evidenced a spirit of cooperation in his inaugural address. Senter also claimed to be in line with the

<sup>43</sup> *Whig*, June 9, 1869.

<sup>44</sup> *Post*, June 29, 1869.

<sup>45</sup> *Appeal*, May 28, 1869.

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National Republican party and Grant's administration which had manifested some inclination to deal more liberally with the late "Rebels".<sup>46</sup> This, however, was disputed by Stokes who claimed that he was the representative of the National Republican party. Political expediency and liberal Radicalism seem the most plausible explanations of Senter's sudden reversal on his party's policy of dealing with the ex-Confederates.

The battle cry of the campaign became "Senter and Universal Suffrage," and all other issues were side-tracked. The disfranchised without exception endorsed the Radical who had voted to disfranchise them, and aligned themselves with "Old Proc",<sup>47</sup> the one Radical they most cordially despised. However reluctant the ex-Confederates may have been to support any man who had the backing of Brownlow, they excused themselves by saying that they were not going to Brownlow's side but that he had at last been converted to their side and that they welcomed all new recruits no matter how personally undesirable. Indeed, it was an anomalous position in which Brownlow and other Radicals found themselves when they gave support to Senter who seemed now to be the champion of the cause of the "Rebels". Many regretted their early choice and turned to the support of Stokes.

Brownlow, however, remained true to his alliance with Senter. This palsied old gentleman spent the summer of 1869 at Montvale Springs in Blount county. He took no active part in the campaign, but East Tennessee Radicals anxiously awaited some word from their oracle. On June 12, the Radical deity spoke in a letter to the *Whig*. Brownlow defended the passage of the franchise law as a necessity, but declared that peace and order had been restored and that the disfranchised should be given the ballot. He proposed, however, that enfranchisement should be accomplished through regular constitutional channels—a process that would require at least two years.<sup>48</sup> Brownlow hoped that this delay would give the Radicals time to establish themselves firmly in power. He argued that they already had control of the courts for another eight years. But rather sadly the old Radical referred to the Supreme Court of his own appointment which had recently annulled his own acts and had thereby en-

<sup>46</sup> Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency* (Boston, 1898), I, 318-320. The National Republican platform of 1868, in reference to the disfranchised, read: "We favor the removal of the disqualifications and restrictions imposed upon the late rebels in the same measure as the spirit of disloyalty will die out, and as may be consistent with the safety of the loyal people."

<sup>47</sup> Brownlow was termed this because of his frequent use of proclamations.

<sup>48</sup> *Post*, June 15, 1869.

franchised a great body of voters. Some of these, Brownlow said, had been "active leaders" of the rebellion and should have been disfranchised "for life". The court's decision, however, was evidence to Brownlow as well as to Senter that enfranchisement could not long be delayed.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Brownlow rather reluctantly accepted the new role that had been thrust upon him. It was believed by many that he had been influenced by his son, Colonel John Bell Brownlow, who was a railroad receiver under Senter and a leader of the Senter faction.<sup>50</sup>

Later in the summer Brownlow wrote another letter to the *Whig* to assure the colored Radicals that Senter had as much claim upon their support as Stokes. The majority of the colored voters, however, seem to have feared that Senter's militia disbandment and universal suffrage policies would cause the return of "Rebel" and Ku Klux rule, and with few exceptions they supported Stokes.<sup>51</sup>

East Tennessee Radicals, formerly rabid followers of Brownlow, were hard to convince that "Old Proc" had gone over to their enemies. An account was printed of one who did not believe it until shown one of Brownlow's letters in the *Whig*. The effect upon this loyal mountaineer is both colorful and interesting: "He took it and read it over twice, laid the paper down, wiped his spectacles with a red cotton handkerchief, blew his nose with his fingers, took an immense chew of tobacco, and sat speechless for at least five minutes."<sup>52</sup>

At last this astonished Radical exclaimed, "Great God, what are we coming to?" Brownlow's faithlessness, to this man, meant that "loyalty" was doomed and that the "Rebels" would again tyrannize over East Tennessee.

From Middle Tennessee came a like cry that is interesting aside from its peculiar mixture of geographical, astronomical and Biblical descriptives:<sup>53</sup>

We are prepared to hear that the roses were blooming in the snow-clad Lapland; that the Orange and Cocoa grove of the tropics were pendant....with icicles; that the sun and moon had changed their orbits; that the brow of night would no longer utter speech, nor darkness show knowledge of the architect of the Universe; yea, we were prepared to hear that the tide of the Mississippi had rolled

<sup>49</sup> *Whig*, June 13, 1869.

