

## PRESIDENT LINCOLN AND THE FARIBAULT FIRE-EATER

THE MIDDLE OF THE nineteenth century was the heyday of the small newspaper. It was an essential part of the agrarian society and the frontier democracy that characterized the period. Only a small amount of capital was required to establish a newspaper on the frontier, where the prevailing isolation created a growing popular demand for news of the outside world. This news, however, was often colored to a greater or less degree by the individuality and political convictions of the editor, who was not always careful to distinguish between his facts and his opinions. The tendency was particularly noteworthy during the years of the Civil War, when public opinion was changing rapidly and political partisanship was exceptionally intense. This indeed was an age of rugged individualism in journalism.

At the opening of the war in 1861 Minnesota was in many respects the most typically frontier state in the Union. Statehood had been attained only three years before and the less than two hundred thousand people were practically all newcomers concentrated in the southeastern section of the state. The Indians still possessed much of the northern and western regions. Minnesota was in a stage of social and economic development similar to that of Illinois of thirty years before, when there had arrived in that state a young man by the name of Abraham Lincoln. Among those who left Illinois for the Minnesota frontier during the 1850's was one of Lincoln's personal and political antagonists, James Shields, who co-operated in the founding of Faribault.<sup>1</sup>

To this frontier town in 1858 went Orville Brown, a native of Jefferson County, New York, who had previously

<sup>1</sup> Edward D. Neill, *History of Rice County*, 319 (Minneapolis, 1882).

had an exciting career in various parts of the West. Brown and Henry W. Holley purchased the *Faribault Herald*, which had been established two years before, and proceeded to transform the paper into the *Central Republican*, a weekly with Brown as editor. From the first he was one of the most radical Republicans of the Northwest and his editorial attacks upon those with whom he disagreed were so bitter that other Minnesota journalists were soon referring to him as "Awful Brown."<sup>2</sup> He was to the Northwest what the "fire-eater" was to the lower South—impatient, determined, provincial, and utterly uncompromising.

When Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican president of the United States in March, 1861, the great majority of the editors of small Republican newspapers indicated a natural willingness to support his general policy. Since these journals were usually the chief party organs in their local communities, political expediency demanded that they uphold their chosen leader. But the Faribault fire-eater was not a very staunch believer in expediency. He often felt that he knew much better than President Lincoln the correct policy for the federal government to pursue. In these respects Brown resembled more closely the editors of the large metropolitan journals than the typical small town newspaperman.

Lincoln's original policy of watchful waiting in regard to Fort Sumter drew the first fire of the editor of the *Central Republican*, who censured the administration for not pursuing a firm and aggressive course. When Lincoln's adoption of such a policy led to the Confederate firing upon Fort Sumter and the outbreak of hostilities, Brown was still dissatisfied because the president considered it necessary to adhere temporarily to a defensive military policy and still hoped to conciliate rather than to conquer the "rebels." Apparently overlooking the fact that Faribault was much

<sup>2</sup> Daniel S. B. Johnston, "Minnesota Journalism in the Territorial Period," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 303.

farther removed than Washington from the danger of Confederate attack, the *Central Republican* in a long editorial on May 1, 1861, insisted that "Honest Old Abe," must abandon his defensive policy because no insurrection was ever suppressed except by an offensive policy. "No more soft talk, no more conciliation of traitors and rebels in arms against the Government," demanded the impatient editor. He even urged the president to issue a proclamation freeing the slaves of all the states that persisted in rebellion. In this respect the Faribault editor was well ahead of such radical antislavery leaders as Horace Greeley and William Cullen Bryant. A week later Brown continued his attack upon the president's course and ventured the prediction that "unless the Administration shall, for the next month, pursue a vigorous, energetic and determined force and war policy against the rebels, it will not have friends enough in all the loyal States . . . to form a respectable funeral procession."<sup>3</sup>

When the Union armies really began to invade rebel territory during the summer of 1861, Brown was aroused over the administration's simultaneous efforts to refrain from interfering with the institution of slavery and the supposed rights of the loyal citizens of the South. To him such fine distinctions always seemed absurd. In the *Central Republican* for June 19, 1861, he proclaimed:

We can tell the powers that be, at Washington, that the people are fast getting sick of this display of tender solicitude for the land pirates and traitors of Secessiondom. There's been enough of sending back loyal colored men to the rebel tyrants; enough of releasing rebels in arms when taken prisoners. The public stomach is already sufficiently nauseated with such doses, and will endure no more.

