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THE

# CIVIL WAR

IN THE

# UNITED STATES

BY

KARL MARX

AND

FREDERICK ENGELS

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, which agitated the American scene from 1861 to 1865, was followed with great interest by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Their appraisal of the "first grand war of contemporaneous history," contained within the present volume in the form of newspaper articles and extracts from a voluminous correspondence, clearly shows the progressive and revolutionary character of the American conflict.

The articles appeared originally in 1861 and 1862 in the New York *Daily Tribune* and the Vienna *Presse*. Though essentially the work of Marx, they were written in close collaboration with Engels. Marx's connection with the *Daily Tribune* dates back to the close of 1851 when Charles Dana, hoping to recruit new readers, especially from the ranks of the German immigrant element, invited Marx to write a series of articles on conditions in Germany. Marx eagerly accepted the offer for two reasons. In the first place, the New York newspaper with its 200,000 readers was one of the most influential periodicals in America and as such, could be used as an excellent medium for the dissemination of his views. Secondly, the American journal offered the German revolutionary emigré the prospect of a steady source of income, a pros-

pect especially pleasing because Marx at that time was in such dire financial straits that he did not have enough money to meet the expenses entailed in the running of a household.

It was therefore with high hopes that Marx began to work for the *Daily Tribune*. Yet, if he expected to gain economic security in his new position, he was quickly disillusioned. Paid as he was for each article accepted, the editors of the New York newspaper were not remiss to throw out whole columns whose tone they did not approve or to use those which they liked as leading editorials. It is interesting to note in passing that when Marx first began to write for the American periodical, he turned to Engels for help. The latter, knowing that his friend was at the time finding it difficult to write English easily and in addition was busily engaged in other matters, responded by writing a number of articles which were later collected into a separate volume called *Germany: Revolution and Counter-revolution.* This work, though written by Engels, was for a long time attributed to Marx. However, ideologically it represented the combined expression of their views.

For over a decade Marx kept the *Daily Tribune* readers informed of European developments, especially as they affected the United States. Consequently when the Civil War broke out, Marx continued his past work and wrote a series of articles on that momentous conflict. Designed for American consumption, his contributions emphasized the attitude of Europe in general and England in particular to the Union cause. Subjects such as the cotton crisis in Great Britain, the threatened invasion of Mexico, the *Trent* case and British public opinion were discussed. Finally, in the early part of 1862, all connections between the American paper and Marx were severed. In April of that year, Dana informed the

latter that the English correspondence would have to be discontinued because the internal American situation took up all the room there was in the paper.

In the meantime, Marx became the English correspondent of *Die Presse,* one of the leading newspapers in Vienna. He was promised a pound for every article accepted and ten shillings for every report. Unfortunately for Marx many of his articles were given "the honors of the waste-paper basket" because Max Friedländer, a cousin of Lassalle and the editor of *Die Presse,* felt that they were not in harmony with the tastes of his readers. On January 7, 1862, Friedländer wrote to Marx asking him "to take into account an Austrian bourgeois public." Yet, in spite of these obstacles, Marx's Vienna *Presse* contributions stand as testimonials to his ability to anticipate future events. For example, as early as November 7, 1861, Marx wrote that American developments were driving the North to promulgate the decisive slogan, *"the emancipation of the slaves."* On August 9, 1862, he informed his readers that "Negro slavery [would] not long outlive the Civil War."

Unlike the articles, the correspondence between Marx and Engels, contained in the present volume, goes beyond the year 1862 and consequently treats not only of the constitutional but also of the revolutionary phase of the struggle. Of particular interest to American readers will be those letters dealing with the relative advantages enjoyed by the North over the South, the character of the Secessionist movement, the significance of the Northwest in bringing matters to a head, the estimate of Lincoln, the military collapse of the Confederacy, and the reconstruction plans of Johnson. After the Civil War, Marx and Engels continued to correspond with each other, as well as with American friends of theirs, on conditions in the United States.

From the articles and letters included herein a panoramic picture of the Civil War is unfolded and its significance clearly shown. The clashing interests of divergent social systems, the inevitable recourse to arms, the offensive taken by the slave power, and the *coup d'état* spirit of the Secessionist conspiracy are graphically developed. Similarly, the relationship of the West to the question of slavery is indicated. Some thirty years before Turner, Marx informed Engels that the more he studied this "American business," the more he became convinced that the struggle "was brought to a head by the weight thrown into the scales by the extraordinary development of the Northwestern States."

