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Suggested Citation:

Campbell, Mary R. "Tennessee and the Union, 1847-1861." *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 10 (1938): 71-90.

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TENNESSEE AND THE UNION, 1847-1861*

By MARY R. CAMPBELL

Possibly the major tragedy in the history of Tennessee was its enforced participation in the Civil War. Because of its position as a border state its interests were typical of those of neither the North nor the South. Within the state itself a wide variety of geographic conditions created a diversity of social and economic interests which further increased the difficulty of obtaining concerted action in matters of political concern.¹ It was particularly difficult, therefore, for the people of Tennessee to reach an agreement when it was no longer possible to postpone a decision on the question of relation of their state to the federal Union. Although, with few exceptions, they had exerted themselves for years in the interest of national harmony, they found it impossible to prevent their state's becoming not only one of the two greatest theatres of war in the struggle between the North and South but also the scene of a miniature civil war between sections within its own borders.

Political affairs in Tennessee during the fourteen year period immediately preceding the conflict between the North and South were complicated. There were two parties of relatively equal and comparatively evenly distributed strength. Although the Whig party and its successors had a considerable body of adherents in Middle Tennessee, their main strongholds were in East and West Tennessee. Similarly, Middle Tennessee was the center of Democratic support, but the party polled a substantial minority vote in each of the other two sections.² The existence of strong sectional feeling between East Tennessee, on the one hand, and Middle and West Tennessee on the other, added to the complexity of the political situation.

Definite convictions concerning sovereignty, state rights, and the extra-legal right of revolution antedate statehood in Tennessee. In view of the fact that Tennesseans generally were still under the spell of Andrew Jackson's powerful personality and ideas, it seems that their political philosophy included emphasis on both state and national sov-

*Read before a meeting of the Society at Knoxville, February 4, 1938.

¹Roscoe Nunn, "The Climate of Tennessee," in *The Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1918), VIII, 8; J. D. B. DeBow (comp.), *Statistical View of the United States* (Compendium of the *Seventh Census*, Washington, 1854); *United States Eighth Census*, volumes on population, mortality and miscellaneous statistics, manufacturing, and agriculture (Washington, 1864).

²Election returns in: *Nashville Daily Union*, November 23, 1848; *Nashville True Whig*, August 9, 1851; *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, August 6, October 11, 1853; and *Nashville Union and American*, August 25, 1855, August 30, 1859, December 2, 1860.

ereignty without any very definite idea as to which was supreme.³ Since the organization of the Whig party in Tennessee had not originally involved a repudiation of Jackson's national program, it, like the Democratic party, included advocates of both state rights and nationalism.

The beginning of the revolutionary movement which culminated in Tennessee's withdrawal from the Union was coetaneous with the dawning realization that the efforts of certain groups in the North to prohibit the extension of slavery to the territories was not only a blow at the institution of slavery but also a decided threat to Southern expansion and even to the South's position of influence in the Union. The discussion which the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso⁴ in Congress precipitated brought this matter concretely to the attention of the people of Tennessee. For the first time they calculated seriously the value of the Union. The belief was widespread in Tennessee that continued Northern encroachments, especially those which jeopardized the future of slavery, the warp of the social and economic fabric of the state, threatened its future prosperity. The difference of opinion as to the best means of obtaining redress of grievances and of guaranteeing their *modus vivendi* formed the basis of party divisions upon the subject within the state.

The people of Tennessee generally shared President Polk's belief that the Wilmot Proviso was a "mischievous and foolish amendment."⁵ Each of the two political parties in the state tried to shift responsibility for it to the other. The Whigs characterized it as "essentially a Polk Democratic measure." The Democrats, on the other hand, denounced the Whigs "as 'Wilmot Proviso men,' as 'abolitionists,' & ,"⁶

The first public endorsement by a state wide organization in Tennessee of the state rights doctrine, which, if carried to its logical conclusion, might eventually lead to the withdrawal of states from the Union, came from the state Democratic convention of 1849. This body declared

That in the event of the passage by Congress of the Wilmot Proviso, or any law abolishing slavery or the slave trade in the District of Columbia, we are ready, heart and soul, with a united front, to join Virginia, the Carolinas, Florida and the other Southern States, in taking such measures for the vindication of our rights, and the preservation of ourselves and those

³Daniel M. Robison, *Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1935), 3.

⁴This measure, introduced by David Wilmot of Pennsylvania in August, 1846, provided that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for a judicially determined crime, should exist in any territory which the United States might acquire as a result of the Mexican War.

⁵Allan Nevins (ed.), *Polk, The Diary of a War President, 1845-1849* (New York, 1929), 138.

⁶Nashville *Republican Banner*, October 22, 1847.

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whom we hold dear, as the highest wisdom of all may, through a southern convention or otherwise, suggest and advise.

It affirmed its belief that

in the recent movements of a large portion of the people of the north, in Congress, in the legislatures of the States, in the civil courts, in the primary assemblies of the people, in their continued efforts to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, in the establishment of the principles of the Wilmot Proviso, and in the protection of fugitive slaves we perceive a total disregard and a reckless violation of all their pledges in the constitution and a design not only to prevent the extension of slavery into the newly acquired territory but to abolish it forcibly at no distant day in all the States of the Union where it now exists.⁷

The convention nominated General William Trousdale as its gubernatorial candidate.