<sup>50</sup> *Appeal*, Aug. 29, 1869.

<sup>51</sup> *Whig*, July 20, 1869.

<sup>52</sup> *Press and Messenger*, June 30, 1869.

<sup>53</sup> *Shelbyville Republican*, in *Whig*, July 1, 1869.

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deserted his own standard and allied himself with Andrew  
Johnson, Isham G. Harris, Emerson Etheridge, N. B. For-  
rest and every unrepentant rebel in the State on the suffrage  
question, but so it is.

In like manner, the Radical die-hards raved everywhere and many  
refused to follow Senter and Brownlow who had betrayed their  
party into the hands of its enemies. But the abnormal alliance was  
complete, and at least Andrew Johnson and Emerson Etheridge of  
the quartet mentioned above took up the cudgel of "Senter and  
Universal Suffrage", but with more consistency than did Brownlow  
and the "Senterites". At Dresden, the eloquent Ethridge happily  
spoke of the fulfillment of his own prophesies: "The Aurora of that  
day has already come forth. On the mountains of the East even  
now she smiling stands. The valleys of the West are all aglow  
with the light of liberty which beams from her heavenly face; from  
her rosy fingers the dews of peace are being scattered, and the sad  
earth is smiling again."<sup>54</sup>

Andrew Johnson campaigned the state in vindication of himself  
and in the interest of Senter. At Maryville he barely escaped rough  
treatment from a drunken-crazed mob of Stokes Radicals. In Middle  
and West Tennessee, he received a better reception than he had re-  
ceived from the same "Rebels" in 1862 when he established military  
government over them.

The campaign progressed. Senter and Stokes toured the state in a  
joint canvass. East Tennessee, the home of Radicalism, was chosen  
as the main battleground. The joint canvass of this section opened  
at Cleveland on June 11, and closed at Madisonville on July 5.  
Only one month was left for Middle and West Tennessee. Into  
practically every county of East Tennessee went the rival Radical  
candidates, both defending their Union war records and appealing  
to the slowly dying war passions of East Tennesseans. Senter argu-  
ed that although he had been a member of the "Rebel" legislature,  
his Union sympathy was well known to East Tennesseans. Stokes  
did not deny the "Duncan Letter" episode, but submitted his Union  
army record to the "boys in blue" who had fought with him. To  
these, some of whom had obtained Federal jobs through his in-  
fluence, Stokes was more desirable than Senter who had not fought

<sup>54</sup> *Press and Messenger*, July 28, 1869.

and who was now advocating a policy that would allow the "Rebels" once more to gain control of the state. Senter had the support of a few Federal soldiers who held state positions, but the majority of East Tennessee Radicals preferred General Stokes.

The campaign of bitter personalities and passions continued. Maryville Radicals threatened Senter with the charge that he had betrayed them to the "Rebels". At Clinton, a personal encounter between the candidates was narrowly avoided.<sup>55</sup> At Loudon, Stokes denounced the inconsistency of Brownlow and thereby aroused the wrath of General James P. Brownlow who took the stand and said that he was responsible for his father's support of Senter. At Jackson, the "Rebel" audience greeted Stokes with "yells and insults" and mobbed the Radical negroes, but when Senter appeared "cheers and music" welcomed him.<sup>56</sup> Senter accused Stokes of everything from personal cowardice to immorality. Likewise Stokes was not any too sure of Senter's bravery or his honesty in handling state finances.

The canvass, though one of bitter animosities, had introduced into it an element which was of far more vital consequence. This was Governor Senter's manipulation of the franchise law to insure his election. Most observers early foresaw that this Radical law would be an important factor in the election. It gave to the governor the power to appoint and remove commissioners of registration. Governor Brownlow had freely exercised this power as well as the power to annul registrations, and in this way had guarded the ballot-box against voters who had supported the Confederacy.