During July, 1861, the offensive military policy advocated by Brown and many others throughout the North culminated in the defeat of the principal Union army at the battle of Bull Run. For a few months the *Central Republican*

<sup>3</sup> *Central Republican* (Faribault), May 1, 8, 1861; *Saint Paul Daily Press*, April 7, 12, 1861.

had little to say about an aggressive military campaign. But the editor was still in the vanguard of a rapidly growing opposition to the vague and conciliatory policy of the president in regard to handling the slaves of rebels. In early September this emancipation sentiment found a willing champion in General John C. Frémont, the commander of the Department of the West, who issued a military proclamation declaring free the slaves of rebels in his department. Since this act exceeded the existing federal law President Lincoln forced a modification of the proclamation. To many left-wing Republicans throughout the North this seemed like a cowardly retreat.<sup>4</sup> For example the *Saint Paul Press*, the leading Republican journal in Minnesota, felt a temporary loss of confidence in the wisdom and ability of the national administration, but upon reflection apprehended "no serious result from this step backward."<sup>5</sup> In contrast to this moderate criticism "Awful Brown" could find no words adequate to describe his disappointment and disgust:

Lincoln has crowned the vascillating policy, which has been the most striking characteristic of his administration, by an act of cowardly imbecility and treachery to his former teachings, to the loyal people that elected him President, and to a brave and loyal soldier, which, by contrast, makes the imbecility of James Buchanan appear respectable. . . .

We freely and frankly acknowledge to our friends that our confidence in, as well as our patience with Abraham Lincoln is exhausted. We have no confidence in the future triumph of our Government over the rebels, founded on his fitness or capacity for the reliable position, in which we did what we could to place him, for which may God and the people forgive. . . .

<sup>4</sup>This statement is based upon an examination of political correspondence and newspapers from all northern states.

<sup>5</sup>*Press*, September 19, 1861. See also the issues of September 3, 20, and November 1, 1861. On October 15 this paper published a letter from United States Senator Morton S. Wilkinson, endorsing Frémont's proclamation and regretting Lincoln's modification. Similar sentiment was expressed by Dr. G. F. Child in letters to Ignatius Donnelly, dated October 8 and December 16, 1861. The letters are in the Donnelly Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

We have but one hope for our country, and that is in the spontaneous uprising of the loyal people in condemnation of this act of a President too tall to stand erect with 18,000,000 of loyal people to support him.<sup>6</sup>

Largely because of the conservative attitude of northern Democrats and the Unionists in the border slave states, the president continued to insist upon fighting the war for the restoration of the Union and without unnecessary interference with the institution of slavery. In Washington such a course looked to many like sound statesmanship; in faraway Faribault it looked like overcautiousness, verging upon moral cowardice. When Lincoln, in his annual message of December, 1861, refused to abandon this policy for a more advanced one, the editor of the *Central Republican* complained that every Republican that he had met had expressed disappointment with the chief executive's position. The editor concluded: "We have never questioned Mr. Lincoln's honesty and patriotism, but we think him decidedly inclined to lean too far South for his own and the country's good."<sup>7</sup>

The most basic cause of the growing popular dissatisfaction, however, was the lack of any substantial progress toward the suppression of the rebellion. The strength of the Union armies had been raised to more than half a million men, but winter arrived before most of them were given an opportunity to fight a single battle. Under the circumstances it was natural for many people to become impatient during the long winter months and to blame the administration for a policy of irresolution and inactivity. The correspondence of the leading men in public life as well as local newspapers furnish unmistakable evidence that many Minnesota citizens were disappointed and discontented, but probably no one publicly censured the president in more severe terms than the editor of the *Central Republican*. Not even the appointment of his journalistic partner to the re-

<sup>6</sup> *Central Republican*, September 25, 1861.