The Whig state convention, which met a few weeks later and nominated Governor Neill S. Brown for a second term, failed to adopt a platform. The Democrats maintained, therefore, that the speech which Governor Brown subsequently made setting forth his position "must necessarily be taken as the sentiments, opinions and positions of the party, and for them will the party justly be held accountable and responsible." The governor accepted the South's attitude on slavery and was of course opposed to the Wilmot Proviso. If it passed, however, he thought that the South should submit, because "Congress could do nothing that would justify any section in resisting its decrees." He deprecated the passing of resolutions by legislatures and public meetings in the South "recommending to the citizens of the southern States, in the event of the passage of the Wilmot Proviso, to resist its enforcement and to break off commercial relations with the north" as much as he did the "fanaticism of the north." He believed it possible to effect a compromise by agreeing upon some line in the territories beyond which slavery would not go.⁸

Although the Whigs attributed Governor Brown's subsequent defeat mainly to apathy, resulting from blind over-confidence, and disaffection or factionalism in their own party, they asserted that the Democrats' "studied and unceasing misrepresentation" of his position on the slavery issue was also a big factor in it. They pointed out, too, that Trousdale's military record had contributed largely to his success.⁹

The Democrats declared that the real cause of Brown's defeat was "the apathy which he produced in his own party by the very vulnerable

⁷Nashville *Daily Union*, April 4, 1849.

⁸*Ibid.*, April 23, 24, 1849.

⁹Nashville *Whig*, August 9, 1849.

position which he occupied in regard to the slavery question." They accused him of being a submissionist and stated that such a position was indefensible.¹⁰

It was quite natural, therefore, that the Democracy of Tennessee should respond enthusiastically to the call of the Jackson, Mississippi, convention of the fall of 1849 for a convention of the slave-holding states to meet in Nashville in June, 1850, to "devise and adopt some mode of resistance to these [Northern] aggressions." Proponents of this movement held that it was to be wholly defensive. Its chief purpose was "generally conceded to be the presentation of a united protest from the South against the attempt to exclude southern men with their slaves from the national territories which had recently been won from Mexico."¹¹

The press of Tennessee, including Whig as well as Democratic papers, heartily endorsed the Nashville or Southern convention at first. This unanimity of sentiment is apparently attributable to the fact that there was universal agreement that further guarantees for the preservation of the rights of the South were necessary and that this convention was merely a means of voicing the protest of a united South, particularly with respect to the unfair discrimination against Southern institutions in the territories and against Northern violations of constitutional provisions regarding slavery. There was seemingly no recognition of a positive disunion sentiment in the move for the Nashville Convention of 1850 until in January of the year 1850 itself. Then, when the compromise proposals¹² which Henry Clay introduced in Congress began to loom large in discussions of national politics, his Whig supporters became conscious of evils hitherto unsuspected which might grow out of such a meeting.¹³

The subsequent action of the Tennessee legislature relative to the choice of delegates to the Nashville Convention revealed the fact that the people's representatives had apparently come to view the matter in a partisan light. The Democratic lower house passed a resolution requesting the governor to appoint two delegates from the state at large and two from each congressional district to represent the state in the convention. The Whig Senate defeated a proposal requesting that the

¹⁰Nashville *Daily Union*, August 18, 1849.

¹¹Dallas T. Herndon, "The Nashville Convention of 1850," Alabama Polytechnic Institute, *Studies in Southern and Alabama History* (Montgomery, 1905), 203, 210-211.

¹²These measures, comprising the Compromise of 1850, provided for: (1) the admission of California as a free state, (2) the organization of Utah and New Mexico as territories without any mention of slavery, (3) the payment of \$10,000,000 in settlement of the boundary claims of Texas, (4) the passage of a more stringent fugitive slave law, and (5) the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

¹³*Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, February 19, 1850; *Memphis Eagle*, February 2, 1850; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig and Independent Journal*, March 2, 1850.

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people adopt measures in their primary assemblies to send delegates to the convention.¹⁴ Some of the "sovereign people," generally Democrats, thereupon took matters into their own hands and chose delegates who subsequently represented the state in the convention.

The Nashville or Southern Convention met as predetermined on June 4, 1850, in Nashville in the face of a somewhat hostile public sentiment.¹⁵ Its proceedings were thoroughly harmonious on the main subjects under consideration. These were: absolute equality of states, the doctrine of state sovereignty, the right of a state to settle its own domestic relations and shape its policy toward the institution of slavery, and, the right of each state to equal participation in all territories with national protection of its property. The convention went on record as favoring a division of the territories between the two sections by extending the Missouri Compromise line of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude to the Pacific "in the event a dominant majority shall refuse to recognize the great constitutional rights we assert, and shall continue to deny the obligations of the Federal Government to maintain them." It viewed its willingness to accept this dividing line as a generous concession, a price of peace in default of just claims. While the convention made no threats in case Congress did not comply with its wishes, it closed its session with a provision for reassembling after Congress had adjourned.¹⁶

Democratic opinion in the state, as it found expression in the two leading Democratic papers of Nashville, was complimentary in its estimate of the work of the convention. The *Daily American* exulted that "The phantom of treason did not once intrude upon its deliberations. . . . She met as men who know their rights and intend to assert them. They claimed nothing but *equal rights*; and maintained them in resolutions, temperate and mild yet firm and unyielding."¹⁷

Although the *Daily Union* felt that the proceedings of the convention had dissipated the fears of those who had opposed its assembling, it could not wholeheartedly endorse all of the opinions expressed by its members. It pointed out that the sentiment of the convention was for "The Union forever, under the guarantees of the Constitution," and that its members showed a "disposition to concede, for the preservation of the Union, everything consistent with southern safety and honor."¹⁸

While the Whig press was by no means as enthusiastic as the Democratic in its commendation of the convention, its comments were not

¹⁴*Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, February 19, 1850.

¹⁵*Nashville Daily American*, June 16, 1850.

¹⁶*Resolutions and Addresses Adopted by the Southern Convention* (Nashville, 1850), 1-21.

¹⁷June 16, 1850.

