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THE ORIGIN OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN EAST TENNESSEE

By VERTON M. QUEENER

No candidate running on a Republican party ticket had ever received a vote in Tennessee when the Civil War came. To most Tennesseans, the party was sectional, "kinky-haired," and anathema; a minority was not so completely hostile.¹ Whatever the parties, bitter controversy was the general rule and any upheaval great or small would cause some readjustment of party affiliation. In 1861 came the great upheaval out of which a new order was to appear.

Between the years 1861 and 1867, there came war, conquest, military government, and the absence of free elections. During these years, there were no parties in Tennessee if the proper definition of a political party is an "organization of voters based on self-interest and bent on getting control of the government."² Both of the old pre-war parties had broken into pieces before the war began. The Whig party had disintegrated in the 1850's; the Democratic party was not so sure of itself after the presidential election of 1860.³ In Tennessee, however, Governor Isham G. Harris had a majority following except in the first secession election. As civil government began to re-appear on the Tennessee horizon about 1864, groups of men of like interest began to organize. One of these organizations developed into the Republican party of Tennessee. A study of this party is by and large a study of East Tennessee because from this section of the state came the Republican officeholders, the Republican leaders, and by far the larger portion of the Republican voters.

In Tennessee's gubernatorial campaign of 1867, there appeared for the first time after the Civil War two rather definite and cohesive political parties: one called the Republican Union

¹Philip M. Hamer (ed), *Tennessee A History 1673-1932* (New York, 1933), I, 505-19.

²M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties*, translated by Frederick Clarke (New York, 1908), II, 652; William Bennet Munro, *The Government of the United States* (New York, 1936), 140.

³Marguerite B. Hamer, "The Presidential Campaign of 1860 in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 3 (Knoxville, 1931), 22.

party, and the other called the Conservative Union party.⁴ These two parties—with changes in names, leaders, followers, and sometimes in principles—constitute our present Republican and Democratic parties.

The Republican party of East Tennessee, which is the theme of this paper, did not appear suddenly on February 22, 1867,⁵ when the Radicals or Republican Unionists met in convention and nominated William G. Brownlow for a second term as governor. Back of 1867, there is a great deal of related, interesting, and instructive political history. By noting the pre-war elements out of which the new parties were to grow, some political maneuvering during the war, and numerous political events which occurred between the cessation of hostilities in Tennessee and the August election of 1867, one is able to watch the Republican party come into being and develop from an embryonic stage to a stage where it took over all branches of the state government.

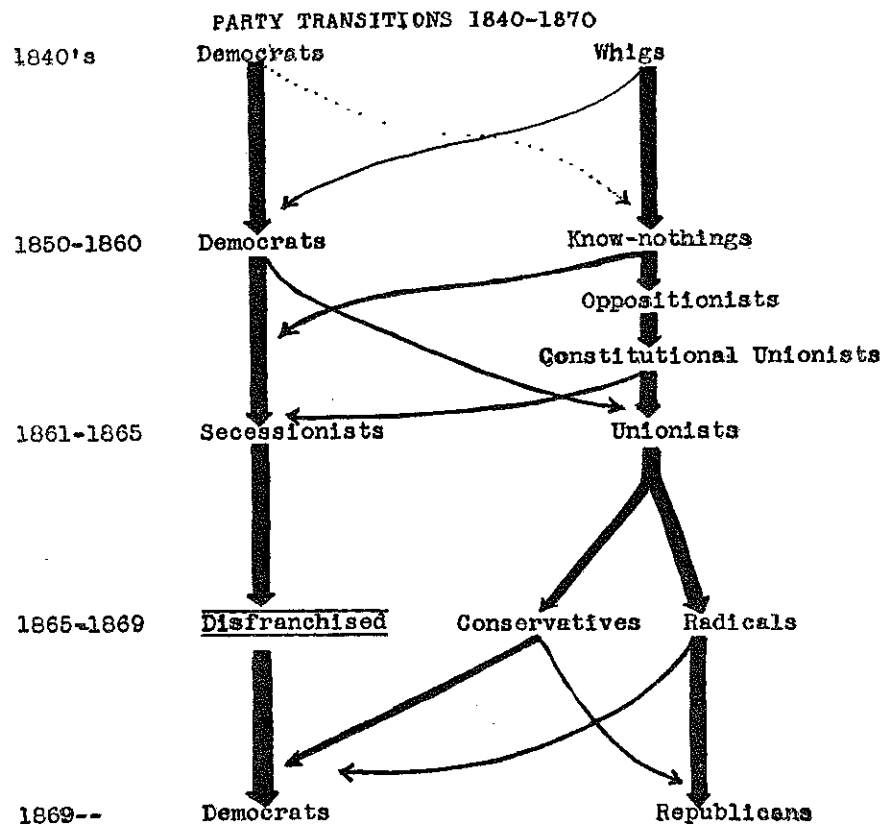
From the time when the two parties were functioning normally before the war, to the time when they could re-assume normal activity after the war, there occurred a lapse of two decades. In these transitional decades the parties went through several stages of re-adjustment and re-alignment. These changes are crudely represented by the chart on the following page. As the chart shows, a few pre-war Democrats became Republicans, while some Whigs became Secessionists and some who remained Unionists became Democrats when the new parties were getting under way during and after Reconstruction.

Professor A. C. Cole has said that "The Whigs of the South were the Unionists, Unionism being a brand of Conservatism." But when the last effort at compromise had failed and the "irrepressible conflict" was on, the Whigs "acquiesced in the situation and gave themselves and their sons to fight the battles of the South in defense of southern rights and southern independence."⁶ Such a statement about the

⁴*Brownlow's Knoxville Whig and Rebel Ventilator*, February 7, 1867 (hereafter referred to as *Whig*); Hamer, *op. cit.*, II, 620, 621.

⁵This date is taken as the beginning of the Republican party because on that date the Republican Unionists (Radicals) held a state convention in Nashville and nominated Brownlow for a second term as governor. The opposition (Conservatives) in April of 1867, nominated Emerson Etheridge as candidate for governor. Hence, the first state-wide bi-party contest after the war had its inception with the Republican convention of February 22, 1867.

⁶A. C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1913), 333.



greater part of the South cannot be questioned but it is almost the opposite of the truth about East Tennessee. In East Tennessee, most of the old-line Whigs and many Democrats did not change to the secession side as the pressure and excitement increased but instead became even more intensely Unionist.

The most obvious pre-war and post-war relationship is that the East Tennessee territory which was Whig territory in the 1840's was Republican territory after the 1870's. This fact deserves at least brief consideration. The Whigs carried East Tennessee in every election between the years 1847 and 1855. In the year 1856, the Know-nothing party carried the section. In 1857, the Democrats won by the small majority of 686 votes. The next election, 1859, the old-line Whigs, now calling themselves the Oppositionists, won. In 1860, the Constitutional

Union party had a majority in East Tennessee of 1,767 votes over the two Democratic candidates combined.⁷ Hence, it must have been fairly easy for Whigs who later became Know-nothings, then Oppositionists, and finally Constitutional Unionists to become Republican Unionists during and after the war.