<sup>7</sup> *Central Republican*, December 18, 1861.

ceivership of the Winnebago federal land office by the president could calm the Faribault fire-eater.<sup>8</sup> The people, he complained, had quietly awaited the action of the administration, day after day and week after week, but they had waited in vain. The policy of the president had been altogether different from what the people had been promised. "The Administration has so far conducted the war upon the theory that if the rebels are treated as enemies, they will be offended, and the consequent restoration of the Union rendered impossible." The president was accused of having more shamefully turned his back upon the people who placed him in power than had any other president from the first organization of the American republic. The people in turn were ironically accused of having "spoiled a good rail-splitter to make a mighty weak President." The irate editor concluded his tirade as follows:

Such, Mr. Lincoln, are the feelings and sentiments of the people that took you from the obscurity of a law office in Springfield, and made you President of this Republic. They don't ask you to prosecute this war for the abolition of slavery, but they do demand that it shall be prosecuted and vigorously prosecuted, for the preservation of the Republic, without regard to what becomes of its cause [*slavery*].<sup>9</sup>

As the early weeks of 1862 rolled by without any military activity Brown continued to attack the president for "irresolution, indecision and inactivity," not realizing that the latter was striving almost desperately to get the armies in motion. During February and March they began to move southward and for several months were so uniformly successful that northern people began to talk about a triumphant end of the war. Brown approved the administration's course by silence. The president's temperament and meth-

<sup>8</sup> Johnston, in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 10: 303. For examples of letters expressing discontent, see Governor Alexander Ramsey to Edward D. Neill, February 6, 1862; Wilkinson to Ramsey, April 3, 1862; Cyrus Aldrich to Ramsey, April 6, 1862. The earlier letter is in the Neill Papers, the later two, in the Ramsey Papers; both collections are owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>9</sup> *Central Republican*, January 22, 1862.

ods were so different from those of the real radical that the editor could very seldom bring himself to praise positively the former's course, even when it was successful. In fact the *Central Republican* continued to censure Lincoln's slavery policy, especially his favorite plan for voluntary, compensated emancipation, and his revocation of General David Hunter's proclamation freeing the slaves of rebels in his military district. Brown's attitude toward the Hunter episode is clearly revealed by the title of his leading editorial: "Humiliation Intensified. The President Again on His Knees to the Slave Power."<sup>10</sup>

This was mild criticism, however, in comparison with the torrent that was unleashed during the late summer and autumn of 1862. The people of Minnesota were stunned in early July by the unexpected news of the defeat before Richmond of the Army of the Potomac, the largest army ever assembled upon the American continent. This brought home to the northern people the disheartening realization that the anticipated early end of the war had again been postponed.<sup>11</sup> Although the people of St. Paul and other communities publicly declared their "abiding confidence in the ability and patriotism of the President," a widespread popular demand arose for a more vigorous prosecution of the war. The Faribault editor, in conformity with his practice of assigning responsibility for failure to the chief executive, boldly announced his position:

The startling events of the past few days have demonstrated to the loyal people of the loyal States, the absolute necessity, if this rebellion is to be put down and peace restored, of a thorough and radical change in the policy of the Government in conducting the war.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Central Republican*, February 26, March 12, April 9, May 28, 1862. The *Press* of March 7, 1862, commended the president's policy of compensated emancipation.

<sup>11</sup> Seldom in American history has the change in political opinion been as sudden and comprehensive as it was during the month following McClellan's repulse before Richmond.

<sup>12</sup> *Press*, July 25, 27, August 12, 1862; *Central Republican*, July 16, 23, August 6, 13, 20, 1862.

Conditions now went rapidly from bad to worse. In August Minnesota experienced its most serious Indian outbreak and one of the worst in the history of the American frontier. Aroused by delay in the payment of federal annuities, the Sioux attacked the frontiersmen, killing scores and terrifying the people throughout the state. Although this outbreak could hardly be blamed directly upon the president, Brown attributed the audacity of the Indians to the general impotency of the administration's military policy.<sup>13</sup> When further evidence of this weakness was immediately furnished by the severe Union defeat in the second battle of Bull Run, the dissatisfaction of the Faribault editor gave way to anger and bitterness. Few Democratic Copperheads ever attacked Abraham Lincoln in such comprehensive terms. The editor denounced the president for deferring to "the most infamous set of villains that ever cursed a suffering country, the traitors of Kentucky in Union garb," instead of adopting a rigorous and uncompromising war policy desired by the loyal people throughout the North. Words seemed inadequate for Brown to stigmatize "the insane policy of the last fifteen months, of protecting rebel property, and returning fugitive slaves to rebel masters." If the president cannot come up to the people's expectations, wrote Brown,

Then in God's name let Mr. Lincoln resign; let him stand aside and let some man take his place that has the courage and the manhood to execute every law of Congress for the suppression of this rebellion, and who will not shrink from the use of every means which God, Congress and the people, have placed in his reach for the same glorious purpose. . . . Justice to loyal men, and justice, strict and impartial, to the traitors and conspirators against the life of the nation, alike demand a radical, thorough and complete change.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Central Republican*, August 27, September 3, 1862. For a detailed account of the Sioux War, see William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2: 109-146, 212-241 (St. Paul, 1924). The prevailing excitement is clearly revealed in letters in the Ramsey and Donnelly papers.