In a like fashion, Marx practically anticipated by half a century the "discovery" of Schmidt and other bourgeois historians that Northern wheat played an important role in shaping Anglo-American relations during the Civil War. In his articles Marx made frequent references to England's growing need of American wheat, a need which he recognized as a factor of prime importance in preventing the British ruling classes from intervening on behalf of the Confederacy. The ever-present implication behind these references is that if Great Britain was ever forced to choose between a cotton and a wheat shortage, she would risk her future on the former rather than on the latter.*

Marx's power of acute observation is further displayed in his dismissal of the theory that the question of a high protective tariff was responsible for the outbreak of the Civil War. He clearly demonstrated that secession "did not take place because the Morrill tariff had gone through

* On this point compare Marx with L. B. Schmidt. See the latter's article on "The Influence of Wheat and Cotton on Anglo-American Relations during the Civil War" in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, vol. xvi, no. 3 (July, 1918), pp. 400-439. See also E. D. Fite, *Social and Industrial Conditions in the North during the Civil War* (New York, 1910), p. 21.

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Congress, but at most the Morrill tariff went through Congress because secession had taken place."

Marx and Engels followed the military aspects of the American conflict with great interest. No pacifist illusions caused them to shut their eyes to the historical importance of war, especially in respect to revolution and counter-revolution. Engels, a keen student of military science, helped Marx considerably in the latter's evaluation of the campaigns in America. The interest of Engels in military matters was not purely theoretical; it arose out of the concrete events of 1849 in Germany when he participated as an adjutant in the unsuccessful Baden insurrection. From that time on, he devoted himself to the study of military science on the assumption that if the working class was to overcome the bourgeoisie, it would first have to master the art and strategy of war. By 1861, Engels was thoroughly versed in military science, and was thus in an excellent position to help Marx evaluate military developments in America. Marx very often incorporated into his articles whole portions of the letters of Engels, especially those dealing with the military situation in the United States. The result is an admirable military appraisal of the American conflict. Especially praiseworthy are those articles dealing with a criticism of the Confederate defense of Kentucky and of McClellan's "anaconda" plan. It is interesting to note that two years before the Union high command decided to conquer Georgia and thereby cut the Confederacy in two, this plan was suggested in the Vienna *Presse*. On March 27, 1862, after a careful analysis of the military situation, such a procedure was advanced on the ground that Georgia was *"the key to Secessia."*

During the early part of the Civil War, Engels entertained reasonable doubts as to a Northern victory. Discouraged by the blunders of the Union generals and

disgusted by the hesitancy of the North to wage a revolutionary war, Engels asked Marx on September 9, 1862 whether he still believed that "the gentlemen in the North [would] crush the 'rebellion.'" Marx, taking into account the economic and social advantages enjoyed by the North, answered in the affirmative and then went on to chide his friend for allowing himself to be "swayed a little too much by the military aspect of things." As the war progressed, Engels became less pessimistic and finally agreed fully with Marx as to the ultimate outcome of the struggle.

Marx and Engels were essentially interested in the revolutionary implications of the Civil War. From the very beginning of the conflict, they clearly perceived that the objective purpose of the struggle was the destruction of the slave power and with it the South's "peculiar institution." They therefore urged the bourgeois republic to wage a revolutionary war: to arm the Negroes and to abolish slavery. Consequently, they greeted with satisfaction the efforts of the Union government during the last two years of the war to smash the counter-revolution and to free the slaves.

It was evident to Marx that the eventual emancipation of the American working class depended upon the preliminary destruction of Negro slavery. "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin," wrote Marx in *Capital,* "where in the black it is branded." Moreover, he justly observed that the development of any sort of "independent movement of the workers" would be greatly hindered "so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic." The validity of this observation is obvious once the devastating effects of chattel labor are realized. So far as the South was concerned, slavery definitely impeded the development of a militant labor movement by throwing into disrepute the dignity of manual work

and by hindering the growth of manufacturing. The rise of industry was inconceivable so long as ante-bellum planters preferred to invest their surplus capital in chattels and lands, rather than in factories and railroads. Under these conditions the emergence of a strong independent labor movement in the South was practically impossible. Slavery likewise threatened the rise of a vigorous proletarian movement in the North by menacing the industrial expansion of that section through limiting its market possibilities in the South, impeding its opportunities for exploitation in the West, and preventing the passage of favorable legislation at Washington.