In an analysis of the Whig vote in East Tennessee by counties for the years 1847, 1848, and 1849, it is found that twelve counties consistently had a Whig majority for all three election years.⁸ Four counties, Hamilton, Meigs, McMinn, and Morgan, voted Democratic in the first election but turned to the Whig party in the last two elections; while two counties, Campbell and Polk, voted Whig in the first two elections and Democratic in the last one. Six counties were consistently Democratic for these three election years;⁹ while two counties, Hawkins and Monroe, voted Democratic in 1847, Whig in 1848, and were carried by the Democrats again in 1849.

A comparison between the elections of 1847, 1848, and 1849, and the elections of 1872, 1882, and 1886,¹⁰ throws light on the transition. All of the twelve counties that voted Whig consistently in the election years of the 1840's voted Republican in the three later election years. Of the six Democratic counties in the earlier elections, only one, Sullivan, remained consistently Democratic in the later elections. Three counties, Bradley, Claiborne, and Greene, which were Democratic throughout the earlier elections, were consistently Republican in the '70's and '80's. In addition to these, four more counties that had vacillated between Whig and Democratic majorities in the '40's were consistently Republican in the later elections. Rhea county, which was Democratic in all of the earlier elections, voted Republican in the year 1886. Washington, another Democratic county in the three earlier elections, was Republican in 1872 and in 1886, but voted Democratic in 1882. Of the eight new counties created in East Tennessee after 1850, all except Sequatchie were Republican in the years 1872, 1882, and 1886. Thus it may be seen that the Whig counties in the 1840's,

⁷Jonesborough *Whig and Independent Journal*, November 22, 1848; Nashville *Republican Banner*, November 20, 1848, November 16, 1852, November 6, and 25, 1860; Knoxville *Whig*, August 18, 1848, November 8, 1856, September 3, 1859.

⁸Anderson, Bledsoe, Blount, Cocke, Carter, Grainger, Jefferson, Johnson, Knox, Marion, Roane, and Sevier.

⁹Claiborne, Greene, Rhea, Sullivan, Bradley, and Washington.

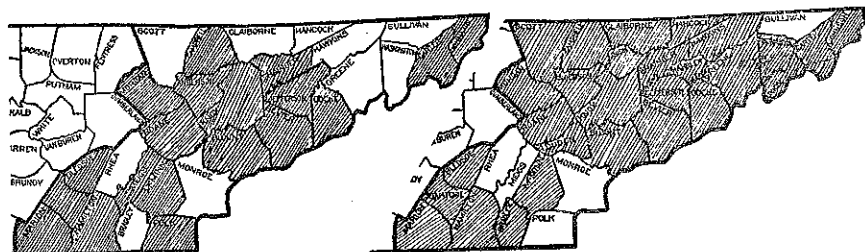
¹⁰These years were picked because they were as nearly as possible normal election years. There were no party schisms or race questions at issue.

including those leaning in the Whig direction, were almost unanimously Republican after the war. In addition, five pre-war Democratic counties had joined the Republican ranks, while only three pre-war Whig counties, and they doubtful ones, Polk, Monroe and Meigs, became Democratic counties after the war.¹⁰

PRE-WAR AND POST-WAR ELECTIONS IN EAST TENNESSEE

1847, 1848, and 1849

1872, 1882, and 1886



Counties that were Whig or leaned toward the Whig party

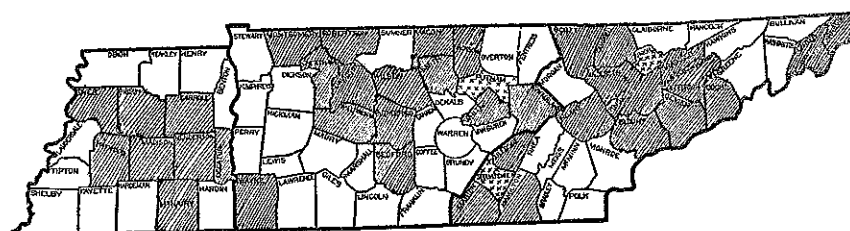
Counties that were Republican or leaned toward the Republican party

Counties that were Democratic or leaned toward the Democratic party.

Counties that were Democratic or leaned toward the Democratic party.

This change to post-war Democratic and Republican parties was not a strict party affair in East Tennessee. Neither was the change as simple as the material thus far considered would indicate. Part of the complications may be seen by a

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1860 BY COUNTIES



Constitutional Union or Old-line Whig counties

Democratic Counties

Counties not reported

The Whigs carried East and West Tennessee; the Democrats carried Middle Tennessee. In this election Cumberland county voted with Bledsoe and Cheatham voted with Davidson and Montgomery.

¹⁰The figures for the four paragraphs of comparison and for the maps were taken from the following papers: *Jonesborough Whig and Independent Journal*, November 22, 1848; *Nashville Republican Banner*, November 20, 1848, November 16, 1852, November 6, and 25, 1860; *Knoxville Whig*, August 18, 1848, November 8, 1856, September 3, 1859. Figures for the later elections came from the Election Returns, Secretary of State's Office, Nashville.

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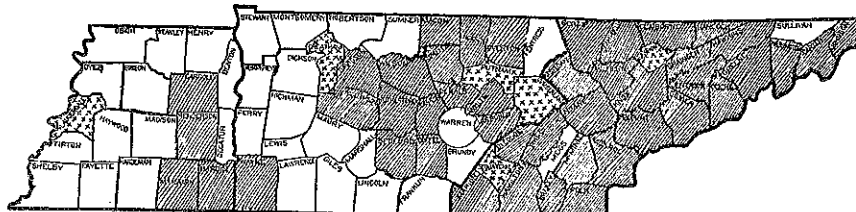
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study of the line-up of the pre-war Whigs and Democrats on some intermediary steps, the most important being that of secession. A drift toward secession became effective in Tennessee shortly after the presidential election of 1860.

This secession drift did not reach East Tennessee with sufficient force to change a majority of the East Tennesseans. Nor do old political party sentiment or ties account for the change or lack of change on the part of voters.

West Tennessee changed from a Whig majority in 1860 to better than a three to one majority for calling a convention to consider secession in the February election of 1861. The drift toward secession had become pronounced in West Tennessee before the first vote on the question of seceding. In Middle Tennessee, it was different. In this section, the people voted by a majority of nearly two thousand for the two Democratic presidential candidates in 1860; while in February following, Middle Tennessee voted more than a thousand majority against holding a convention on secession. The drift toward secession affected this section between the February and June elections of 1861. In East Tennessee, where the old-line Whigs had usually about a 2,500 majority, the voters turned down the secession movement by a majority of four and a half to one in February, 1861.

