

# Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

## Writings on the North American Civil War

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# Karl Marx

## The North American Civil War

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### London, October 20, 1861

For months the leading weekly and daily papers of the London press have been reiterating the same litany on the American Civil War. While they insult the free states of the North, they anxiously defend themselves against the suspicion of sympathising with the slave states of the South. In fact, they continually write two articles: one article, in which they attack the North, and another article, in which they excuse their attacks on the North.

In essence the extenuating arguments read: The war between the North and South is a tariff war. The war is, further, not for any principle, does not touch the question of slavery and in fact turns on Northern lust for sovereignty. Finally, even if justice is on the side of the North, does it not remain a vain endeavour to want to subjugate eight million Anglo-Saxons by force! Would not separation of the South release the North from all connection with Negro slavery and ensure for it, with its twenty million inhabitants and its vast territory, a higher, hitherto scarcely dreamt-of, development? Accordingly, must not the North welcome secession as a happy event, instead of wanting to overrule it by a bloody and futile civil war?

Point by point we will probe the plea of the English press.

The war between North and South -- so runs the first excuse -- is a mere tariff war, a war between a protectionist system and a free trade system, and Britain naturally stands on the side of free trade. Shall the slave-owner enjoy the fruits of slave labour in their entirety or shall he be cheated of a portion of these by the protectionists of the North? That is the question which is at issue in this war. It was reserved for *The Times* to make this brilliant discovery. *The Economist*, *The Examiner*, *The Saturday Review* and *tutti quanti* expounded the theme further. It is characteristic of this discovery that it was made, not in Charleston, but in London. Naturally, in America everyone knew that from 1846 to 1861 a free trade system prevailed, and that Representative Morrill carried his protectionist tariff through Congress only in 1861, after the rebellion had already broken out. Secession, therefore, did not take place because the Morrill tariff had gone through Congress, but, at most, the Morrill tariff went through Congress because secession had taken place. When South Carolina had its first attack of secession in 1831, the protectionist tariff of 1828 served it, to be sure, as a pretext, but only as a pretext, as is known from a statement of General Jackson. This time, however, the old pretext has in fact not been repeated. In the Secession

Congress at Montgomery all reference to the tariff question was avoided, because the cultivation of sugar in Louisiana, one of the most influential Southern states, depends entirely on protection.

But, the London press pleads further, the war of the United States is nothing but a war for the forcible maintenance of the Union. The Yankees cannot make up their minds to strike fifteen stars from their standard. They want to cut a colossal figure on the world stage. Yes, it would be different if the war was waged for the abolition of slavery! The question of slavery, however, as *The Saturday Review* categorically declares among other things, has absolutely nothing to do with this war.

It is above all to be remembered that the war did not originate with the North, but with the South. The North finds itself on the defensive. For months it had quietly looked on while the secessionists appropriated the Union's forts, arsenals, shipyards, customs houses, pay offices, ships and supplies of arms, insulted its flag and took prisoner bodies of its troops. Finally the secessionists resolved to force the Union government out of its passive attitude by a blatant act of war, and *solely for this reason* proceeded to the bombardment of Fort Sumter near Charleston. On April 11 (1861) their General Beauregard had learnt in a meeting with Major Anderson, the commander of Fort Sumter, that the fort was only supplied with provisions for three days more and accordingly must be peacefully surrendered after this period. In order to forestall this peaceful surrender, the secessionists opened the bombardment early on the following morning (April 12), which brought about the fall of the fort in a few hours. News of this had hardly been telegraphed to Montgomery, the seat of the Secession Congress, when War Minister Walker publicly declared in the name of the new Confederacy: No man can say where *the war opened today* will end. At the same time he prophesied that before the first of May the flag of the Southern Confederacy will wave from the dome of the old Capitol in Washington and within a short time perhaps also from the Faneuil Hall in Boston. Only now ensued the proclamation in which Lincoln called for 75,000 men to defend the Union. The bombardment of Fort Sumter cut off the only possible constitutional way out, namely the convocation of a general convention of the American people, as Lincoln had proposed in his inaugural address. For Lincoln there now remained only the choice of fleeing from Washington, evacuating Maryland and Delaware and surrendering Kentucky, Missouri and Virginia, or of answering war with war.