As the campaign progressed it became apparent to Governor Senter that Stokes would get a large majority of the Radical vote and that his own reelection could be insured only by getting the votes of the disfranchised. Fortunately for Senter, this was easy because of his power to remove and appoint commissioners of registration. Therefore, he began the wholesale removal of Radical registrars and the appointment of Conservatives to take their places. Within a month most of the old registrars were replaced by more liberal men who were not very particular about obeying the franchise law, and issued certificates to thousands of "Rebels".<sup>57</sup> Their "judicial power" gave them this right and they did not construe "loyalty" to mean necessarily the support of the Union during the war. In Dyer county, the new registrar had been in office only a week when it was reported that he had already issued twelve hundred cer-

<sup>55</sup> *Post*, July 3, 1869.

<sup>56</sup> *Nashville State Journal*, in *Post*, July 29, 1869.

<sup>57</sup> *Post*, July 7, 1869.

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tificates to "disloyal men", and that the "loyal men" of the county only numbered six hundred.<sup>58</sup> It was soon estimated that sixty of the eighty-four registrars had been removed, and that by election day less than five thousand men would be without certificates of registration.<sup>59</sup> In this way the "Rebels" were given the ballot throughout the state, and the franchise law was virtually annulled.<sup>60</sup>

The Radical followers of Stokes were loud in their criticism of Senter's action. From Maury county, Radical objection to their new registrar took this form:<sup>61</sup>

Robert D. Rickets  
Certificate Vender!

Indorses for every rebel Democrat and secures certificates whether he knows him or not. This is the man who packs certificates, and no doubt pledges his "word of honor" that everybody, even the "Devil," who was the original rebel, is loyal to the Government of the United States.

While the Radicals howled, the Conservative Unionists and the ex-Confederates were jubilant. They manifested their joy at the approaching downfall of Radicalism.<sup>62</sup>

Their days are numbered, they are like the grass; in the morning of their pride and strength they flourished, and now in the evening they will be cut down, and the places which knew them once, the high places of power which they have trod with the heel of oppression, will resound to their footsteps no more.

Their fate was palpable to the most sanguine of the Stokes Radicals, and in desperation they undertook to stay the inevitable tide which threatened to engulf them. At first, they resorted to injunctions, but the state Supreme Court upheld the governor's removal power.<sup>63</sup> The injunctions were dissolved and Senter's registrars took office. Foiled in this attempt to safeguard the ballot-box from the "Rebels", Stokes and his followers threatened Federal military intervention and the reestablishment of Federal military government. In fact, men were sent to Washington, but they were not successful in getting military aid. They were successful, however, in getting the endorsement of Stokes by two of President

<sup>58</sup> *Press and Messenger*, July 7, 1869.

<sup>59</sup> *Post*, July 31, 1869.

<sup>60</sup> Temple, *op. cit.*, 183.

<sup>61</sup> *Press and Messenger*, July 7, 1869.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Post*, July 9, 1869.

Grant's cabinet officers,<sup>64</sup> but this was small help in getting more votes for Stokes. Threats continued. "Rebels" with fraudulent certificates were charged with breaking their army paroles and were threatened with arrest and trial before military court.<sup>65</sup> Some Radicals even advocated the organization of a Stokes government in case Senter should be elected with the hope that Congress would intervene and recognize it as the legal government.<sup>66</sup>

These threats were of no avail. Senter was governor and had all the power of Radical legislative enactments behind him. He claimed that he had removed only registrars who had violated the law, and that he had instructed his appointees to show no partiality in granting certificates. Brownlow had used the militia to prevent the "Rebels" from voting, and now Senter threatened to use it to protect these same men in their right to vote. This must have caused the "Parson" much loss of sleep. The Radical sedition law, which was designed to prevent criticism of Brownlow's "loyal" government, was now about to be used in criminal prosecution of the Radicals, who had made the law, because they were saying treasonable things about Senter's "loyal" government. The militia and sedition laws were not used, but no doubt they would have been had Senter deemed it necessary.

It soon became evident to all that universal suffrage was already a reality. Before the canvass was over the Stokes faction was reluctantly accepting this situation. One Stokes Radical remarked: "Universal Suffrage can do no more than has already been done for the disfranchised of this Country....While gubernatorial candidates are wrangling over this question, the Governor is having it opened to all applicants, and it is now best to turn attention to other issues as that is settled."<sup>67</sup> Stokes himself recognized this, and in Middle and West Tennessee he reversed his East Tennessee pronouncements on universal suffrage and became as good a suffrage candidate as Senter. At Memphis he said: "Suffrage is a dead letter. Any man can get a certificate."<sup>68</sup> At Huntington he declared: "I will enfranchise every man on God's green earth who will come up and ask for it."<sup>69</sup> This was somewhat different from his East Tennessee statement, earlier in the campaign, that he would have his "tongue

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, July 27, 1869. These were Postmaster General Cresswell and Secretary of the Treasury Boutwell.