<sup>14</sup> *Central Republican*, September 10, 1862. One of the basic charges made by radical Republicans against Lincoln during the summer of 1862



A few days later President Lincoln indicated a change of policy by issuing his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and a proclamation providing for more comprehensive suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. The *Central Republican* highly approved of these acts as harbingers of a more vigorous prosecution of the war, which it had been advocating for months. The editor, however, soon resumed his role as a harsh critic of the president because of the lack of decisive military success.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the two invading Confederate armies had been repulsed at Antietam and Perryville during the early fall, but as the Union victories were not followed up, the war dragged on indecisively. When Brown realized that the second year of the war was approaching its end with apparently little substantial progress toward the suppression of the rebellion, he became almost furious at the alleged inactivity and procrastination of the Union commanders. On November 12, his *Central Republican* concluded a typical editorial as follows:

That army must be put in motion — our armies everywhere must move on the enemies works, or Mr. Lincoln's Administration must fail, and with it our glorious Union must go down.

When Democratic spokesmen interpreted their success in the fall elections as the result of popular dissatisfaction with Republican incompetence in the conduct of the war, Brown retorted that the war had never been conducted, even for a single day, on Republican principles. He attributed both political defeat and military failure to Lincoln's persistence in fighting the war on border-state principles and under Democratic generals, while Republican principles and men had been held in the background. "Our soldiers have fought bravely, and won victories which would have been was that he failed to enforce fully the recent Confiscation Act by which Congress had attempted to force a more vigorous war policy upon the administration.

<sup>15</sup> *Central Republican*, October 1, 22, 1862.

decisive but for the treason or idiocy of their Democratic commanders," he wrote. Certainly this was a land of free speech! A week later the frontier editor concluded his lecture to the chief executive of the nation:

The President, so long as he persists in the policy of committing the control of the army to the leading men of the party that sympathizes with the rebels . . . need never expect to see a united North.

The enthusiasm of the party that made him President, has given place to discouragement and despondency, and every day's continuance of the last year's policy will increase the feeling. If he would have his friends stand by him he must stand by them.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of 1862 Lincoln had taken most of the specific steps advocated by Brown. He had inaugurated a comprehensive emancipation program and had replaced the leading conservative commanders with more aggressive generals. Still the frontier editor was not satisfied. The president's methods were never those of the fire-eater, even when their objectives were identical. Moreover, another major military defeat, at Fredericksburg on December 13, brought death and sorrow to many additional Minnesota homes without making any progress toward the suppression of the rebellion. As a result popular discontent and discouragement reached their lowest ebb of the entire war. Under these circumstances the country was rife with criticism of the president. The *Central Republican* denounced Lincoln's lenient policy toward the Indians who had participated in the frontier outbreak. The editor characterized the president's annual message as a revelation of "weakness and want of moral courage, which has been the most prominent characteristic of his whole administration." Later Lincoln was censured for retaining in his cabinet conservative men who opposed necessary and vigorous measures and for failure to give active military commands to such radical generals as Frémont and Ben Butler. In the midst of the dark winter of 1863 Brown contended that the great crisis in the

<sup>16</sup> *Central Republican*, November 5, 12, 1862.

nation's history had arrived and insisted that the president should adopt any and every means for the overthrow of the rebellion — "not only because the military exigencies demand it but because it is morally right and ought to be done."<sup>17</sup>