The question of the principle of the American Civil War is answered by the battle slogan with which the South broke the peace. Stephens, the Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy, declared in the Secession Congress that what essentially distinguished the Constitution newly hatched at Montgomery from the Constitution of Washington and Jefferson was that now for the first time slavery was recognised as an institution good in itself, and as the foundation of the whole state edifice, whereas the revolutionary fathers, men steeped in the prejudices of the eighteenth century, had treated slavery as an evil imported from England and to be eliminated in the course of time. Another matador of the South, Mr. Spratt, cried out: "For us it is a question of founding a great slave republic." If, therefore, it was indeed only in defence of the Union that the North drew the sword, had not the South already declared that the continuance of slavery was no longer compatible with the continuance of the Union?

Just as the bombardment of Fort Sumter gave the signal for the opening of the war, the election victory of the *Republican* Party of the North, the election of Lincoln as President, gave the signal for secession. On November 6, 1860, Lincoln was elected. On November 8, 1860, a message telegraphed from South Carolina said: Secession is regarded here as an accomplished fact; on November 10 the legislature of Georgia occupied itself with secession plans, and on November 13 a special session of the legislature of Mississippi was convened to consider secession. But Lincoln's election was itself only the result of a split

in the *Democratic* camp. During the election struggle the Democrats of the North concentrated their votes on *Douglas*, the Democrats of the South concentrated their votes on *Breckinridge*, and to this splitting of the Democratic votes the Republican Party owed its victory. Whence came, on the one hand, the preponderance of the *Republican* Party in the North? Whence, on the other, the disunion *within* the *Democratic* Party, whose members, North and South, had operated in conjunction for more than half a century?

Under the presidency of Buchanan the sway that the South had gradually usurped over the Union through its alliance with the Northern Democrats attained its zenith. The last Continental Congress of 1787 and the first Constitutional Congress of 1789 -90 had legally excluded slavery from all Territories of the republic north-west of the Ohio. (Territories, as is known, is the name given to the colonies lying within the United States itself which have not yet attained the level of population constitutionally prescribed for the formation of autonomous states.) The so-called Missouri Compromise (1820), in consequence of which Missouri became one of the States of the Union as a slave state, excluded slavery from every remaining Territory north of 36 degrees latitude and west of the Missouri. By this compromise the area of slavery was advanced several degrees of longitude, whilst, on the other hand, a geographical boundary-line to its future spread seemed quite definitely drawn. This geographical barrier, in its turn, was thrown down in 1854 by the so-called Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the initiator of which was St[ephen] A. Douglas, then leader of the Northern Democrats. The Bill, which passed both Houses of Congress, repealed the Missouri Compromise, placed slavery and freedom on the same footing, commanded the Union government to treat them both with equal indifference and left it to the sovereignty of the people, that is, the majority of the settlers, to decide whether or not slavery was to be introduced in a Territory. Thus, for the first time in the history of the United States, every geographical and legal limit to the extension of slavery in the Territories was removed. Under this new legislation the hitherto free Territory of New Mexico, a Territory five times as large as the State of New York, was transformed into a slave Territory, and the area of slavery was extended from the border of the Mexican Republic to 38 degrees north latitude. In 1859 New Mexico received a slave code that vies with the statute-books of Texas and Alabama in barbarity. Nevertheless, as the census of 1860 proves, among some hundred thousand inhabitants New Mexico does not yet count half a hundred slaves. It had therefore sufficed for the South to send some adventurers with a few slaves over the border, and then with the help of the central government in Washington and of its officials and contractors in New Mexico to drum together a sham popular representation to impose slavery and with it the rule of the slaveholders on the Territory.