VOTE ON SEPARATION IN FEBRUARY 1861



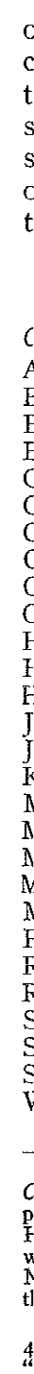
No Convention
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The purpose of the convention was to be a consideration of separation. However, the issue was not a clear cut one, for some Unionists voted for a convention and for Union delegates to the convention while other Unionists voted against a convention and for Union delegates.

The drift of sentiment toward secession continued, however, and in the June election on the actual issue of separation, West Tennessee voted almost five to one in favor of withdrawing from the Union. Middle Tennessee experienced an almost unbelievable transformation, changing from a majority

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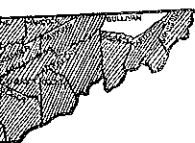
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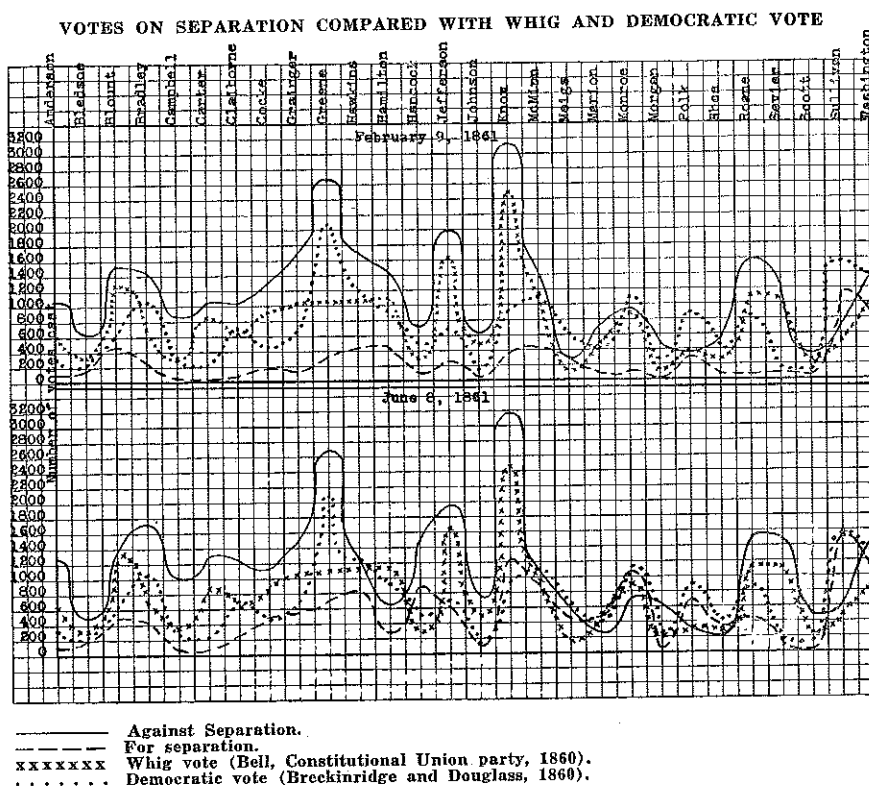
other East Tennessee county.¹⁴ But in every East Tennessee county except four the normal Democratic vote was more than the separation vote of June, 1861, this in spite of the fact that some Whigs joined the secession movement. The table below shows the Democratic and Whig (Constitutional Union) vote of 1860 in comparison with the "separation" and "no separation" vote of June, 1861.¹⁵

County	Presidential election of 1860		Separation election of June, 1861	
	Democrat	Whig (C.U.)	Separation	Union
Anderson	369	614	97	1276
Bledsoe	215	361	197	500
Blount	633	1261	418	1766
Bradley	1060	710	507	1382
Campbell	291	345	59	1000
Carter	220	839	86	1343
Claiborne	728	614	250	1243
Cocke	487	933	518	1185
Grainger	684	1047	586	1492
Greene	2092	1048	744	2691
Hawkins	1239	1067	908	1460
Hamilton	985	1074	854	1260
Hancock	511	309	279	630
Jefferson	716	1623	603	1987
Johnson	144	508	111	787
Knox	1087	2417	1226	3196
McMinn	1119	986	904	1144
Meigs	609	150	481	267
Marion	403	498	414	600
Monroe	1151	915	1096	774
Morgan	264	165	50	630
Polk	888	396	738	317
Rhea	410	289	360	202
Roane	882	1105	454	1568
Sevier	195	1035	60	1528
Scott	155	252	19	521
Sullivan	1586	358	1586	627
Washington	1398	967	1022	1445
Totals	20,551	22,320	14,780	32,923

¹⁴Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee, From 1833-1875, Their Times and Their Contemporaries* (New York, 1912), 357-467. O. P. Temple felt that the Unionist party and later the Republican party were the old Whig party under a new name. He writes of such men as Judge John Baxter, Judge Connally F. Trigg, and others who left the Unionists or Republican parties as men who left their "life-long" party. Nor did he seemingly ever feel that he, himself, had changed parties, but rather that the old Whig party had had its name changed. *Ibid.*, 72, 92.

¹⁵The figures for the table are found in *Nashville Republican Banner*, December 4, 1860; *Nashville Union and American*, June 25, 1861. The papers report them as "official with the exception of two or three counties."

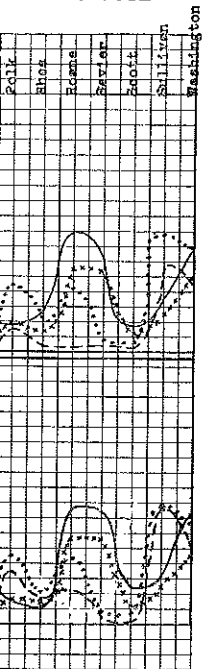
Oliver P. Temple, whose figures cannot be verified, contended that "the Union party in East Tennessee in the June election of 1861 was composed of about 20,520 Whigs and 13,890 Democrats, and the secession party of about 9,260 Democrats



and 5,130 Whigs.¹⁰ This, he said, meant that the Unionist party consisted of four fifths of the old-line Whigs of 1860 and three fifths of the old-line Democrats of that year. The secession party then was composed of one fifth of the old-line Whigs and three fifths of the 1860 Democrats. Temple arrived at these fractions by arithmetic and his figures though arbitrary have not been questioned. He pointed out that the June vote was in

¹⁰O. P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Cincinnati, 1899), 540. Temple's figures for the June election of 1861 do not correspond in several instances with the table given above due to the fact that there are no official records of the elections for this period and newspaper reports vary. Temple listed two East Tennessee counties not included in the above table, Sequatchie and Union. In the presidential election of 1860 Sequatchie voted with Hamilton and hence could not be used in the table of comparison. Union county election returns throughout the 1850's and 1860's were consistently late, sometimes seemingly too late to appear in the tables carried by the newspapers of the state.