¹⁸June 14, 1850.

altogether unfavorable. For example, the *Republican Banner and Nashville Whig* declared that the convention, which had professed love for the Union and at the same time talked Southern confederacy, was not really representative of the South. It rejoiced that the Whigs had had no part in it. It did assert, however, that despite its belief that the convention was premature, and that it should have been only a last resort, it indicated the tone of Southern opinion and suggested that the North would do well to take warning.¹⁹

Since the majority of Tennesseans were essentially conservative, it is not surprising that, largely irrespective of party affiliation, they welcomed the news that Congress, through the united action of Whigs and Democrats, had passed in September the last of the measures making up the Compromise of 1850. The vote of Tennessee's congressional delegation, which had taken a prominent part in the debates on them,²⁰ was apparently representative of the sentiment in the state. This group, although it consisted of eight Democrats and five Whigs, was, for the most part, favorable to all of the proposals.²¹

Such being the case, the idea, then, that the Nashville Convention should reassemble was absurd to most Tennesseans. The demands of this adjourned session of the convention, consisting chiefly of radicals from the depleted ranks of the delegations of the seven states represented,²² were, as a matter of course, extreme. The Tennessee delegation, although itself divided,²³ "attempted to stem the tide of radicalism by the introduction of the 'Tennessee Resolutions' which were more moderate than those adopted by the Convention."²⁴

Condemnation of the second session of the Nashville Convention was well nigh universal in Tennessee. The *Daily American*, which "preferred the man who went too far in defense of Southern rights to the one who did not go far enough," would neither endorse all the doctrines of the preamble and the resolutions nor approve all that the convention had said.²⁵ The *Memphis Eagle* felt that the convention had proposed a tragedy and enacted a comedy.²⁶

¹⁹June 17, 1850.

²⁰Barsha R. Webb, *Attitude of Members of Congress from Tennessee on the Slavery Question, 1820-1858* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1931), 100.

²¹*Congressional Globe*, 31 Congress, 1 Session (Washington, 1850), 1555, 1572, 1573, 1589, 1647, 1764, 1776, 1807, 1819, 1830.

²²Tennessee's delegation had shrunk to only fourteen members.

²³Herndon, *op. cit.*, 230-231. The conservatives, under the leadership of G. J. Pillow, A. V. Brown, A. O. P. Nicholson and A. J. Donelson, dominated it. Claiborne of the minority favored immediate secession.

²⁴St. George L. Sioussat, "Tennessee, the Compromise of 1850, and the Nashville Convention," *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, IV (December, 1918), 244.

²⁵November 20, 1850.

²⁶November 18, 1850.

The gubernatorial campaign of 1851, which was already getting under way before the adjournment of the second session of the Nashville Convention, promised to be an exciting one. A "united Democracy" renominated Governor Trousdale.²⁷ Although General William B. Campbell apparently did not wish to be his party's candidate for the governorship, he finally permitted Whig leaders to draft him in view of their insistence that he was the only one of their number who had any appreciable chance of defeating Trousdale.²⁸

Both parties very definitely subordinated state to national issues.²⁹ They were still thinking in terms of the Wilmot Proviso, the Nashville Convention, and the Compromise of 1850. Each sought not only to justify the position which it had taken with reference to each of these questions but also to prove that its policy was the one best calculated to preserve the Union and at the same time to safeguard the rights of the South.

The Democrats opposed the "dangerous fanaticism of the North," against which even "the fireaters of the South" sought only to protect themselves and their institutions. They favored maintaining the Union "by the rigid enforcement of the compromises of the constitution." Regardless of whatever differences of opinion existed among them as to the "intrinsic merits of the compromise measures, either as they affect the rights of the South or North," the Democrats were all agreed, they said, "in acquiescing in them and supporting them as a final adjustment of all difficulties."³⁰ They charged the Whigs with being allies of the abolitionists, and accused Campbell of being willing to "submit" to the repeal of the fugitive slave law.³¹

Governor Trousdale personally took a more advanced position with reference to the Compromise of 1850 than that occupied by the rank and file of his party. Although he favored acquiescing in and maintaining it, he characterized it on the whole as being oppressive and unjust to the South. He asserted that Campbell and the Whig party were "too favorable to northern views and feelings in their discussions of the Compromise." He branded the charge that he was a disunionist as a slander³² and declared his devotion to the Union.³³

²⁷Nashville *American*, August 13, 1851.

²⁸B. H. Shepherd, "Chairman of a Whig Central Committee," February 10, 1851; M. P. Gentry, November, 1850; G. A. Henry, February 10, 1851; and J. W. Allen, March 3, 1851, to William B. Campbell, William B. Campbell Papers (in possession of L. R. Campbell, Nashville).

²⁹Philip M. Hamer (ed.), *Tennessee, A History, 1673-1932* (New York, 1932), 480-481.

³⁰Nashville *Daily Union*, August 2, 1851.

³¹Nashville *True Whig*, June 27, 30, 1851.

³²*Ibid.*, August 6, 1851.

³³Nashville *Daily Union*, August 6, 1851.

General Campbell, on the other hand, assumed a position substantially in accord with that of the bulk of his constituents. He maintained that the compromise was the "work of the wisdom and patriotism of the country in a great crisis of sectional agitation, to allay sectional controversy and save the Union." He believed it, in the main, "to be just and reasonable, and entitled to the approbation of the people of all sections of the country." He charged that the effect of Trousdale's criticisms of the compromise was to weaken its hold upon popular confidence and approval and thus, unintentionally perhaps, to aid the disunionists of the North and South alike.³⁴

Campbell criticised Trousdale for his failure to condemn South Carolina along with the abolitionists of the North for constantly fomenting strife. He "was for enforcing the fugitive slave law at the north even to the shedding of blood, if necessary—even if the army and militia had to be called out;³⁵ but he was for enforcing the laws in South Carolina as well as in Massachusetts."³⁶ Not only Campbell but the Whigs in general attributed disunion sentiment to the Democratic leaders. Campbell, however, pointedly exonerated the masses of the party from this charge.³⁷

In the subsequent election, in which the largest number of voters in the state's history participated, General Campbell was victorious. The Democrats attributed Trousdale's defeat to a lack of cordial support in his own party and to the fact that he had been a victim of misrepresentation by the Whigs. They cried,

He whose life has been devoted to the Union, whose person is covered with scars, received fighting under the flag of the Union, in defense of the honor and integrity of the Union, has been denounced as a disunionist.³⁸

The Whigs, however, declared that the real reason for his defeat was that he and some other leading Democrats "took a position upon the great exciting question of the day in which the masses of their own party did not concur." The main body of Democrats, like the Whigs, preferred the candidate who proposed "yielding to the Compromise a hearty unequivocal, efficient support" to the one who advocated giving a "complaining, reluctant, *enduring* 'acquiescence' calculated to engender anew the elements of sectional strife, and reopen a dangerous and unprofitable sectional controversy." The vast majority of Whigs and Democrats alike were "conservative to the core—firmly resolved to main-

³⁴Nashville *True Whig*, August 6, 1851.