However, this convenient method did not prove applicable in other Territories. The South accordingly went a step further and appealed from Congress to the Supreme Court of the United States. This Court, which numbers nine judges, five of whom belong to the South, had long been the most willing tool of the slaveholders. It decided in 1857, in the notorious Dred Scott case, that every American citizen possesses the right to take with him into any territory any property recognized by the Constitution. The Constitution, it maintained, recognises slaves as property and obliges the Union government to protect this property. Consequently, on the basis of the Constitution, slaves could be forced to labour in the Territories by their owners, and so every individual slaveholder was entitled to introduce slavery into hitherto free Territories against the will of the majority of the settlers. The right to exclude slavery was taken from the Territorial legislatures and the duty to protect pioneers of the slave system was imposed on Congress and the Union government.

If the Missouri Compromise of 1820 had extended the geographical boundary-line of slavery in the Territories, if the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854 had erased every geographical boundary-line and set up

a political barrier instead, the will of the majority of the settlers, now the Supreme Court of the United States, by its decision of 1857, tore down even this political barrier and transformed all the Territories of the republic, present and future, from nurseries of free states into nurseries of slavery.

At the same time, under Buchanan's government the severer law on the surrendering of fugitive slaves enacted in 1850 was ruthlessly carried out in the states of the North. To play the part of slave-catchers for the Southern slaveholders appeared to be the constitutional calling of the North. On the other hand, in order to hinder as far as possible the colonisation of the Territories by free settlers, the slaveholders' party frustrated all the so-called free-soil measures, i.e., measures which were to secure for the settlers a definite amount of uncultivated state land free of charge.

In the foreign, as in the domestic, policy of the United States, the interest of the slaveholders served as the guiding star. Buchanan had in fact bought the office of President through the issue of the Ostend Manifesto, in which the acquisition of Cuba, whether by purchase or by force of arms, was proclaimed as the great task of national policy. Under his government northern Mexico was already divided among American land speculators, who impatiently awaited the signal to fall on Chihuahua, Coahuila and Sonora. The unceasing piratical expeditions of the filibusters against the states of Central America were directed no less from the White House at Washington. In the closest connection with this foreign policy, whose manifest purpose was conquest of new territory for the spread of slavery and of the slaveholders' rule, stood the *reopening of the slave trade*, secretly supported by the Union government. St[ephen] A. Douglas himself declared in the American Senate on August 20, 1859: During the last year more Negroes have been imported from Africa than ever before in any single year, even at the time when the slave trade was still legal. The number of slaves imported in the last year totalled fifteen thousand.

Armed spreading of slavery abroad was the avowed aim of national policy; the Union had in fact become the slave of the three hundred thousand slaveholders who held sway over the South. A series of compromises, which the South owed to its alliance with the Northern Democrats, had led to this result. On this alliance all the attempts, periodically repeated since 1817, to resist the ever increasing encroachments of the slaveholders had hitherto come to grief. At length there came a turning point.

For hardly had the Kansas-Nebraska Bill gone through, which wiped out the geographical boundary-line of slavery and made its introduction into new Territories subject to the will of the majority of the settlers, when armed emissaries of the slaveholders, border rabble from Missouri and Arkansas, with bowie-knife in one hand and revolver in the other, fell upon Kansas and sought by the most unheard-of atrocities to dislodge its settlers from the Territory colonised by them. These raids were supported by the central government in Washington. Hence a tremendous reaction. Throughout the North, but particularly in the North-west, a relief organisation was formed to support Kansas with men, arms and money. Out of this relief organisation arose the *Republican Party*, which therefore owes its origin to the struggle for Kansas. After the attempt to transform Kansas into a *slave Territory* by force of arms had failed, the South sought to achieve the same result by political intrigues. Buchanan's government, in particular, exerted its utmost efforts to have Kansas included in the States of the Union as a *slave state* with a slave constitution imposed on it. Hence renewed struggle, this time mainly conducted in Congress at Washington. Even St[ephen] A. Douglas, the chief of the Northern Democrats, now (1857 - 58) entered the lists against the government and his allies of the South, because imposition of a slave constitution would have been contrary to the principle of sovereignty of the settlers passed in the Nebraska Bill of 1854. Douglas, Senator for Illinois, a North-western state, would naturally have lost all his influence if he had wanted to concede to the South the right to steal by force of arms or through acts of Congress Territories colonised

by the North. As the struggle for Kansas, therefore, called the *Republican Party* into being, it at the same time occasioned the first *split within the Democratic Party* itself.