The spring of 1863 brought renewed hope and confidence to the people of Faribault as well as to millions of others throughout the North. During the summer the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg definitely turned the military tide in favor of the Union armies so that the northern people again looked forward to a speedy triumph of their cause. Under the circumstances Orville Brown naturally found less to criticize in Lincoln's management of the war than he had during the preceding year. Nevertheless, the editor was inclined to seize upon almost every opportunity to blame the president for any unsatisfactory developments. The editorial tone was still that of the typical fire-eater — impatient, censorious and uncompromising. In June the president was taken to task for revoking General Burnside's order suppressing the *Chicago Times*, perhaps the most prominent and virulent Democratic assailant of the administration in the Northwest. Although no Republican journalist criticized Lincoln more consistently than Brown, yet he was among the most determined to deny the Copperhead editor the right to attack the president from the other side. To Brown it was the difference between patriotic duty on the one hand and downright treason on the other. Tolerance and forbearance were never the cardinal virtues of a fire-eater.<sup>18</sup>

Lincoln's inclination to conciliate Democrats and other conservatives in the interest of public harmony repeatedly aroused the ire of the *Central Republican*. The editor warned the president not to interpret the Republican vic-

<sup>17</sup> *Central Republican*, December 17, 24, 31, 1862; February 11, April 8, 1863.

<sup>18</sup> *Central Republican*, May 20, June 17, 1863.

ories in the fall elections of 1863 as an indication that the loyal men of the North endorsed his conservative and conciliatory course. On the other hand the moderate *Saint Paul Press* considered the results of the elections as "such a magnificent outburst of popular approbation as was never given to any President since the days of Washington."<sup>19</sup>

The degree to which Brown had come to differ from the majority of Minnesota Republicans is best revealed by the discussion of "the Presidential Question" during the early weeks of 1864. The correspondence of prominent public men as well as newspapers and other media of popular expression show conclusively that an overwhelming majority of Republicans definitely favored the re-election of President Lincoln. From the son of Governor Stephen Miller came word that "all parties will support Lincoln." One Minnesota citizen described the prevailing sentiment as follows:

About here we are all for "*Glorious, Old, Abe*" for the next President. My own opinion is, that his *renomination* and *reelection*, will be the death blow to this *infernal rebellion*, and will have a powerful effect, in our favor in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

In response to this sentiment, the Minnesota legislature passed a resolution in favor of Lincoln's re-election. Brown could remain quiet on the subject no longer. He condemned the action of the legislature as premature and misrepresenting the people. He frankly admitted that he preferred another candidate and maintained that Lincoln probably could not be re-elected even if he should be renominated. On March 2, 1864, however, the Republican or Union state convention heartily endorsed Lincoln's adminis-

<sup>19</sup> *Central Republican*, July 1, 22, November 18, 1863; *Press*, October 18, 1863.

<sup>20</sup> George Miller to Donnelly, February 26, 1864; William S. Timerman to Donnelly, March 16, 1864, Donnelly Papers. Many of Donnelly's other correspondents favored Lincoln. Among the leading Minnesota newspapers supporting his renomination were the *Winona Republican* and the *St. Cloud Democrat*.

tration and strongly recommended his renomination.<sup>21</sup> For a few days the *Central Republican* had little to say on the subject. But on April 20, the editor stated his position under the heading, "The Great Want of the Nation":

The greatest, most imperative want, the one thing needful has been and still is a bold, fearless, manly leader for the people in the person of a Chief Magistrate of the nation; a man endowed with the requisite moral as well as physical courage and ability to lead the people under the broad banner of universal freedom . . . .

However honest Mr. Lincoln may be one thing is absolutely certain, he has not been a leader of the people. He has failed utterly as a leader. Every step he has taken he has been forced to take by popular opinion.

In the next issue Brown complained that Lincoln's boom for renomination was the work of his federal appointees (apparently forgetting that his former partner was in this group) and of journals that had been liberally rewarded for their efforts in the campaign of 1860. Even after enough delegates to the national convention had been instructed for Lincoln to make his renomination a foregone conclusion, the Faribault editor was still contending that General Grant or Secretary Chase would be a better candidate than the president. Meanwhile the *Central Republican* continued its criticism of the president's policies and actions, especially of his reconstruction program and his refusal to repudiate the moderate Republicans and Unionists and to affiliate himself definitely with the radicals.<sup>22</sup>

By June, 1864, the political alignment for the coming campaign was beginning to crystallize. The national convention of the Republican or Union party met at Baltimore and renominated President Lincoln almost unanimously. Although the Democrats postponed their national convention until the end of August, another candidate was already in the field against Lincoln. A relatively few disgruntled

<sup>21</sup> *Central Republican*, February 10, 1864; *Press*, March 3, 1864.