³⁵Campbell said: "In accordance with the Whig address, that if this law was repealed or distinctly modified, it would then be time for the south to look out for her rights, even at the hazard of disunion—For Our Rights Must Be Protected." *Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, June 27, 30.

³⁸Nashville *American*, August 13, 1851.

tain at once the rights of the south, against all assaults from whatever quarter—standing immovably upon the old Republican basis of conservative, Constitutional rights.”³⁹

The struggle between the Democrats and their political opponents for supremacy in the state relegated national issues to a subordinate position during the remainder of the decade of the fifties. Although the Whigs carried the state for Scott in their party's last presidential race in 1852, the party as such disappeared in Tennessee after its defeat in the gubernatorial contest of 1853.⁴⁰ By 1857 the Democrats, under the leadership of Andrew Johnson, had destroyed the Know-Nothing or American party which had replaced the Whig organization.⁴¹ Henceforth, the Democratic party, although it faced competition from a strong Opposition party,⁴² was dominant in the state.⁴³

Despite their absorption in the intra-state struggle between the Democrats and their opponents for political control of the state, Tennesseans did not lose sight of the sectional controversy hinging upon the slavery issue in the nation at large. Throughout the decade, with few exceptions, they evinced great attachment for the Union, although they held various opinions concerning the relationship existing between the several states and the Union.

The passage by Congress of the Kansas-Nebraska bill⁴⁴ in 1854, reopening as it did the discussion of the status of slavery in the territories, in a measure revived the sectional feeling in Tennessee which had largely died down after the adoption of the Compromise of 1850. The discussion of the bill quickly resolved itself into a partisan struggle, with the Democrats supporting it and the erstwhile Whigs opposing it. The Democrats looked on it as an application of the principles of non-intervention⁴⁵ rather than “Squatter Sovereignty”⁴⁶ and so considered it a concession to the South. Furthermore, they felt that taking away the power of Congress to legislate regarding slavery in the territories other than to insure constitutional protection to it, and leaving the determination of its status to the people of the territories themselves, the Supreme Court *alone* having power to pass on their laws, guaranteed

³⁹Nashville *True Whig*, August 21, 1851.

⁴⁰*Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, October 11, 1853.

⁴¹Nashville *Union and American*, August 30, 1859.

⁴²The Opposition party consisted of all of the opponents of the Democratic party, *i. e.*, former Whigs and Know-Nothings.

⁴³Nashville *Union and American*, August 30, 1859.

⁴⁴The Kansas-Nebraska bill repealed the Missouri Compromise and provided that Kansas and Nebraska should be organized as territories without restriction as to slavery.

⁴⁵According to the doctrine of “non-intervention” Congress had no power to legislate concerning slavery in the states or in the territories.

⁴⁶“Squatter sovereignty” or “popular sovereignty” was the doctrine that the people of the territories had the right of permitting or prohibiting slavery.

the permanence of the institution there.⁴⁷ The Whigs, on the other hand, warned the South not to support the measure, characterizing it as "humbug." "If," said the *Republican Banner and Nashville Wrig*,

the principle of squatter sovereignty, which is incorporated in the bill is accepted by the South and once established, it requires no great sagacity to perceive that there will never be another slave state formed out of any territory we now possess or which we may hereafter acquire . . . although such will be acquired by the *common* treasure or the *common* blood of *all* the states.⁴⁸

Except for the vote of Representative George W. Jones, Democrat, who opposed it, and those of Senator James C. Jones and Representatives Felix K. Zollicoffer and Charles Ready, Whigs, who favored it, the votes of Tennessee's congressional delegation on the Kansas-Nebraska bill followed partisan lines.⁴⁹

In view of the fact that the people of Tennessee generally regarded slavery as either necessary or desirable or as both necessary and desirable, both parties supported the Southern position concerning the South's "peculiar institution." They heartily endorsed the Dred Scott decision⁵⁰ as a matter of course.⁵¹ John Brown's raid⁵² at Harper's Ferry greatly alarmed them. Many of the state's congressional representatives discussed the matter in Congress in an attempt not only to present the views of their constituents to the country at large but also to allay the intense excitement which it had created.⁵³

Tennesseans, believing the Union to be in jeopardy, regarded the presidential election of 1860 as a crucial contest. Many believed that "it will be a war between nationalism and sectionalism—between constitutional liberty and higher-lawism—between questions of public peace and all the dangers of a threatened revolution."⁵⁴ Since a preponderant majority of the people of Tennessee held conservative views on the slavery issue and were thoroughly devoted to the Union, their immediate objective was to help secure the election of a president in whom the people of all sections had confidence. They hoped that such a chief executive could bring about an amicable settlement of the sectional controversy then agitating the country.

⁴⁷*Nashville Union and American*, March 7, 1854.

⁴⁸March 9, 13, 1854.

⁴⁹*Congressional Globe*, 33 Congress, 1 Session, 1254, 1321.

⁵⁰The Dred Scott decision, which declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional, declared that slaves were property and implied that Congress' only power over slavery in the territories was the duty of protecting slave property.

⁵¹*Nashville Union and American*, August 30, 1859.

⁵²In pursuance of his plan to establish a refuge in the mountains of the South to which slaves might come, John Brown seized the government arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

⁵³*Congressional Globe*, 36 Congress, 1 Session, 98-107.

⁵⁴*Nashville Union and American*, December 4, 1859.