<sup>65</sup> *Nashville State Journal*, in *Post*, July 26, 1869.

<sup>66</sup> *Chattanooga Republican*, in *Post*, July 27, 1869.

<sup>67</sup> *Press and Messenger*, July 21, 1869.

<sup>68</sup> *Post*, July 19, 1869.

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torn out by the roots" before he would consent to enfranchisement of the "Rebels".<sup>70</sup> But in East Tennessee Stokes was talking to Radicals, whereas in Middle and West Tennessee his audiences were composed of former supporters of the Confederacy who now had certificates to vote. The *Press and Messenger* with great satisfaction described the Radical discomfiture.<sup>71</sup>

He digged a hole, he digged it deep,  
He digged it for his brother;  
But in the hole, he tumbled in,  
That he had digged for t'other.

Radical prospects were indeed gloomy, but the outlook was pleasing to the Conservatives. At first they pledged themselves to follow a policy of strict neutrality by not running candidates for the legislature. But when Senter started the removal of Radical registrars, Conservative candidates were announced for the legislature. There were now three legislative tickets, namely: Senter Republicans, Stokes Radicals, and Conservatives. As a result of the division of the normal Radical vote, the Conservatives, with the aid of the newly enfranchised "Rebels", had little difficulty in electing their candidates. This action of the Conservatives and "Rebels" demonstrated that they did not trust the Senter Republicans, and that they were determined to make assurance doubly sure of the removal of "Rebel" disabilities by electing a Conservative legislature.<sup>72</sup>

The Senter Republicans did not like this breach of trust by the Conservatives. They well knew that a Conservative legislature would sweep the last vestiges of Radical legislation from the statute books, and thus turn the state government over to the ex-Confederates. Few Senter Republicans, to say nothing of the Radicals, were ready to see this extreme carried out, but it was a natural result.<sup>73</sup> The Senter Republicans and the Conservatives united upon the one plank of universal suffrage, and Senter was more interested in securing his election than he was in universal suffrage. The Conservatives, on the other hand, were interested only in Senter because he made it possible for the disfranchised to vote.<sup>74</sup> Prospects of a Conservative legislature drove many Senter Republicans to the Stokes banner.<sup>75</sup> Even Pearne of the *Whig* became almost frantic

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, June 30, 1869.

<sup>72</sup> Nashville *Banner*, in *Whig*, July 17, 1869; Cleveland *Banner*, in *Press and Messenger*, July 22, 1869.

<sup>73</sup> *Post*, July 23, 1869.

<sup>74</sup> *Appeal*, Aug. 7, 1869.

<sup>75</sup> *Post*, July 31, 1869.

when Conservatives were announced for the legislature, and showed far more concern for the defeat of the Conservatives than for the election of Senter.

Election day, August 5, finally came. Brownlow left his Montvale health retreat and came to Knoxville to cast his vote for Senter. Presentiment must have been his when he saw hundreds of the detested "Rebel" sect voting for the same man. Senter was elected by a majority of over sixty-five thousand. Stokes received about the normal Radical vote, although he fell short of Grant's vote in 1868 by almost two thousand. This showed that the Radical party in Tennessee was still virtually intact and that Senter received support from only a small minority of it. But the thousands whom Senter had irregularly enfranchised gave him a majority of overwhelming proportions.<sup>76</sup>

The Conservatives easily obtained a majority in the legislature. Only eight Stokes Radicals were elected, and all of these were from East Tennessee. Thirteen Senter Republicans were elected, and eight of these were from East Tennessee. All the rest were Conservatives, the most of whom were from Middle and West Tennessee, although twenty-one were elected in East Tennessee because of the Radical schism.<sup>77</sup>

The Radicals were completely routed. Although they were not destroyed, their party (the Republican) was never again to have ascendancy in Tennessee. The Conservative assembly which convened on October 4, 1869, took action that placed the state in the control of the ex-Confederates and inaugurated a new era in Tennessee's political history.

<sup>76</sup> *Press and Messenger*, Aug. 18, 1869.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

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