<sup>22</sup> *Central Republican*, March 16, 30, April 27, May 4, 11, June 1, 1864.

and extreme Republicans and War Democrats had held a convention in Cleveland, where they nominated General Frémont on an incoherent anti-Lincoln platform. In his letter accepting the nomination Frémont had attacked Lincoln and his administration with extreme bitterness. The Frémont movement, however, elicited little support in frontier Minnesota; Republican newspapers, with scarcely an exception, even among the radical journals, immediately took their stand under the Lincoln banner.

But the Faribault editor was undecided about the correct course to pursue. Upon learning of the action at Baltimore, Brown wrote privately to Congressman Ignatius Donnelly:

I am very sorry the Baltimore Convention could not have made a better selection for candidates and a platform as good as the Cleveland Convention. I should like to work and vote for some good candidate for the Presidency but we have had enough of Abraham Lincoln. The nation if it can will not stand three years more of half war measures. . . . Should the Democrats nominate Gen. [John A.] Dix or Grant on a war platform, Lincoln will retire to private life next March. . . . I know he (Lincoln) has a large army of petty officials through the country whose future bread & butter depends upon his re-election, but there's not quite enough of them to elect him over two other candidates and perhaps three.<sup>23</sup>

The Faribault editor spoke publicly with the same frankness that he used in private. In his first editorial following Lincoln's renomination Brown praised the Cleveland platform at length and condemned the one adopted at Baltimore. He concluded with his respects to the nominee:

We are sorry that the platform leaves to the supporters of Mr. Lincoln no alternative but an unqualified endorsement of his past policy, his tenderness to rebels, his truckling servility to Kentucky neutrals and foreign nations, his ill-timed, ill-starred and ill-fated amnesty proclamation and puerile reconstruction scheme, the cotton-trading policy, the plantation-leasing system and cotton hunting expeditions; but it does not, and those who support him have got to endorse the past and trust Old Abe for the future.

<sup>23</sup> Brown to Donnelly, June 11, 1864, Donnelly Papers.

In addition to these old charges against the president the editor took him to task for pardoning some of the Sioux "murderers," Indians convicted of participation in the outbreak of 1862. In response to popular request the *Central Republican* soon made its position more definite, if no less equivocal. The editor declared that he would continue to discuss frankly the issues and the candidates and at "the proper time" would support "some man who comes nearest our standard of faith, and in whose honesty and patriotism we have most confidence for the Presidency; and whether that man will be Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Fremont, Gen. Grant, or some other man, we cannot now say."<sup>24</sup>

"The proper time" for Brown's announcement did not come until nearly three months later. In the meantime he continued to snipe at the president, for refusing to sign the reconstruction bill sponsored by the radical Republicans, for permitting the return of the banished Copperhead, Vallandigham, and for condescending to give more or less official sanction to the efforts of various individuals to open the way for a negotiated or compromise peace with the rebels. Even when Lincoln issued a call for five hundred thousand new enlistments, his previous military policy was blamed for making such a call necessary. An editorial appeal like the following was hardly enthusiastic enough to rally many men to the colors: "But bitterly as all earnestly loyal men may condemn this wicked policy, and whatever may have been the past errors of the Administration, this is no time for loyal men to turn their backs upon our heroes in the field."<sup>25</sup> As the war dragged on indecisively during the summer of 1864, Brown began to lose hope of "the complete subjugation of the rebels and the glorious triumph of the cause of humanity and freedom." In regard to the coming political campaign he wrote privately in August: "I cannot help thinking Mr. Lincoln's chances have been growing smaller

<sup>24</sup> *Central Republican*, June 15, 22, 1864.

<sup>25</sup> *Central Republican*, July 6, 27, August 10, 1864.

by degrees and *painfully* less, ever since his foolish nomination by the Baltimore Convention." With a good candidate like Dix or Chase there would be nothing to fear, but only "brilliant military success" could save Lincoln from an overwhelming defeat by the Copperheads.<sup>26</sup>

This was the proverbial darkness before the dawn. Within a few days Minnesota was greatly heartened by the news of impressive military and naval victories. Almost simultaneously the Democratic convention, by adopting a virtual antiwar platform, drove many wavering voters into the Republican camp.<sup>27</sup> The Faribault fire-eater hesitated no longer. He placed Lincoln's name on his masthead, but with an editorial endorsement that damned him with faint praise to say the least:

We unfurl the banner of Lincoln and Johnson, not because Mr. Lincoln is our first choice for the Presidency; for most certainly we should on the same platform, [have] greatly preferred Chase, Dix, Grant, or Butler, or even Fremont, without his letter of acceptance, could he have been properly brought before the people. But under existing circumstances we can see no other banner under which a loyal man can enlist with the slightest hope of aiding in the salvation of his country. There are some of his official acts which we have felt it our duty as a public journalist to criticise with much severity, but we have never doubted his patriotism.