While a large majority of the Democrats in Tennessee supported John C. Breckinridge, a small minority favored Stephen A. Douglas. John Bell, a native son, received the enthusiastic support of the Opposition or Constitutional Union party.⁵⁵ Although there was no Republican organization in the state,⁵⁶ the leaders of the Breckinridge, Douglas, and Bell forces, respectively, urged the voters to support their candidate as the only one who could defeat Abraham Lincoln and so prevent the dissolution of the Union. Party lines remained unbroken and Bell, because of the split in the Democratic vote, carried Tennessee by a plurality.⁵⁷

Although the result of the election in the country at large was extremely displeasing to the people of Tennessee, they accepted it calmly and proposed to abide by it.⁵⁸ They were bitterly disappointed over the elevation to the presidency of a man who, although relatively unknown to them, had been the candidate of a party whose platform they believed to be at variance with what they regarded as the correct interpretation of the constitution. They were fearful of what they termed Republican aggressions on their rights. Moreover, they were apprehensive concerning the future of the Union in view of the threats which certain extremists of the Lower South had made in the event of Lincoln's election.

The election of Lincoln to the presidency in 1860 set in motion a train of events which eventually, though not at once, broke all party lines in Tennessee and ultimately created a situation in which there were only two groups, those who advocated joining the Confederate States of America and those who favored adhering to the Union. There were a few radicals who declared in the beginning that the elevation of a candidate to the presidency by a sectional party hostile to Southern interests was a justifiable cause of secession and urged the taking of immediate steps in that direction. There was likewise a small body of extreme conservatives who apparently entertained no fears concerning Lincoln's attitude toward the South and could not conceive of any action that he might take as furnishing sufficient cause for dissolving the Union.⁵⁹ The overwhelming majority of the people of the state, however, accepted Lincoln's victory philosophically and proposed quietly to

⁵⁵The Opposition party in Tennessee became a part of the national Constitutional Union party in 1860.

⁵⁶Horace Greeley and John F. Cleveland (comps.), *A Political Textbook for 1860* . . . (New York, 1860), 26-29.

⁵⁷*Nashville Union and American*, December 2, 1860.

⁵⁸*Rutherford Telegraph* (Murfreesboro), November 10, 1860; *Mauvy Press* (Columbia), November 14, 1860; *Clarksville Chronicle*, November 9, 1860; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, November 10, 1860; *Memphis Appeal*, November 18, 1860.

⁵⁹Oliver P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Cincinnati, 1899), 149, 154, 165.

await developments. The more skeptical among this number felt confident that Lincoln and his supporters would be guilty of some overt act of aggression which would ultimately force the secession issue. The remainder of this group, while it was somewhat apprehensive of danger to Southern rights, maintained an optimistic outlook and counselled a policy of watchful waiting.

Most Tennesseans favored their state's following a policy of "masterly inactivity" or acting as mediator between the North and the South at this time. Since the understanding in political circles was that Governor Harris did not consider the triumph of the "Black Republican Party" sufficient cause for the secession of a state, the *Memphis Appeal* proposed that the people urge him to convene the legislature in extra session to consider the state of political affairs in the country.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, on November 25 ex-Governor Neill S. Brown, Andrew Ewing, Edwin H. Ewing, Leon Trousdale, Allan A. Hall, and other prominent members of both the Constitutional Union and Democratic parties had issued the following statement to the people of Tennessee:

In the present dangerous crisis of affairs the undersigned respectfully recommend the assemblage of the people in primary meetings, to request the Governor to call together the Legislature of Tennessee forthwith, with a view to their providing for a State Convention, the object of which shall be to bring about a conference of Southern States [possibly similar to the Nashville Convention of 1850] to consider existing political troubles, and if possible to compose our sectional strife.⁶¹

Shortly after this, W. C. Whitthorne, representative from Maury county and speaker of the House, set forth his estimate of public sentiment in Tennessee in a letter to Senator A. O. P. Nicholson. He wrote:

- 1st. She is for waiting in the Union,
- 2nd. She will be against coercion,
- 3rd. She will be for a convention or consultation with all the Southern States, and propose either amendments or an united declaration as to future action, somewhat like the Georgia platform,⁶²
- 4th. If either before or after this the States South of her go out she will follow suit ultimately. I doubt this if but one or two went.⁶³

⁶⁰November 18, 29, 1860.

⁶¹*Nashville Union and American*, November 25, 1860.

⁶²The Georgia Platform, adopted by a state convention in December, 1850, declared, in substance, that the Compromise of 1850 was a final adjustment of the sectional controversy between the North and South and that a violation of it by the North would furnish sufficient grounds for dissolving the Union. Richard H. Shryock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850* (Durham, North Carolina, 1926), 325-334.

⁶³December 1, 1860, Papers of Andrew Johnson, II (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

The *Appeal* of December 8 announced that Governor Harris, in obedience to what he believed to be the will of the people, would convene the legislature in extra session on January 7, 1861, in Nashville to consider the present monetary and financial crises and to attempt to decide upon a course of action for the state. Although there appeared to be little opposition to the extra session⁶⁴ there was some. The Clarksville *Chronicle* observed that

The members not having been elected with any view to such an emergency, they cannot be considered fair exponents of popular sentiment, and, as a whole, we fear it is not just such a body as is capable of grappling successfully, the vital issues to be presented for its consideration.⁶⁵

With relatively few exceptions, the people of Tennessee resented South Carolina's withdrawal from the Union.⁶⁶ Since they believed that several other states would inevitably follow her example, they felt that her action would precipitate a crisis in national affairs. They were convinced that anything which jeopardized the existence of the Union adversely affected the interests of Tennessee.