The Republican Party put forward its first platform for the presidential election in 1856. Although its candidate, John Fremont, was not victorious, the huge number of votes cast for him at any rate proved the rapid growth of the Party, particularly in the North-west. At their second National Convention for the presidential election (May 17, 1860), the Republicans again put forward their platform of 1856, only enriched by some additions. Its principal contents were the following: Not a foot of fresh territory is further conceded to slavery. The filibustering policy abroad must cease. The reopening of the slave trade is stigmatised. Finally, free-soil laws are to be enacted for the furtherance of free colonisation.

The vitally important point in this platform was that not a foot of fresh terrain was conceded to slavery; rather it was to remain once and for all confined with the boundaries of the states where it already legally existed. Slavery was thus to be formally interned; but continual expansion of territory and continual spread of slavery beyond its old limits is a law of life for the slave states of the Union.

The cultivation of the southern export articles, cotton, tobacco, sugar, etc., carried on by slaves, is only remunerative as long as it is conducted with large gangs of slaves, on a mass scale and on wide expanses of a naturally fertile soil, which requires only simple labour. Intensive cultivation, which depends less on fertility of the soil than on investment of capital, intelligence and energy of labour, is contrary to the nature of slavery. Hence the rapid transformation of states like Maryland and Virginia, which formerly employed slaves on the production of export articles, into states which raise slaves to export them into the deep South. Even in South Carolina, where the slaves form four-sevenths of the population, the cultivation of cotton has been almost completely stationary for years due to the exhaustion of the soil. Indeed, by force of circumstances South Carolina has already been transformed in part into a slave-raising state, since it already sells slaves to the sum of four million dollars yearly to the states of the extreme South and South-west. As soon as this point is reached, the acquisition of new Territories becomes necessary, so that one section of the slaveholders with their slaves may occupy new fertile lands and that a new market for slave-raising, therefore for the sale of slaves, may be created for the remaining section. It is, for example, indubitable that without the acquisition of Louisiana, Missouri and Arkansas by the United States, slavery in Virginia and Maryland would have been wiped out long ago. In the Secessionist Congress at Montgomery, Senator Toombs, one of the spokesmen of the South, strikingly formulated the economic law that commands the constant expansion of the territory of slavery. "In fifteen years," said he, "without a great increase in slave territory, either the slaves must be permitted to flee from the whites, or the whites must flee from the slaves."

As is known, the representation of the individual states in the Congress House of Representatives depends on the size of their respective populations. As the populations of the free states grow far more quickly than those of the slave states, the number of Northern Representatives was bound to outstrip that of the Southern very rapidly. The real seat of the political power of the South is accordingly transferred more and more to the American Senate, where every state, whether its population is great or small, is represented by two Senators. In order to assert its influence in the Senate and, through the Senate, its hegemony over the United States, the South therefore required a continual formation of new slave states. This, however, was only possible through conquest of foreign lands, as in the case of Texas, or through the transformation of the Territories belonging to the United States first into slave Territories and later into slave states, as in the case of Missouri, Arkansas, etc. *John Calhoun*, whom the slaveholders admire as their statesman *par excellence*, stated as early as February 19, 1847, in the Senate, that the Senate



alone placed a balance of power in the hands of the South, that extension of the slave territory was necessary to preserve this equilibrium between South and North in the Senate, and that the attempts of the South at the creation of new slave states by force were accordingly justified.

Finally, the number of actual slaveholders in the South of the Union does not amount to more than three hundred thousand, a narrow oligarchy that is confronted with many millions of so-called poor whites, whose numbers have been constantly growing through concentration of landed property and whose condition is only to be compared with that of the Roman plebeians in the period of Rome's extreme decline. Only by acquisition and the prospect of acquisition of new Territories, as well as by filibustering expeditions, is it possible to square the interests of these poor whites with those of the slaveholders, to give their restless thirst for action a harmless direction and to tame them with the prospect of one day becoming slaveholders themselves.