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round numbers 48,800 in East Tennessee; that the Whig majority in East Tennessee in 1860 was 2,500. Hence, of the 48,800 votes, the Whigs could have voted 25,650 and the Democrats 23,150, but the results in round numbers were 34,000 against secession and 14,800 for secession. Therefore, he figured that four fifths of the Whigs and three fifths of the Democrats would bring almost the exact number polled for the Union. On the other hand, one fifth of the Whigs and two fifths of the Democrats was the only combination which would bring almost the exact number of votes polled by the secession party.¹⁷ The actual vote in 1861, according to Temple's figures, was 34,033 for the Union and 14,872 for separation.

Temple was surprised at the results of his own figures, "particularly at the large number of old Democrats who voted for the Union." About the one fifth of his own party who became secessionist he said: ". . . the Whigs who thus joined the Confederacy were among the best men in the party, many of them being slaveholders."²⁸ A large number of Democrats in the first district, Andrew Johnson's district, remained loyal. These Democrats followed Johnson in the election of 1860 when he was speaking for Breckinridge, who obtained a plurality over John Bell of 1,006 votes in Greene county. Then, in June, 1861, these same people in Greene county voted for the Union by a majority of 1,947 votes, again following Johnson.²⁹

The election of June, 1861, set the final stamp on whether East Tennessee counties would be Democratic or Republican counties. The line-up here by and large continued throughout the subsequent political battles to the end of the century.²⁰ The drift toward secession of course ceased as such when Tennessee joined the Confederacy. After the league with that government had been formed, East Tennesseans continued to drift toward the Southern side, but certainly not in large numbers.

The movement toward the Southern cause may be seen in part by a brief study of some East Tennessee leaders and how they changed. Of a selected group of eighty-seven leading men in East Tennessee whose political affiliations at the outbreak of the Civil War can now be determined, fifty-seven were Unionists and thirty were Secessionists. The fifty-seven Unionists

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹Nashville *Union and American*, June 25, 1861.

²⁰Daniel M. Robison, *Bob Taylor* (Chapel Hill, 1935), 10.

were made up of forty-one former old-line Whigs and thirteen Democrats. The party affiliations of three Unionists cannot now be determined. It is interesting to note that eleven of the Unionists who had been Whigs turned to the Conservative or Democratic ranks during the course of the war, while only one of the pre-war Democrats who became Unionists is known to have changed to the Radical party and later to the Republican party.

Of the thirty Secessionists, thirteen were known to have been Democrats at the outbreak of the war and eleven had been Whigs. Six of the thirty Secessionists could not be classified as to party affiliations. Of the Whigs, three aligned themselves with the Democratic party during the course of the war, but none of the Democrats changed to the Republican party.²¹

By mathematics, one observes that approximately three fourths of the Unionist leaders in East Tennessee were old-line Whigs at the outbreak of the war and of this three fourths, one fifth left the Union ranks. Of the one fourth of the Unionists who had been Democrats, one fifth later turned to the secessionist side. This left the Unionist party at the end of the war composed of one fifth Democrats and four fifths old-line Whigs. No additional Democrats drifted into the Unionist party from the Secessionist ranks.

The Secessionists, on the other hand, were composed of approximately two fifths former Democrats, a little over a third of old-line Whigs, and approximately one fourth cannot be classified. Of the Whigs who were for secession, approximately one half were members of the Democratic party after the war. The conclusion may be drawn that at the end of the war one half of the Confederate leaders of East Tennessee were former Democrats, slightly over one fourth were old-line Whigs, and one fourth cannot be classified.²²

It is, however, upon the Unionist party that attention should be focused, in which it is observed that almost four fifths of the East Tennessee leaders were old-line Whigs at the close

²¹Those men from Temple's list in his *Notable Men of Tennessee* whose pre-war party affiliations could be discovered have been used. Other men listed and their party affiliations were collected from the following works: O. P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War*, *passim*; William T. Hale and D. J. Merritt, *History of Tennessee*, I, and III; P. M. Hamer, *op. cit.*; *The Dictionary of American Biography*; and the Knoxville *Whig* during the war years.

²²Arda Susan Walker, a student assistant in history, did the tedious work of searching out the East Tennessee leaders and determining their party affiliations.

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As the Civil War dragged toward an end in Tennessee, more than three years after old political parties had ceased to exert any influence, the Unionist group began to emerge as the victors in whose hands would be placed all political duties and rights. The Secessionists, on the other hand, were being forced to accept the role of political outcasts. For a time after 1864, the Secessionists continued toward political oblivion, a stage from which they did not reappear until 1869. As the former Secessionists and Confederates ceased to have any political influence, the Unionists began to divide into what appeared to be political parties. Out of that division slowly emerged the new parties; hence these Unionist divisions must be considered carefully.

This division in the Unionist ranks had its beginning with the issuance of Lincoln's preliminary emancipation proclamation. Many Union men who had at first given some support to the Confederacy believed that the emancipation proclamation was unconstitutional.²² Other Conservative Unionists, men who had been Unionists all along, felt the same way about the emancipation act. These Unionists were followers of Andrew Johnson and believed in the Senate resolution proposed by him which maintained that the war was to be waged for the preservation of the Union and for no other purpose.²³

A few examples will make clearer the change in attitudes because of the emancipation proclamation. Such men as Judge John Baxter, William B. Carter, Thomas A. R. Nelson, John Netherland, and General James G. Spears all seem to have changed their attitude on the question of Unionism because of the emancipation proclamation. Baxter was much displeased with "the emancipation policy of Mr. Lincoln . . . and quickly denounced it" and other measures. So incensed was he that he joined the Democratic party and remained there until about 1875. William B. Carter, who showed his pro-Unionism by promoting the bridge-burning episode in East Tennessee in

²¹P. M. Hamer, *op. cit.*, II, 583.

²²The resolution proposed in the United States Senate by Johnson and, in 1861, adopted by Congress, said in part that the war was to be waged only to "defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution, and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several states unimpaired, and that as soon as these objects were accomplished the war ought to end." See *Cong. Globe*, 37 Cong. 1 Sess., Appendix, 243-65.