On January 7, the legislature met pursuant to the call of the governor. On this occasion Governor Harris, by this time apparently under the influence of the secession movement which had recently been gaining some headway, ably recounted the South's grievances against the North and advocated immediate secession.⁶⁷

The legislature almost immediately began the consideration of a measure to provide for the holding of a state convention to consider the question of federal relations. The debate upon the convention bill in both the House and Senate centered mainly upon an amendment requiring that no ordinance which the proposed convention might pass changing Tennessee's relation to the federal government should become effective until a majority of the qualified voters in the last gubernatorial election had ratified it.⁶⁸ Both houses unanimously ratified the amended bill. This law provided that the people should choose delegates at the same time that they voted on the question of holding the convention in order that a second election might not be necessary in the event of the authorization of the holding of the convention.⁶⁹

A heated campaign, in which both the proponents and the opponents

⁶⁴Knoxville *Tri-Weekly Whig*, December 6, 1860.

⁶⁵December 7, 1860.

⁶⁶James W. Fertig, *Secession and Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Chicago, 1898), 15.

⁶⁷*Public Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1861 (first extra session), 1-13.

⁶⁸Robert Johnson to Andrew Johnson, January 13, 1861, Papers of Andrew Johnson, IV.

⁶⁹*Senate Journal of the State of Tennessee*, 1861 (first extra session), 59. *House Journal of the State of Tennessee*, 1861 (first extra session), 195.

of the convention alike sought to break party lines,⁷⁰ preceded the election of February 9 on "Convention" or "No Convention" in Tennessee. There were three different points of view concerning the matter. The Secessionists favored it and hoped to elect delegates who, if such a thing should be possible, would bring about Tennessee's secession. The members of one group of the Unionists were friendly to the convention because they believed that conservatives would control it and use it as a means of checking or making powerless the disunion sentiment in the state.⁷¹ They advocated the selection of delegates pledged to prevent the secession of the state. The other group, much larger than the first, opposed the convention because they believed that there was no necessity for it and because they feared that Secessionists might gain control of it and take the state out of the Union. Nevertheless, they urged everyone to support candidates definitely committed to the maintenance of the state's position in the Union so that in case there should be a convention conservatives would control it and render it harmless.⁷²

The people of Tennessee, irrespective of party lines, defeated the move to call a state convention by a substantial majority.⁷³ Furthermore, a "very decided majority of the delegates" whom they selected were Unionists.⁷⁴ There was little correlation between the vote in this contest and that in the presidential election of the preceding fall. Although the total vote was almost twenty thousand less in February than it had been in November when Bell had carried the state by a plurality of only a little more than four thousand, the convention lost by a majority of approximately eleven thousand five hundred. The majority against the convention was more than two hundred fifty votes greater than Douglas' entire vote in November had been.⁷⁵

The refusal of a large majority of the people to sanction the holding of a convention which they feared might jeopardize the state's position in the Union or, at the least, serve to aggravate sectional animosity in the country at large, however, was not indicative of an unqualified adherence to the Union. It was rather the manifestation of a desire to remain in the Union provided certain conditions obtained. It was also the expression of a hope for a peaceful solution of the problems confronting the nation.

⁷⁰T. W. Watkins to Senator John J. Crittenden, January 19, 1861, John J. Crittenden Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Cave Johnson to William B. Campbell, January 6, 1861, Campbell Papers; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, January 19, 1861; *Nashville Union and American*, January 25, February 5, 1861; *Memphis Avalanche*, January 25, February 4, 1861.

⁷¹*Nashville Patriot*, February 3, 1861.

⁷²*Republican Banner and Nashville Whig*, January 29, 1861.

⁷³*Nashville Union and American*, March 3, 1861.

⁷⁴W. P. Titus, *Picturesque Clarksville* (Clarksville, 1887), 259.

⁷⁵*Nashville Union and American*, December 2, 1860, March 3, 1861.

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Neither the conservatives, who favored remaining in the Union and attempting to win back the Gulf states, nor the radicals, who advocated withdrawing from the Union and joining them, regarded the February election as a final statement of Tennessee's position. A realistic conception of the state of national affairs prevented any feeling of assurance on that score by either group.⁷⁶

With the exception of avowed Secessionists, Tennesseans, therefore, were

waiting, and impatiently, and anxiously watching, every move that is made in Congress, by the convention so-called [the Peace Congress],⁷⁷ by the movements and speeches of the Pres't elect, on his rout from Springfield to Washington to catch a glimpse upon which to hang a hope, for the salvation of the country.⁷⁸

Many were apprehensive lest the North had drawn the wrong inference from the February election.

If the Republican party see or fancy they see in this election an evidence of fear, and so assume upon it the bearing of a conqueror more than that of a friend, then indeed *God help Tennessee, and God help the South*; but if they receive it as an assurance that the old brotherly love beats strong in the South, and would flow back if it were not checked by the pride that leads to a dread of being mistaken for a suppliant, in lieu of being recognized as a forgiving friend, willing to forget the past and make provision for the prevention of any future misunderstanding; if they receive the news in this spirit, we say, why then all will yet be well.⁷⁹

They were fearful that the "failure to call the convention taken in connection with Andy Johnson's speeches" might "strengthen the backbone of the Republicans and increase the difficulties of settlement." They believed that the fact that the Secessionists "trumpeted" this refusal as "unconditional submission" would also contribute to the same end.⁸⁰

Unionists and Secessionists disagreed rather violently as to the probability of the Republicans' acceptance of a fair and peaceful solution of the dispute between the North and the South. The *Republican Banner* declared that Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee would accept nothing less than the Crittenden Compromise.⁸¹

⁷⁶John R. Neal, *Disunion and Restoration in Tennessee* (New York, 1899), 7.

⁷⁷The Peace Congress or Conference, consisting of representatives from all except the seceding states, was in session in Washington from February 4 to 27, 1861.

⁷⁸Simon Bradford to John J. Crittenden, February 21, 1861, Crittenden Papers.

⁷⁹Memphis *Daily Argus*, February 11, 1861.

⁸⁰Clarksville *Chronicle*, February 15, 1861.

⁸¹Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky had worked out a plan compromising the difficulties between the North and South, the main feature of which was a proposed constitutional amendment providing for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line of thirty-six degrees and thirty minutes to the Pacific with slavery prohibited north of it and protected south of it.