A strict confinement of slavery within its old terrain, therefore, was bound according to economic law to lead to its gradual effacement, in the political sphere to annihilate the hegemony that the slave states exercised through the Senate, and finally to expose the slaveholding oligarchy within its own states to threatening perils from the poor whites. In accordance with the principle that any further extension of slave Territories was to be prohibited by law, the Republicans therefore attacked the rule of the slaveholders at its root. The Republican election victory was accordingly bound to lead to open struggle between North and South. And this election victory, as already mentioned, was itself conditioned by the split in the Democratic camp.

The Kansas struggle had already caused a split between the slaveholders' party and the Democrats of the North allied to it. With the presidential election of 1860, the same strife now broke out again in a more general form. The Democrats of the North, with Douglas as their candidate, made the introduction of slavery into Territories dependent on the will of the majority of the settlers. The slaveholders' party, with Breckinridge as their candidate, maintained that the Constitution of the United States, as the Supreme Court had also declared, brought slavery legally in its train; in and of itself slavery was already legal in all Territories and required no special naturalisation. Whilst, therefore, the Republicans prohibited any extension of slave Territories, the Southern party laid claim to all Territories of the republic as legally warranted domains. What they had attempted by way of example with regard to Kansas, to force slavery on a Territory through the central government against the will of the settlers themselves, they now set up as law for all the Territories of the Union. Such a concession lay beyond the power of the *Democratic* leaders and would only have occasioned the desertion of their army to the Republican camp. On the other hand, Douglas's settlers' sovereignty could not satisfy the slaveholders' party. What it wanted to effect had to be effected within the next four years under the new President, could only be effected by the resources of the central government and brooked no further delay. It did not escape the slaveholders that a new power had arisen, the *North-west*, whose population, having almost doubled between 1850 and 1860, was already pretty well equal to the white population of the slave states -- a power that was not inclined either by tradition, temperament or mode of life to let itself be dragged from compromise to compromise in the manner of the old North-eastern states. The Union was still of value to the South only so far as it handed over Federal power to it as a means of carrying out the slave policy. If not, then it was better to make the break now than to look on at the development of the Republican Party and the upsurge of the North-west for another four years and begin the struggle under more unfavourable conditions. The slaveholders' party therefore played *va banque*. When the Democrats of the North declined to go on playing the part of the poor whites of the South, the South secured Lincoln's victory by splitting the vote, and then took this victory as a pretext for drawing the sword from the scabbard.

The whole movement was and is based, as one sees, on the *slave question*. Not in the sense of whether the slaves within the existing slave states should be emancipated outright or not, but whether the twenty million free men of the North should submit any longer to an oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders; whether the vast Territories of the republic should be nurseries for free states or for slavery; finally, whether the national policy of the Union should take armed spreading of slavery in Mexico, Central and South America as its device.

In another article we will probe the assertion of the London press that the North must sanction secession as the most favourable and only possible solution of the conflict.

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# Karl Marx

## The *Trent* Case

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### London, November 28, 1861

The conflict of the English mail ship *Trent* with the North American warship *San Jacinto* in the narrow passage of the Old Bahama Channel is the lion among the events of the day. In the afternoon of November 27 the mail ship *La Plata* brought the news of the incident to Southampton, where the electric telegraph at once flashed it to all parts of Great Britain. The same evening the London Stock Exchange was the stage of stormy scenes similar to those at the time of the announcement of the Italian war. Quotations for government stock sank three-quarters to one per cent. The wildest rumours circulated in London. The American Ambassador, Adams, was said to have been given his passport, an embargo to have been imposed on all American ships in the Thames, etc. At the same time a protest meeting of merchants was held at the Stock Exchange in Liverpool, to demand measures from the British Government for the satisfaction of the violated honour of the British flag. Every sound-minded Englishman went to bed with the conviction that he would go to sleep in a state of peace but wake up in a state of war.

Nevertheless, the fact is well-nigh categorically established that the conflict between the *Trent* and the *San Jacinto* brings no war in its train. The semi-official press, like *The Times* and *The Morning Post*, strikes a peaceful note and pours juridically cool deductions on the flickerings of passion. Papers like the *Daily Telegraph*, which at the faintest *mot d'ordre* roar for the British lion, are true models of moderation. Only the Tory opposition press, *The Morning Herald* and *The Standard*, hits out. These facts force every expert to conclude that the ministry has already decided not to make a *casus belli* out of the untoward event.