He may and in our opinion has too long retained such men as Blair, Usher, Seward and Wells in his Cabinet; been too lenient with traitors, too timid in dealing with the rebels, and failed, through kindness, to bring to bear the whole power of the Government with all the severity, vigor and energy it should and would have been under a second Andrew Jackson, upon the rebels, and at times has seemed to fail to comprehend the responsibilities and dignity of his position in this solemn crisis to tell an anecdote or perpetrate a joke. Yet we have never doubted his patriotic determination to prosecute the war to a successful issue and to secure an honorable and permanent peace.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Brown to Donnelly, August 30, 1864, Donnelly Papers.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the prominent War Democrat and former United States senator, Henry M. Rice, announced that he would vote for Lincoln. Rice to Captain Russell Blakeley and John McKusick, November 1, 1864, Rice Papers, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>28</sup> *Central Republican*, September 14, 1864.



During the remaining weeks of the presidential contest, from September to November, the editor of the *Central Republican* was in the midst of the fray. He attacked the Copperheads from all angles and made Republican success synonymous with the salvation of the Union. But he said little in particular advocacy of the re-election of Abraham Lincoln, apparently assuming that the party cause was stronger and more desirable than the vindication of the president.

When, however, the results of the November elections demonstrated that the popular appeal of the president was as great as that of local candidates, the editorial attitude softened somewhat. Although the *Central Republican* could not refrain from casting aspersions upon Lincoln's past policies, it generally approved of his annual message in December and commended especially his firm stand for universal emancipation. Simultaneously the editor actually praised the president's appointment of the radical Chase to the chief justiceship of the Supreme Court.<sup>29</sup>

During February, 1865, however, Brown almost returned to the role of the fire-eater in his opposition to Lincoln's conciliatory but unsuccessful policy of seeking a negotiated peace with the Confederates. Under the caption, "The Peace Fizzle," the editor condemned the entire affair and sarcastically reminded the president that it was about time that he recognized the southern rebels as armed enemies and treated them accordingly. But when the Democrats tried to attribute the failure of the peace negotiations to the severity of Lincoln's terms, the *Central Republican* rallied to his defense.<sup>30</sup>

National events now moved with such startling rapidity that it was almost impossible for the people on the Minne-

<sup>29</sup> *Central Republican*, December 14, 1864. Lincoln's popular majority over his Democratic opponent in Rice County increased from 485 in 1860 to 608 in 1864, although it declined in the state as a whole from 9,375 to 7,685. *Tribune Almanac and Political Register for 1865*, 60.

<sup>30</sup> *Central Republican*, February 8, 22, 1865.

sota frontier to comprehend fully the changing scene. In early April the Faribault editor joined in the great rejoicing throughout the North over the fall of Richmond, the surrender of Lee's army, and the triumph of the Union. He also witnessed this universal joy turn to profound sorrow upon the receipt of the shocking information that the president had been assassinated.<sup>31</sup>

Although Brown admitted that the mourning of the people was the greatest since the passing of George Washington, he still seemed unable to appreciate the essential strength and greatness of the slain man.<sup>32</sup> The Faribault editor was still a fire-eater in temperament and technique. For him it was inherently impossible to understand a man who could champion a great cause without fanaticism, who could engage in a great controversy without vindictiveness, who in the hour of final triumph could proclaim, "With malice toward none; with charity for all." But the tragic years that followed were ample proof that Orville Brown was far from being the only one who failed to appreciate the lofty idealism and the broad statesmanship of the martyred president. After all is said, the fact remains that the American frontier produced only one Abraham Lincoln.

WINFRED A. HARBISON

WAYNE UNIVERSITY  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

<sup>31</sup> *Central Republican*, April 5, 12, 19, 1865.

<sup>32</sup> *Central Republican*, April 26, May 3, 1865.



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