The *Union and American* pointed out that since the "Black Republicans" would not agree to this compromise, there was no way to avoid secession.⁸² The Unionists hoped that the Peace Conference would arrive at some satisfactory adjustment of the controversy between the North and the South. Apparently the Tennessee delegation to this conference carried out the wishes of the majority of Tennesseans when they voted for all of the propositions⁸³ which that body adopted.⁸⁴ Some of the Unionists believed that Congress would adopt the proposals of the Peace Conference.⁸⁵ The Secessionists characterized the conference as a "magnificent failure" and did not think that there was the "remotest possibility of a reconstruction of the Union" upon the basis which this body of "venerable dummies" advocated.⁸⁶

Unionists and Secessionists alike saw in Lincoln's inaugural address the verification of their hopes or fears, as the case might be. The *Patriot*, a Unionist paper of Nashville, commented thus upon it:

He very correctly denies the doctrine of secession, regards the refractory States as still in the Union, and expresses his determination to execute the laws as far as practicable. Coercion does not necessarily follow. He cannot collect the taxes in the seceded States except by force and he is powerless to use military force except upon the call of the civil authorities. He will have to adapt himself to circumstances, therefore, and he will, we are persuaded, be far, very far, from attempting force where it is not justifiable, and in self defense. He is not so blind as not to see what will be the consequences of an attempt to coerce; and unless he desires to rush madly upon ruin, he will avoid hostilities.⁸⁷

The *Avalanche*, a Memphis Secessionist paper, said that

It is a fit initiation of an administration elected upon the bloody idea of inciting insurrection among our slaves, turning non-property holder against property holder, burning down our residences, murdering our wives and children, and carrying out all the infamous doctrines of the Helper⁸⁸ book.

⁸²Nashville *Union and American*, February 10, 1861.

⁸³The conference proposed an amendment to the constitution very similar to the Crittenden proposal, but with an added provision that no additional territory should be acquired by the United States without the agreement of a concurrent majority of senators from both the slave and the free states.

⁸⁴Nashville *Union and American*, March 3, 1861. Judge A. O. Totten voted against the first proposition, the prohibition of slavery north of the Missouri Compromise line.

⁸⁵Congressman Robert Hatton to William B. Campbell, February 25, 1861, Campbell Papers.

⁸⁶Memphis *Daily Argus*, February 18, 1861; Nashville *Union and American*, March 3, 1861.

⁸⁷March 7, 1861.

⁸⁸Hinton Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South, How to Meet It* (New York, 1860). This book, a bitter indictment of the slavery system, apparently circulated in Tennessee although it was hard to get. R. A. McDonald to T. A. R. Nelson, January, 1860, T. A. R. Nelson Papers (McClung Collection, Lawson-McGhee Library).

A day later it asserted that the inaugural "threatens the immediate coercion by blockade, by land-invasion, by every means which fiendishness can suggest and power can afford, of our sister States of the South."⁸⁹

The willingness of the people of Tennessee to accept almost any sort of compromise which would insure the preservation of the Union lasted until after the fall of Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's subsequent call for troops. These events convinced a majority of those who had previously refused to acquiesce in the policy of withdrawing from the Union of the futility of longer expecting a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the North and the South. The Nashville *Republican Banner* declared that Lincoln's proclamation calling for troops had forced the border states into rebellion, and, *ipse facto*, severed their allegiance to the Union. Furthermore,

While the doctrine of secession will never be endorsed or accepted by the men who have constituted the Union Party, and who sought to preserve the Union as long as there was hope for its preservation, they have ever been prepared, when the crisis came, for rebellion and revolution.⁹⁰

Although President Lincoln's call for troops after the fall of Fort Sumter solidified the opposition of all groups in Middle and West Tennessee against the federal government and caused them to despair of the hope of preserving the Union and consequently to favor Tennessee's uniting with the Confederate States, it had no such effect on the great majority of the people in East Tennessee. Nevertheless, there were some Unionists there who were apparently somewhat uncertain as to the proper course to pursue.⁹¹

Some hope, apparently born of sheer despair, still existed among certain Unionists even after Lincoln's call for troops that perhaps Tennessee could bring about peace between the two sections by combining with the other border states and refusing to join either the North or the South.⁹² This idea of establishing a Border States Confederacy, which had existed at least since the early part of December, 1860,⁹³ was short-lived, however, on the part of all but a small number of Unionists in Middle and West Tennessee and of a larger group in East Tennessee. The others, having despaired of the state's being able to maintain a position of neutrality, joined the Secessionists in supporting all measures designed to carry the state out of the Union and to put it on a sound military footing.

⁸⁹March 5, 6, 1861.

⁹⁰April 18, 1861.

⁹¹A. W. Howard to T. A. R. Nelson, April 17, 1861, Nelson Papers.

⁹²Nashville *Republican Banner*, April 19, 1861; Nashville *Patriot*, April 14, 1861.

⁹³Sam Milligan to Andrew Johnson, December 13, 1860, Johnson Papers, II.

In pursuance of the recommendations of Governor Harris, the legislature, which had met in a second extra session on April 25, passed a bill declaring that Tennessee had withdrawn from the United States and resumed its sovereignty as an independent state. It provided for the submission of this Declaration of Independence to a vote of the people on June 8.⁹⁴ At that time they were to vote for "Separation" [from the United States] or "No Separation" and "Representation" [in the Confederacy] or "No Representation."⁹⁵ The Senate passed this measure by a vote of twenty to four and the House by a vote of forty-six to twenty-one.⁹⁶ The only counties outside of East Tennessee which had representatives who opposed this proposal were Davidson, Robertson, Wayne, and White in Middle Tennessee, and Carroll and Henderson in West Tennessee.⁹⁷

The legislature ratified the Military League which the commissioners, whom Governor Harris had appointed in accordance with a joint resolution of both houses of the legislature, had negotiated with the representative of the Confederate States by votes of fourteen to six in the Senate and forty-five to sixteen in the House. The opposition to this measure, like that to the Declaration of Independence, came mainly from East Tennessee.⁹⁸

There was a heated campaign between those who advocated ratification of the measures of the state legislature and those who opposed them. Although this contest centered chiefly in East Tennessee,⁹⁹ there was some activity in Middle and West Tennessee.