Convinced that the germ of the future revolution lay in the North, Marx supported the bourgeois republic in its struggle against the slave oligarchy. In this respect he had the wholehearted aid of the British proletariat. When in the latter part of 1861, the reactionary Palmerston government attempted to use the *Trent* affair as a pretext for a war against the North, English workers held protest meetings in Brighton and elsewhere. These demonstrations were called in spite of the fact that the British ruling classes did everything in their power to make the workers believe that an alliance with the Confederacy would result in the breaking of the Northern blockade of Southern ports, which in turn, would mean the importation of greater quantities of cotton with consequent re-employment and prosperity. Yet, the British workers could not be so easily fooled; despite widespread misery and starvation, they showed their "indestructible excellence" by opposing the war-mongers and by demanding peace. Their pro-Union demonstrations forced the Palmerston government to adopt a more conciliatory tone throughout the entire *Trent* affair. Marx, in reporting these meetings to his American readers, requested them

never to forget that "at least the *working classes* of England" were on their side.

Similarly, the international proletariat supported the American Republic against the slave power. In 1864, Marx, carrying out the instructions of the First International, sent a message to the people of the United States congratulating them upon the re-election of Lincoln. In this address (to be found in the Appendix of the present volume), Marx pointed out that from the beginning of the struggle European workers had made the Northern cause their own and that "the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for the general holy crusade of property against labor...." In conclusion, Marx asserted that just as the "American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American anti-slavery war will for the working classes."

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the articles and letters, included herein, come as a refreshing antidote to much that has been written on the Civil War. On the whole, the American conflict has been analyzed in such simple and idealistic terms that historical actualities have been sacrificed for preconceived notions based on fantastic premises.

Among these the most unrealistic is the one propounded by Alexander H. Stephens and Jefferson Davis, leading exponents of the Southern Bourbon school. Faced by "the brutal fact of defeat," these two politicians sought to defend the "lost cause" and at the same time to obscure the historic problem of Negro slavery by discovering the cause of the conflict in the convenient American doctrine of states' rights. In his *Constitutional View of the Late War between the States* (1868-70), Stephens set forth the thesis that the civil strife was occasioned by "opposing

ideas as to the nature of what is known as the General Government. The contest was between those who held it to be strictly Federal in character and those who maintained it to be thoroughly National." To the former Vice-President of the Confederacy, slavery was merely the spark that brought these "antagonistic principles" in actual collision "on the field of battle." Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, put it even more simply. "The question of slavery," he wrote in his *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881) "served as an *occasion,* it was far from being the *cause* of the conflict." Moreover, Stephens and Davis both agreed that the Civil War was inevitable. To them it was inconceivable to imagine the North and South living peacefully side by side so long as one accepted the Hamiltonian concept of government and the other the Jeffersonian.

The traditional Northern thesis was formulated by James F. Rhodes, a retired business man and brother-in-law of Mark Hanna, the Republican leader who helped "make" McKinley president. In his seven-volume *History of the United States* (1893-1906), he set forth the theory that the Civil War was the result of clashing ideas as to the moral justification of slavery. Throughout his work, Rhodes adopted a tolerant attitude toward the South and was of course in entire sympathy with the prevalent Northern disposition to let bygones be bygones.

At present most historians reject the traditional Northern and Southern thesis as to the cause of the Civil War. Even such conservatives of the South as George F. Milton have so modified the time-honored Stephens-Davis apology that it can hardly be recognized. In his *Eve of the Conflict* (1934), Milton, repudiating the old Southern theory of the inevitability of the struggle, holds that the civil strife was a "needless war." He maintains that the conflict could have been avoided if the people

had followed the dictates of reason and intelligence exemplified in the attitude of Douglas and had repudiated the promptings of emotion and passion aroused by "inflamed minorities." In essence the Civil War was a "battle between rational and mystic democracy. . . ."

Unlike Milton, Edward Channing, late professor of history at Harvard, does not belittle the force of Northern anti-slavery sentiment, nor does he deny the fact that the anti-slavery struggle, especially as it affected the territories, was tangible and material. Moreover, his designation of the Civil War as the War for Southern Independence is a step in the right direction * and is distinctly superior to the old title of the War between the States, a title used by Stephens and other reactionaries to establish the legitimacy of the Secessionist conspiracy.

Probably the best description of the Civil War is the one given by Charles A. Beard in his *Rise of American Civilization* (1927). His title, the Second American Revolution, conceals nothing and suggests a great deal. In his discussion, the leader of the liberal bourgeois school shows that the conflict was a struggle between two divergent economic and social systems, one a mono-agricultural order based upon slavery and the other a diversified system of agrarian and industrial productivity built upon free labor. He shows how the Civil War was the inevitable outcome of these clashing forces and how it represented a revolutionary occurrence of prime importance. A similar position is taken by Arthur C. Cole whose *Irrepressible Conflict* (1934) is a more complete study of the period.