1861, became the "leader of the conservative opposition" after the emancipation, and "enthusiastically demanded the preservation of the Constitution as it was." Thomas A. R. Nelson claimed that Lincoln had neither the right nor the authority to issue the proclamation. He turned anti-Republican and remained so until his death. In the spring of 1864, John Netherland took offense at the administration and joined in the McClellan movement and continued to cooperate with the Democratic party the rest of his life. General Spears, the only Democrat of the group, bent all his efforts toward the Union cause, even to joining the Federal army and making himself conspicuous by his bravery in the battle of Murfreesboro and in many skirmishes. In 1864, he denounced emancipation as "illegal and unauthorized." He maintained that he "went into the army to support and uphold the old Constitution" which did not now need altering. He became so bitter that Lincoln had him dismissed from the army.²⁶ Thus the proclamation freeing the Negroes caused a number to oppose the Lincoln administration. Then, as Reconstruction came on, others who had stood for the Union throughout the war could not go along with the Radicals in their program of proscription and for that reason joined the Conservatives. Andrew Johnson would be the best example of this group.

Unconditional Unionists (Republicans-to-be), however, had approved all the acts of the Federal government in its efforts to win the war. These extreme Union men were at the beginning of the war in close cooperation with the four who changed to a conservative position. They were led by such men as William G. Brownlow, Horace Maynard, T. D. Arnold, Samuel Milligan, and Oliver P. Temple. These men and hundreds of others like them but with less leadership made up the Unconditional Unionist party of 1861 and afterwards. They finally became the core of the Republican party.

A second step in the development of distinct party lines came a short time later with the efforts of Andrew Johnson, military governor, to re-inaugurate loyal government in Tennessee. After the Federals took Chattanooga and Knoxville early in September, 1863, President Lincoln instructed the military governor that "not a moment should be lost" in re-inaugurating

²⁶Temple, *Notable Men of Tennessee*; see separate biographical sketches of men named.

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a loyal civil government.²⁶ But later in the same month the Federals were defeated at Chickamauga, September 20, 1863. It was December of that year before Lincoln offered his liberal amnesty oath and the ten per cent plan for the political reconstruction of the Southern states. In January, 1864, Johnson attempted to get Lincoln's plan going by holding in Nashville a convention which resolved, among other things, that a civil government could best be inaugurated by a convention chosen by the "loyal citizens of the state." Andrew Johnson believed, however, that restoration could best be made by the election of justices of the peace and other county officers. With such a beginning in mind, he called an election for March 5, 1864, to elect county officials.²⁷

The voters in this first post-war election were divided into two groups: those who were willing to take Lincoln's amnesty oath and those who, having been Loyalist all along, did not have to take the oath. The former were to be known as Conservatives and had been supporters of the Confederacy at the out-set but had soon become Union men. The latter were largely East Tennessee Unionists who joined with Johnson in his feeling that Lincoln's amnesty oath was not sufficient. Hence, many of the voters in this election had to take, in addition to Lincoln's amnesty oath, what they termed Johnson's "damnasty" oath. The issue in this would-be election was whether or not there should have been a second oath to qualify for suffrage. This oath required all who took it to swear that they ardently desired the extension of the emancipation proclamation to Tennessee.²⁸ Some Conservatives (hesitant Union men) chose what they considered the lesser of two evils and took both oaths in order to be able to vote in the March election.²⁹

Conservatives who had participated in the rebellion took the oaths to no avail, however, for, in February of 1864, Horace Maynard, attorney-general, and an East Tennessee Unconditional Unionist, issued a ruling that Conservatives who had supported the Confederacy could not vote until six months after taking the amnesty oath. He maintained that, by supporting

²⁶*The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series Three, III (Washington, 1901), 789. Chattanooga fell to the Federal army on September 2, and Knoxville on September 9, 1863. Lincoln wrote to Johnson on September 11.

²⁷*Nashville Daily Press*, February 23, 1864.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Knoxville Whig*, February 6, 1864.

rebellion they had lost their citizenship. The oath restored them to citizenship, but the state constitution said that "a voter must have been a citizen of the United States for six months,"⁸⁰ prior to an election in which he wanted to participate. In spite of this arrangement, the election was bi-partisan, and, in many counties, the Conservatives won, though in no place was any appreciable number of votes cast. Where there were Federal armies and officeholders the Unconditionals won. Many people thought the election was not an election but a travesty or a farce.⁸¹ Johnson was thoroughly disappointed at the strength shown by the Conservatives and made no further attempt toward civil government at the time.⁸²

The next party contest came before, and as a preliminary to, the presidential election of November, 1864. Some of the Conservative Unionists were former Democrats, as has been seen. These attended the Democratic national convention and later placed a McClellan-Pendleton electoral ticket in the field in Tennessee. Johnson called a Unionist convention to meet in Nashville in September, 1864, and both Unconditional Unionists and Conservative Unionists appeared as members of this convention. At the opening meeting, the Conservative Unionists were denounced as secessionists and "copperheads" and "kicked out" of the convention. The rump convention then drew up a second "dam-nasty" oath, which required all prospective voters to swear that they would "cordially oppose all armistices or negotiations for peace with rebels in arms . . . [and] will heartily aid and assist the loyal people in whatever measures may be adopted . . ."⁸³ This oath was a party measure aimed to silence the Conservatives, for a voter could not swear to this and then vote for a platform which contained a plank advocating "peace by negotiation."

The Conservative Unionists made a direct appeal to Lincoln, but they got no satisfaction. In the campaign, their meetings were broken up by Negroes and East Tennessee soldiers. Johnson said that loyal men were to be the controllers of "Ten-

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, February 20, 1864.

⁸¹*Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1864, p. 764; the *Nashville Union and American* said of the election that "so far as Nashville is concerned [the election] was a serious farce."

⁸²James W. Fertig, *The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee* (Chicago, 1898), 13; James W. Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill, 1934), 42.

⁸³*Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1864, p. 765.

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nessee's grand and sublime destinies, and Rebels must be dumb."⁸⁴

This presidential election, like Johnson's first attempt to hold an election, was little short of a farce. The vote for the state is unrecorded, but in Memphis, the Lincoln-Johnson electors received 1,579 votes and the McClellan electors 24 votes; in Nashville, the Lincoln ticket received 1,317, the McClellan ticket 25. The Lincoln-Johnson electors cast the vote of Tennessee for the Union ticket, but Congress, opposed to Lincoln's work of reconstruction, and not needing the vote of any state that had seceded to elect the Union party candidates, threw out the votes of Tennessee along with the votes from Louisiana and Arkansas.⁸⁵

The end of the year 1864 was drawing near and no civil government for Tennessee had been organized. Other efforts were to be made and out of these efforts more distinct political parties emerged. In December, 1864, the Unionist Executive Committee of East Tennessee called a convention to meet in Nashville to nominate delegates to a state constitutional convention. The few Unionists in the other sections of the state agreed. But before anything could be done, General John B. Hood invaded Tennessee. It was not until after the disastrous battles of Franklin and Nashville that the Unionists were free to attempt the re-establishment of a civil government in the state. The convention called for December, 1864, met in Nashville on January 8, 1865.