It must be added that the event, if not the details of its enactment, was anticipated. On October 12, Messrs. Slidell, Confederacy emissary to France, and Mason, Confederacy emissary to England, together with their secretaries Eustis and MacFarland, had run the blockade of Charleston on the steamship *Theodora* and sailed for Havana, there to seek the opportunity of a passage under the British flag. In England their arrival was expected daily. North American warships had set out from Liverpool to intercept the gentlemen, with their dispatches, on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. The British ministry had already submitted the question whether the North Americans were entitled to take such a step to its

official jurisconsults for their opinion. Their answer is said to have been in the affirmative.

The legal question turns in a narrow circle. Since the foundation of the United States, North America has adopted *British* maritime law in all its rigour. A major principle of this maritime law is that all *neutral merchantmen* are subject to search by the belligerent parties.

"This right, " said Lord Stowell in a judgment which has become famous, "offers the sole security that no contraband is carried on neutral ships."

The greatest American authority, *Kent*, states in the same sense:

"The right of self-preservation gives belligerent nations this right. The doctrine of the British admiralty on the right of visitation and search ... has been recognised in its fullest extent by the courts of justice in our country."

It was not opposition to the right of search, as is sometimes erroneously suggested, that brought about the Anglo-American War of 1812 to 1814. Rather, America declared war because England *unlawfully* presumed to search even American *warships*, on the pretext of catching deserters from the British Navy.

The *San Jacinto*, therefore, had the right to search the *Trent* and to confiscate any contraband stowed aboard her. That *dispatches* in the possession of Mason, Slidell and Co. come under the category of contraband even *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, etc., admit. There remains the question whether Messrs. Mason, Slidell and Co. were themselves contraband and might consequently be confiscated! The point is a ticklish one and differences of opinion prevail among the doctors of law. *Pratt*, the most distinguished British authority on "Contraband", in the section on "*Quasi-Contraband, Dispatches, Passengers*" specifically refers to "communication of information and orders from a belligerent government to its officers abroad, or the conveyance of military passengers". Messrs. Mason and Slidell, if not officers, were just as little ambassadors, since their governments are recognised neither by Britain nor by France. What are they, then? In justification of the very broad conceptions of contraband asserted by Britain in the Anglo-French wars, Jefferson already remarks in his memoirs that contraband, by its nature, precludes any exhaustive definition and necessarily leaves great scope for arbitrariness. In any event, however, one sees that from the standpoint of English law the *legal question* dwindles to a Duns Scotus controversy, the explosive force of which will not go beyond exchange of diplomatic notes.

The *political* aspect of the North American procedure was estimated quite correctly by *The Times* in these words:

"Even Mr. Seward himself must know that the voices of the Southern commissioners, sounding from their captivity, are a thousand times more eloquent in London and in Paris than they would have been if they had been heard in St. James's and the Tuileries."

And is not the Confederacy already represented in London by Messrs. Yancey and Mann?

We regard this latest operation of Mr. Seward as a characteristic act of tactlessnesses by self-conscious weakness simulating strength. If the naval incident hastens Seward's removal from the Washington Cabinet, the United States will have no reason to record it as an "untoward event" in the annals of its Civil War.



# Karl Marx

## The Anglo-American Conflict

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**London, November 29, 1861**

The law officers of the Crown had yesterday to give their opinion on the naval incident in the Bahama Channel. Their records of the case consisted of the written reports of the British officers who have remained on board the *Trent* and of the oral testimony of Commodore Williams, who was on board the *Trent* as Admiralty agent, but disembarked from the *La Plata* on November 27 at Southampton, whence he was immediately summoned by telegraph to London. The law officers of the Crown acknowledged the right of the *San Jacinto* to visit and search the *Trent*. Since Queen Victoria's proclamation of neutrality on the outbreak of the American Civil War expressly lists *dispatches* among articles of contraband, there could be no doubt on this point either. There remained, then, the question whether Messrs. Mason, Slidell and Co. were themselves contraband and therefore confiscable. The law officers of the Crown appear to hold this view, for they have dropped the *material* legal question entirely. According to the report of *The Times*, their opinion blames the commander of the *San Jacinto* only for an *error in procedure*. Instead of Messrs. Mason, Slidell and Co., he should have taken the *Trent* herself in tow as a prize, brought her to the nearest American port and there submitted her to the judgment of a North American prize court. This is incontestably the procedure corresponding to British and therefore to North American maritime law.