The work of Beard and Cole, though containing much useful material, suffers from certain limitations inherent in the liberal bourgeois approach. These restrictions become evident when examined in the light of the articles and letters contained in the present volume. Failing to

* E. Channing, *History of the United States* (New York, 1925), vol. vi.

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appreciate fully the class dynamics of historical development, liberal bourgeois historians do not clearly distinguish between the class forces at work. This leads them to ignore some of the most significant revolutionary phenomena of the period. Not least is the part played by the American working class in bringing the Civil War to a successful conclusion. This subject, worthy of extended treatment, is either completely disregarded or quickly disposed of.

On the eve of the Civil War, the American working class, fully cognizant of the dangers inherent in the Secessionist movement, vigorously declared itself for the preservation of the Union. Labor organizations in the South joined with those in the North in passing resolutions favoring the unity of the American Republic. These resolutions, though fundamentally directed against the Secessionist movement, were nevertheless for the most part animated by a desire to prevent war if that was at all possible. As such, they reflected the attitude of a number of prominent labor leaders whose pacifistic tendencies and political immaturity blinded them to the full significance of the impending conflict. Among these leaders was William H. Sylvis, head of the Iron Molders Union, who was later to distinguish himself as the guiding spirit behind the National Labor Union and as a friend of the First International. The desire of Sylvis to avert the coming struggle did not prevent him from standing in strong opposition to the Secessionist movement, an opposition amply demonstrated by his activities prior to and during the war. On February 12, 1861, Sylvis, writing in a workingman's newspaper, the *Mechanics' Own,* proposed that the wage-earners of the country hold demonstrations in which the unity of the Republic should be made the dominant note. When hostilities actually broke out, Sylvis recruited a detachment of iron molders

which helped protect Washington from Lee's threatened invasion.

A considerable number of unorganized workers adopted a pacifistic attitude on the eve of the Civil War. Their outlook, however, was largely manufactured by powerful pro-slavery interests located in such large Eastern mercantile centers as Boston, New York and Philadelphia. These elements, connected with the slave barons of the South in the capacity of financiers, merchants and politicians, played upon the working-class fear of unemployment to such an extent that they were able to stampede many unorganized wage-earners into the anti-war camp.

However, once "the irrepressible conflict" began, the working class as a whole came to the defense of the Union and workers "vied with farmers in furnishing [the Lincoln administration] with volunteers." Writing many years later, Powderly, head of the Knights of Labor, stated, "... It is true that men in other walks of life enlisted and did good service in the Union cause, but the great bulk of the army was made up of working men." In the front rank of those who volunteered were trade union officials who actively recruited military companies in the factories where they worked. In some cases labor organizations joined the army in a body; for instance, one in Philadelphia passed the following resolution: "It having been resolved to enlist with Uncle Sam for the war, this union stands adjourned until either the Union is saved or we are whipped."

An even more advanced position than this was taken by some German-American working-class leaders, such as, for instance, Joseph Weydemeyer, loyal friend of Karl Marx. This Socialist fighter, along with many other leaders, fought on the side of the North not only to preserve the Union, but also to abolish slavery. The eradica-

tion of the latter was held essential to the ultimate emancipation of the proletariat. As the war progressed, American wage-earners began to exhibit a similar orientation. Their desire "to secure freedom for all the inhabitants of the United States" gave them, as Powderly puts it, "renewed zeal in the work of emancipation."

The working class of America did yeomen service not only at the front but behind the lines. Here in the factories of the nation wage-earners toiled unceasingly to produce the sinews of war. While capitalists were reaping millions as a result of fat war contracts, the laboring classes were working at pitifully inadequate wages. Yet, they worked on and on in order to bring the war to a successful conclusion. Their devotion to the Union government is well illustrated in a testimonial drawn up by the sewing women of Cincinnati on February 20, 1865, and addressed to Lincoln. In this memorial, these "wives, widows, sisters and friends of the soldiers in the army of the United States" contrasted their wretched conditions with those of the war-profiteers "who fatten on their contracts by grinding immense profits out of the labor of their operatives." Yet, despite this example of upper class selfishness, these women assured Lincoln of their sympathy with and loyalty to the government, a government they were still "desirous of aiding."