A Middle Tennessee Radical paper described the arrival in Nashville of the East Tennessee delegation by proclaiming triumphantly:

The men of the mountains came down in their strength on Saturday to attend the convention today. Parson Brownlow and about one hundred fifty other good men and true arrived nearly frozen bodily by a long dreary ride in box cars from Knoxville; but spiritually all aglow with fire and unquenchable patriotism . . .⁸⁶

⁸⁴Patton, *op. cit.*, 48; P. M. Hammer, *op. cit.*, II, 59.0

⁸⁵*Cong. Globe*, 38 Cong. 2 Sess., 668-69. The resolution not to count the electoral votes of any of the eleven states that had seceded declared that "no valid election" was held in any of these, including Tennessee. In the debate over the resolution Ben Wade, in charge of the resolution in the Senate, said the votes of these states would not be counted even if needed to elect Lincoln, but the resolution was not introduced until all knew how the election had gone. See *ibid.*, 553-98. The passage of this resolution was a feature of the fight between the Radicals and Lincoln over his work as a reconstructionist. The resolution was intended as a trap which it was believed the President could not avoid, but he side-stepped very neatly and taught his tormentors a lesson in politics.

⁸⁶Nashville *Press and Times*, January 9, 1865.

When this convention got down to business on the following Tuesday morning, there were some 521 delegates from sixty counties, of whom a goodly proportion were Federal soldiers.⁸⁷

In the convention political divisions appeared at once as the delegates debated a resolution offered by L. C. Houk, a Radical from East Tennessee. Houk's resolution limited membership in the convention to "delegates who had actively supported the Union." A. J. Clements of Macon county in Middle Tennessee argued that such a resolution excluded many from his section who had been supporters of the Confederacy but who were now in the United States army. After much warm discussion, Houk's resolution was adopted.⁸⁸

Another East Tennessean offered a more radical resolution which widened the breach in the Unionist ranks. In this resolution, Roderick Random Butler of Johnson county proposed that voting be by counties and that each county be given one vote for each hundred votes cast in the county against disunion in 1861. Middle and West Tennessee delegates argued against this resolution and threatened to quit the convention should it be adopted. It was adopted after a bitter debate on Tuesday, then reconsidered on Wednesday and withdrawn in deference to an agreement worked out the previous night.⁸⁹ Enough had been done in organizing the convention to show that Unconditional Unionists, and mainly those of East Tennessee, were running the convention.

The work of the convention, once it was organized, caused much political animus. The convention had been called to nominate candidates to a state constitutional convention, but, instead, the assemblage arrogated unto itself the character and prerogatives of a constitutional convention. After six days of bitter debate, the majority proposed an amendment abolishing slavery and "a schedule" which declared null and void all acts taking Tennessee out of the Union and all legislative acts passed after the state declared for independence.⁹⁰ The convention further "empowered" the military governor to call an election for choosing a governor and legislature whenever he thought fit. Then the versatile group became a party convention and nomi-

⁸⁷Knoxville *Whig*, January 25, 1864.

⁸⁸P. M. Hamer, *op. cit.*, II, 592-93.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 594.

⁹⁰The schedule, composed of eight sections, was printed in its entirety in the *Whig*, January 25, 1865.

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nated Brownlow for governor and selected a general legisla-
tive ticket. The election for governor and legislators was to be
by plebiscite which should be held as soon as possible after the
referendum on the amendment and "schedule."

On the amendment and the "schedule" those eligible could
vote by writing or printing the word "ratification" or "rejec-
tion" on their ballots. All could vote who would take the oath
that had been required for voting in the presidential election of
the previous year, or all who were well known to the judges of
the election as Unconditional Union men. Furthermore, each
voter was to write his name plainly on the back of his ballot,
and all ballots were to be preserved. The political implications
in the work of this "convention" were that all who could not
follow the extreme Unionists had better stay at home on election
day.

The amendment and the "schedule" were ratified on Feb-
ruary 22, 1865, by 26,865 to 67. The total vote was small: in
Knox county there were 2,452 "ratifications" and 3 "rejections";
in Nashville 1,416 "ratifications" and 3 "rejections." It was
called a "mud-sill vote," for most men of influence or property
neither visited the polls nor gave the election the slightest
thought.⁴¹ Although the total vote cast in this election was disap-
pointingly small, it may be taken as an accurate measure of the
strength of the Radical Unionist party in 1865 because of the
keenness with which they looked forward to the victory.

On March 4, 1865, a governor and legislature were chosen
by plebiscite, the vote being 23,352 to 35. On April 5, 1865,
this small and extreme Unionist party came into power and for
two years following, Tennessee political parties revolved around
the acts of Governor Brownlow and the measures of his legis-
lature. This legislature passed many acts, but only those bear-
ing directly on party affairs of that day or later will be consid-
ered here. Many of the acts which have any party significance
were, as the speaker of the Senate, Samuel R. Rodgers, said,
aimed to keep the loyal people of the state from ever being "gov-
erned by rebels." He continued, "Look at the returned rebels
. . . boasting of what they intend, cursing this Legislature as
a bogus concern."⁴²

The most important work of the legislature was that of
carrying out of a provision of the "schedule" recently added to

⁴¹Knoxville *Whig*, March 1, 1865, and quoting the *Memphis Bulletin*.

⁴²Knoxville *Whig*, May 3, 1865.

the constitution which placed on this legislature the responsibility for fixing the elective franchise. The fixing of the franchise was a political machination and on this question two schools of opinion appeared at once. The extreme Radicals proposed to disfranchise all who had supported the Confederacy in any way. The less radical proposed that suffrage be granted to all who would henceforth be loyal to the United States constitution, excluding in addition to those excluded by Lincoln's proclamation of amnesty such others as "ought not to vote because of their present disloyal conduct."⁴³

The debate on the new franchise bill was bitter but not too long, for on June 5, 1865, the Radicals won by adopting the Arnell Bill, named for Samuel M. Arnell. This act made a classification of all who could vote. The whole matter boiled down to the franchise being limited to Unconditional Union men and few others. The act was more a disfranchising act for it disfranchised all who had given aid and comfort to the Confederacy. One class was disfranchised for fifteen years, and the rest, including all common soldiers of the Confederacy, for five years. The law further provided that all voters were to be registered by the county court clerk and that any voter might be challenged at the ballot box. If a voter was challenged, then he must take a severe oath, which included a promise to support the federal and state officials, the General Assembly, etc.⁴⁴ Many people could not take such an oath because they felt the whole state government to be extra-legal or unconstitutional. The motive for wanting to vote on the part of the people who would not take the oath was of course a desire to be rid of the whole regime.