More people in Tennessee took part in the election of June 8, 1861, than had participated in either the presidential election of the preceding November or the special state election of February 9, 1861. Of the number voting, 104,913 voted for "Separation" and 47,238 voted for "No Separation" and 104,102 voted for "Representation" and 47,264 voted for "No Representation." There was a relatively close correlation between the votes of East and West Tennessee in the elections of February and June, 1861. Such was not the case with Middle Tennessee. Whereas East Tennessee had decidedly opposed both the conven-

⁹⁴Governor Harris had proposed this method of dealing with the situation because he was "unwilling to interpose a convention between himself and the people." Henry W. Hilliard to Secretary Robert Toombs, April 29, 1861, *War of the Rebellion . . . Official Records* (Washington, 1890-91), Series I, Volume III, Part I, 77.

⁹⁵*Public Acts*, 1861 (second extra session), 13-23.

⁹⁶*Senate Journal*, 1861 (second extra session), 32-33; *House Journal*, 1861 (second extra session), 57.

⁹⁷Other representatives subsequently replaced those from Davidson county.

⁹⁸*Senate Journal*, 1861 (second extra session), 68-69; *House Journal*, 1861 (second extra session), 79.

⁹⁹Thomas W. Humes, *The Loyal Mountaineers of East Tennessee* (Knoxville, 1888), 104.

tion and the Declaration of Independence and West Tennessee had just as decisively favored both, Middle Tennessee, which had voted down the convention by a small majority, cast an overwhelming majority of its votes for the Declaration of Independence.¹⁰⁰

In view of the intense excitement which prevailed at the time, it seems extremely unlikely that there was a total absence of fraud and intimidation in the election of June 8. The probability is that both sides resorted to violence and corruption in certain instances. The Nashville papers resented the charges of *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* that the Disunionists in Middle and West Tennessee resorted to fraudulent voting and the use of force.¹⁰¹ Apparently some Unionists in these sections refrained from voting because they saw the futility of it.¹⁰² Since some Unionists in both East and West Tennessee asserted that there was virtual civil war in certain areas or that they wanted to seize the arms of the Disunionists, the opponents of the state administration evidently had some equipment with which to combat their enemies.¹⁰³

Although the people of the state as a whole had voted two to one for separation and representation, those of East Tennessee had voted two to one against it. It was not strange, therefore, that many of the people of East Tennessee should have entertained the idea of setting up an independent state. Apparently the Unionist leaders who advocated this course recognized no inconsistency in their position in asserting that Tennessee's withdrawal from the Union was unconstitutional and of trying at the same time to justify and actually to bring about the secession of East Tennessee from the rest of the state.

On June 11 T. A. R. Nelson, the president of the East Tennessee Convention, pursuant to a resolution which that body had adopted on May 31 at its first session at Knoxville, issued a call for it to meet again at Greeneville on June 17. In its "Declaration of Grievances" this body asserted that although the people of East Tennessee had conducted the election of June 8 fairly, those of Middle and West Tennessee had not done so. It also declared that since the government of the United States had been free and tolerant, it preferred this government to that of the Confederacy which was both oppressive and intolerant. Its "Resolutions" expressed a desire for peace, characterized the action of the state legislature in separating Tennessee from the Union and allying it with the Confederacy as unconstitutional, declared that in order to

¹⁰⁰Nashville *Union and American*, December 2, 1860, March 3, June 25, 1861.

¹⁰¹*Union and American*, June 9, 1861; *Republican Banner*, June 16, 1861; *Patriot*, June 9, 1861.

¹⁰²John Lelleyet to Andrew Johnson, June 10, 1861, Johnson Papers, XI.

¹⁰³W. H. Cherry, D. T. Street, H. M. Wood, Thomas Maxwell, Julius S. Perry, H. K. Broyles, and fourteen other men from Hardin and Wayne counties to John Lelleyet, May 5, 1861, *ibid.*; R. A. Crawford to T. A. R. Nelson, July 18, 1861, Nelson Papers.

maintain peace it was presenting a memorial asking the legislature to permit the formation of a separate state of East Tennessee, and provided for the holding of an election for delegates to a constitutional convention to meet at Kingston at some time after the legislature had granted permission for the organization of East Tennessee into a separate state.¹⁰⁴

Senator Boyd of Knox and Roane counties presented the memorial of the convention, substantially an incorporation of the ideas of the declaration of grievances and the resolutions, to the state Senate. A joint select committee of five members from each house of the legislature took it under consideration, and subsequently recommended that the legislature take no action on the matter at that time. It was not satisfied that the memorialists adequately and accurately represented the sentiment of East Tennessee. It pointed out that the formation of a new state of East Tennessee was a matter of concern to the entire state, but that Middle and West Tennessee had had no opportunity of expressing their opinions on the subject. It declared that if the citizens of East Tennessee really desired to form a new state, the legislature which the people would elect in a few months would be the proper body to deal with the problem. It earnestly hoped for the removal of "all causes of irritation between citizens of different sections of the state." The legislature unanimously accepted the report of the committee.¹⁰⁵

East Tennessee's attempt to form itself into a separate state failed and the boundaries of the state remained intact. Thus, Tennessee, one of the border states which had "always stood between the two sections as a mighty breakwater to sectional feeling and action,"¹⁰⁶ reluctantly entered into the bitter struggle between the North and the South with a divided people.

¹⁰⁴*Proceedings of the E. Tenn. Convention . . .* (Knoxville, 1861), 13, 20-27.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 26-28; *Senate Journal*, 1861 (third extra session), 70, 142-144, 176-178.

¹⁰⁶*Maury Press* (Columbia), December 19, 1860.

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