With the war won and the Southern slavocracy crushed, the wage-earners of America served notice on the ruling classes that they intended to secure in the very near future a more equitable distribution of wealth and a more equal share in those democratic institutions which they had defended with their blood. On November 2, 1865, Ira Steward, prominent leader of the eight-hour-day movement, proposed a number of resolutions at a mass meeting of Boston workers held at Faneuil Hall. Among those adopted was the following:

> . . . we rejoice that the rebel aristocracy of the South has been crushed, that . . . beneath the glorious shadow of our victorious flag men of every clime, lineage and color are recognized as free. But while we will bear with patient endurance the burden of the public debt, we yet want it to be known that the workingmen of America will demand in future a more equal share in the wealth their industry creates . . . and a more equal participation in the privileges and blessings of those free institutions, defended by their manhood on many a bloody field of battle.

Within a short time after the passage of this resolution, an eight-hour-day movement was running, as Marx so aptly put it, "with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific," and a national federation of labor—the National Labor Union—was being launched.

Thus, the American working class did its share in bringing the Civil War to a successful end. Its splendid response to Lincoln's continuous plea for troops together with the heroic sacrifices of the British proletariat and the magnificent work of Marx and the First International form one of the most inspiring chapters in the history of the working-class movement.

Liberal historians likewise ignore or at best gloss over the part played by the Negro people in helping the North win the Civil War. The arming of Negroes (the necessity of which Marx realized and the revolutionary implications of which he was cognizant) is given scant notice despite the fact that, according to official figures, 186,017 colored troops served in the Northern armies during the struggle. Of these 123,156 were still in service on July 16, 1865. Drawn from working-class and petty bourgeois circles in the North and from free Negro and fugitive slave elements in the South, Negro soldiers participated in 198 battles and skirmishes and lost some 68,178 men. These statistics tell only part of the story; they do not disclose the heroism exhibited by Union Negro troops in battle

nor their caliber as fighting men. These can be appreciated only through an examination of testimonials still available. For instance, there is the communication of Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson who commanded a Federal detachment of Negroes in Florida. "It would have been madness," he wrote in February, 1863, "to attempt with the bravest white troops what [I] successfully accomplished with black ones." The excellence of the Negro as a soldier was matched only by his eagerness to enlist and fight for freedom. Despite petty discriminations of all kinds (for example, colored troops received less pay in the Union army than white ones), Negroes flocked to the colors; pay or no pay, they did not hesitate to volunteer. Negroes served in the Northern armies not only as privates but as officers. Without previous military experience and solely on the basis of ability, Negro fighters rose from the ranks to become commissioned officers, some even attaining the rank of Major and Lieutenant-Colonel.

In addition to officers and soldiers, the Negro people furnished the Union armies with servants, helpers and laborers. These were mainly drawn from the ranks of fugitive slaves who deserted their plantations in ever-increasing numbers as the war went on. Serving within the Federal lines, these runaway Negroes helped build roads and fortifications which, in turn, permitted tens of thousands of white troops to take up their guns and return to the ranks, thereby increasing the military strength and efficiency of the Northern armies.

The present volume serves not only to disclose the limitations inherent in the liberal bourgeois approach to the Civil War and the shallowness of the traditional idealistic interpretations of the subject, but also preserves the revolutionary traditions of that struggle from reactionary and conservative distortions. The years 1861-65

marked the defeat of the armed insurrection of the slave power and the unleashing of a revolutionary movement of vast potentialities. In its Civil War phase, the revolution abolished chattel slavery and destroyed the old plantocracy. At the same time it insured the continuance of democracy, freedom and progress by putting an end to the rule of an oligarchy, by preventing the further suppression of civil liberties in the interests of chattel slavery and by paving the way for the forward movement of American labor. To crush the counter-revolution and brush aside a decadent social order much blood was spilt. In this connection workers and farmers, who supplied the Union army with the bulk of its fighting force, contributed more than their share. In their struggle for freedom, they and their progressive bourgeois allies were aided, as were their forefathers during the first American Revolution and their spiritual descendants in Spain today, by European revolutionaries. Particularly conspicuous in this connection were the German refugees of 1848-49, bourgeois liberals like Schurz and Kapp and working-class radicals like Weydemeyer and Anneke. The revolutionary character of the American conflict was fully appreciated by contemporary observers. On December 30, 1860, one of these, a militant abolitionist connected with the Chicago *Tribune,* Horace White by name, wrote, "We live in revolutionary times and I say God bless the revolution!" Some fifty-eight years later, Lenin in his *Letter to American Workers* reminded the people of the United States that their revolutionary tradition went back to "the war of liberation against the English in the 18th and the Civil War in the 19th century." The latter he described as "world-historic, progressive and revolutionary. . . ."

Today, ultra-reactionary political groups, professional patriots and big business Bourbons are attempting to ex-

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