This disfranchising act was more severe than many of the Tennessee Radicals wished, but as the Speaker of the House admitted, they were attempting, by its enactment, to win favor with the Radicals at Washington. The Speaker wrote: "If I am correctly informed from Washington, should we fail or neglect to disfranchise [*sic*] rebels the state of Ten.[*sic*] will at once be put under a military Governor and our members of Congress will not be admitted."⁴⁵ The Radicals no doubt thought they had worked out a franchise law which would keep their

⁴³*House Journal*, 34 General Assembly, 1 Session, 1865, pp. 196, 220-21.

⁴⁴*Knoxville Whig*, June 21, 1865.

⁴⁵S. R. Rodgers to Col. O. P. Temple, May 13, 1865, Temple Papers (University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville).

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⁴⁹Ibid

party in control and at the same time would win them favor at Washington.

The first political party test under the new franchise act came in August, 1865. At this time representatives to the national House were to be elected. During the campaign, ex-Confederates stood aside disfranchised, while the Conservative and Radical factions of the Unionists each urged the defeat of the other. The issues were the Radical regime and the franchise law. Governor Brownlow inadvertently gave what was probably a true picture of the whole difficulty when he said: "The franchise law is a necessary and legal measure to prevent the placing of East Tennessee again under . . . such men as Harris, or Cheatham, or Bate, or Pillow, a mere appendage to a rebel state!"⁴⁶

Aside from the franchise law, other means were used to thwart the Conservatives. They were threatened with the Federal army, and finally when the Conservatives won in five of the eight congressional districts, the Governor refused to count all of the votes in one district and thereby saved his friend Samuel M. Arnell, author of the franchise law, from defeat.⁴⁷ In this election, some 62,000 votes were cast, approximately one third of the voting strength of the state in 1861. The Radicals were amazed at the outcome, because their extreme position had been rejected by handpicked Unionist voters. They were forced to conclude that the franchise law of the previous year was not sufficiently stringent.

The Radicals, before this election, had dreamed of complete strangulation of the old pre-war parties and of building up one "thorough-going Union Party." As a Middle Tennessee Radical paper put it:

Sagacious, energetic patriots will listen to no trickster and office hunter, who calls for the revival of the old Whig or the old Democratic party. These partisan organizations lived their days, and perished at last of their corruptions; and we think they perished not a day too soon. What the people demand now, is a great, living, thorough-going Union Party . . .⁴⁸

Despite the conviction of this Radical paper, the dissension within the Radical party was threatening the very existence of the organization.⁴⁹ Brownlow, able politician that he was, per-

⁴⁶Knoxville *Whig*, August 16, 1865.

⁴⁷*Senate Journal*, 34 General Assembly, 2 Session, 1865-66, p. 154.

⁴⁸Nashville *Press and Times*, July 7, 1865.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, July 11, 1865.

formed many acts and said many things which promoted division in the party which he was trying to lead. In writing to a friend, he said: "They [the Radicals] are backed up by the loyal masses North, who are resolved not to follow Johnson with his newly-formed partizans in his wild scheme to ressurect [*sic*] the Democratic party"⁵⁰

The Tennessee Radicals, by becoming more and more extreme, were forcing the more moderate men to leave the Radical position and join the Conservatives.⁵¹ This shift in the Radical position developed in Tennessee in connection with a new franchise law. The recent congressional election had demonstrated that in a general state election the Conservatives would gain the ascendancy. The Radical extremist could not question the loyalty of the Conservatives because they were "solid and substantial Union men whose loyalty was above question."⁵² But the Conservatives opposed a new disfranchising act.

The new bill, which in due time became a law, consisted of two parts. The first part provided that only those white men could vote who had never borne arms against the United States, had never given aid or comfort to rebels, had never sought or accepted civil or military office under the Confederacy or any part of its states, and had never given money or property to aid the rebellion. Exceptions were made for white men who had been honorably discharged from the United States army or navy or had voted in the elections of the previous November, February, or March, or had been appointed to office in Tennessee by Johnson or Brownlow. The second part of the law was even more important and led eventually to the undoing of the Radicals. Under this phase of the new law, voters had to secure certificates from county commissioners of registration. These commissioners were appointed by, and could be removed at the will of, the governor.⁵³ While the franchise law was in the process of being passed, the Governor described it as "a terrible Bill, with some rough plans in it The rebels are furious," he said, "but our men don't regard them."⁵⁴

The bill was so terrible "that it divided the Governor's party into warring factions." The Conservatives tried to prevent

⁵⁰W. G. Brownlow to Col. O. P. Temple, January 25, 1866, Temple Papers.

⁵¹E. M. Coulter, *William G. Brownlow* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 284.

⁵²Patton, *op. cit.*, 114.

⁵³Knoxville *Whig*, March 7, 1866.

⁵⁴W. G. Brownlow to Col. O. P. Temple, January 25, 1866, Temple Papers.

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passage by staying away and thereby preventing a quorum. The legislature degenerated into a brawl, with swearing and fighting between the speaker, William Heiskell of Knox County, and James Mullins of Bedford county. Finally, seventeen of the more conservative resigned, and new elections were called to fill the vacancies.⁶⁷ This election offered a second chance to see what the few voters in counties where elections were to be held thought of the extreme Radical program. Brownlow called the opposition to a new franchise law the "little rebellion" and his paper, the *Whig*, began advocating that East Tennessee "secede" from the rest of the state if the Conservatives won, as apparently they were going to do.⁶⁸

When the votes were counted, all but three of the Conservatives had been re-elected. The Radicals denied seats to some of these Conservatives, on the ground that they had pledged their constituents to prevent the passage of the franchise bill! The three Radicals who won in the by-election were seated. This addition gave the Radicals a majority of the total number in legislature which was necessary for a quorum,⁶⁹ and the new franchise law was passed on May 3, 1866.⁷⁰

The party division over the franchise question, unlike that of secession in 1861, was temporary rather than permanent. Of the seventeen who resigned only three were East Tennesseans: Williams of Carter county, Willis of Hawkins county and Hood of Hamilton county. Of these three, Willis is not mentioned in any record that could be discovered. The other two, like practically all Radicals, became Republicans. As far as could be discovered the others who resigned, but who were not East Tennesseans, were later Republicans. For example, A. A. Freeman was nominated for governor on the Republican ticket in 1872. At the time these legislators resigned, the question was how extreme the new franchise law should be, and they no doubt knew the sentiment of their constituents and simply refused to go along with Brownlow and his extremists. Brown-

⁶⁶Those resigning from the House were: William Barton of Cannon county; T. H. Bledsoe, Lincoln; N. Brandon, Stewart; W. Y. Elliot, Rutherford; Asa Faulkner, Warren; A. A. Freeman, Haywood; J. R. Hood, Hamilton; W. B. Lewis, Davidson; A. D. Nicks, Dickson; C. N. Ordway, Giles; W. P. Scales, Dyer; W. Simmons, Franklin; A. A. Steele, Marshall; S. P. Walker, Shelby; A. R. Wayne, Sumner; Pleasant Williams, Carter; and W. W. Willis, Hawkins. *House Journal*, 34 General Assembly, 1865-66, pp. 403ff.

⁶⁷Knoxville *Whig*, March 14, 1866.

⁶⁸*House Journal*, 34 General Assembly, 2 Session, 1865, 420ff.

⁶⁹Knoxville *Whig*, May 5, 1866.

low accused them of having resigned to "gratify the amnestied and pardoned rebels," and when the by-election returned most of them, he said, "the traitors . . . have been re-elected by disloyal constituencies."⁸⁸

The Radicals had for a second time tried to concoct a measure of disfranchisement strong enough to keep this party in power. There remained other steps which they could and did take: namely, enfranchisement of the Negroes, and passing a state guard act. They reasoned that with a majority of white men of the state disqualified, and with the Negroes voting the Radical ticket, as they would most surely do, the small group of Radicals, largely from East Tennessee, could keep themselves in power indefinitely.⁸⁹ Governor Brownlow had discussed the possibility of giving the vote to Negroes as early as October, 1865. The legislature had considered the measure in the spring of 1866. But, chiefly because of the strong opposition of DeWitt C. Senter in the Senate, who seemed to speak largely for East Tennessee, the measure was not passed.⁹⁰ A state guard would be a potent weapon at the polls and the Radicals believed it would be needed should Negroes attempt to vote.

Brownlow, to win support for his program, was preaching in and out of Tennessee, another war. The rebels were going to bring it on, but he wanted it, for "then there could be some real hanging parties. Johnson would, in this second rebellion, take the place of Jeff Davis."⁹¹ But to paraphrase Brownlow is to lose some of the venom; his own paper reported that he had said many times and from different stumps:

If another war shall be forced upon this country the loyal masses who constitute an overwhelming majority of the people of this great nation in-

⁸⁸Knoxville *Whig*, March 7, April 11, 1866.

⁸⁹*Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1866, 731. As Brownlow put it, "with the loyal men of the State allowed to vote, the government thereof will remain in loyal hands. Without their votes, the State will pass into disloyal hands."

⁹⁰Patton, *op. cit.*, 128. DeWitt C. Senter was a Unionist. At this time, he was the senator representing Claiborne, Grainger, Anderson, and Campbell counties, all in East Tennessee. Brownlow, like Senter, opposed Negro suffrage personally and was afraid that East Tennessee Radicals would defeat any program favoring the Negroes. In the previous year, he issued a statement to "the East Tennessee Loyalists." And among other things, he said, "I felt confident that the passage of such a law [granting Negroes the right to testify in court] would satisfy the colored people of the country, and that the indiscriminate right of suffrage would not be exacted of us; whereas, if we should fail to concede to the Negro the right to testify, Congress would grant it for us, and with it the right of suffrage." The Governor continued:

"A law to this effect has already passed the [state] Senate but the chances are that it will be defeated in the House. If defeated, it will be killed by the loyal votes of East Tennessee—the members correctly representing the sentiments of their constituents." Nashville *Press and Times*, December 2, 1865.

⁹¹Knoxville *Whig*, October, 1866, and later issues.

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tend it shall be no child's play. They will do as they ought to do, make the entire Southern Confederacy as God found the earth when he commenced the work of creation, "Without form and void." They will not and ought not leave a rebel fence-rail, out-house, or dwelling in the eleven seceded states.—And as for the rebel population, let them be exterminated. And when the War is wound up, which should be done rapidly, and with swift destruction—let the land be re-surveyed and sold out to pay the expenses of the war, and settled only by a people who will respect the Stars and Stripes.

I want to have something to say about the division of your [Northern] forces the next time. I would divide your great army into three grand divisions.—Let the first go armed and equipped as the law of the army require, with small arms and artillery.—Let that be the larger division and let them do the killing. Let the second division be armed with pine torches and spirits of turpentine, and let them do the burning. Let the third and last division be supplied with surveyor's compasses and chains and we will survey out the land and settle it. Those are my sentiments.⁶³

In August, 1867, there would be a general election, and both governor and legislature would be called to the ballot box for an accounting. The Radicals, now generally calling themselves Republicans, decided that a Negro suffrage measure and a state guard act should be passed before the coming election. By the end of February, 1867, both acts had been passed.⁶⁴ By the first law, Negroes were permitted to vote but not to hold office.⁶⁵ By the second act, Brownlow could raise one or more companies of state guardsmen from each congressional district. The governor could call out this army as he saw fit "to keep peace or to enforce the law."⁶⁶

With Negro suffrage, and with a military force at their beck and call, the Radical Republicans met on February 22, 1867, and nominated Brownlow for a second term.⁶⁷

Although the situation seemed hopeless to the Conservatives, they met in convention in April and nominated the Honorable Emerson Etheridge, a former Whig, then a Unionist, and later a Republican, to oppose Brownlow.⁶⁸ The outcome of the election was a surprise to no one. The Brownlow Radicals,

⁶³Knoxville *Whig*, August 22, September 12, 1866. In summarizing the work of the three divisions, he protected loyal Southern men in each point. *Ibid.*, October 24, 1866.

⁶⁴*Acts of Tennessee*, 34 General Assembly, 3 Session, 1866, pp. 27ff.

⁶⁵Nashville *Banner*, December 5, 1867.

⁶⁶Knoxville *Whig*, January and February, 1867; Nashville *Press and Times*, March 18, 1867.

⁶⁷Knoxville *Whig*, February 25, 1867.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, April 21, 1867.

now officially the Republican Union party, won with 74,034 votes to 22,550 votes cast by the Conservative Unionists.⁶⁶ The election gave the Republicans the entire delegation in the lower house at Washington, and at Nashville they had all but a unanimous legislature.⁶⁷ As for East Tennessee, the Republican stronghold then as now, Brownlow carried every county in this section and his total vote was 25,789 to 4,155 for Etheridge.

Through this election and all that led up to it, a Republican party was formed, and many members of the party hoped that their large vote⁶⁸ in the August election of 1867, plus accretions from immigrants, would make their party a majority party in the state.

⁶⁶Charles A. Miller, *Official Manual of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1890), 170. Many Conservatives, former Confederates, could not, or would not, vote for Etheridge because they felt he had been too ardently for the Union.

⁶⁷The Conservatives had managed to elect four members of the legislature.

⁶⁸The Republican vote of more than 74,000 was within 8,000 of a majority of all votes cast in the election of June 8, 1861, on the question of secession. This they considered an excellent showing, and they might well hope to become a majority party within a short time, if accretions hoped for could be realized.