It is equally incontestable that the British frequently violated this rule during the anti-Jacobin war and proceeded in the summary fashion of the *San Jacinto*. However that may be, the whole conflict is reduced by this opinion of the law officers of the Crown to a *technical error* and consequently deprived of any immediate import. Two circumstances make it easy for the Union government to accept this point of view and therefore to afford formal satisfaction. In the first place, Captain Wilkes, the commander of the *San Jacinto*, could have received no direct instructions from Washington. On the voyage home from Africa to New York, he called on November 2 at Havana, which he left again on November 4, whilst his encounter with the *Trent* took place on the high seas on November 8. Captain Wilkes's stay of only two days in Havana did not permit any exchange of notes between him and his government. The consul of the Union was the only American authority with whom he could deal. In the second place, however, he had obviously lost his head, as his failure to insist on the surrender of the dispatches proves.

The importance of the incident lies in its moral effect on the English people and in the political capital that can easily be made out of it by the British cotton friends of secession. Characteristic of the latter is the Liverpool protest meeting organised by them and previously mentioned by me. The meeting took place on November 27 at three in the afternoon, in the cotton auction-rooms of the Liverpool Exchange, an hour after the alarming telegram from Southampton had arrived.

After vain attempts to press the chairmanship on Mr. Cunard, the owner of the Cunard steamships plying between Liverpool and New York, and other high trade officials, a young merchant named Spence, notorious for a work he wrote in support of the slave republic, took the chair. Contrary to the rules of English meetings, he, the chairman, himself proposed the motion to call on "the government to preserve the dignity of the British flag by demanding prompt satisfaction for this affront." Tremendous applause, clapping and cheers upon cheers! The main argument of the opening speaker for the slave republic was that slave ships had hitherto been protected by the American flag from the right of search claimed by Britain. And then this philanthropist launched a furious attack on the slave trade! He admitted that England had brought about the war of 1812-14 with the United States by insisting on searching for deserters from the British Navy on Union warships.

"But," he continued with wonderful dialectic, "but there is a difference between the right of search to recover deserters from the British Navy and the right to seize passengers, like Mr. Mason and Mr. Slidell, men of the highest respectability, regardless of the fact that they were protected by the British flag!"

He played his highest trump, however, at the close of his diatribe.

"The other day," he bellowed, "while I was on the European Continent, I heard an observation made as to the course of our conduct in regard to the United States, and I was unable to reply to the allusion without a blush -- that the feeling of every intelligent man upon the Continent was that we would submit to any outrage and suffer every indignity offered to us by the Government of the United States. But the pitcher goes so often to the well that it is broken at last. Our patience had been exercised long enough! At last we have arrived at facts: this is a very hard and startling fact [!] and it is the duty of every Englishman to apprise the Government of how strong and unanimous is the feeling of this great community of the outrage offered to our flag."

This senseless rigamarole was greeted with a peal of applause. Opposing voices were howled down and hissed down and stamped down. To the remark of a Mr. Campbell that the whole meeting was irregular, the inexorable Spence replied: "I perfectly agree with you that it is a little irregular but at the same time the fact that we have met to consider is rather an irregular fact." To the proposal of a Mr. Turner to adjourn the meeting to the following day, in order that "the city of Liverpool can have its say and not a clique of cotton brokers usurp its name", cries of "Collar him, throw him out!" resounded from all sides. Unperturbed, Mr. Turner repeated his motion, which, however, was not put to the vote, again contrary to all the rules of English meetings. Spence triumphed. But, as a matter of fact, nothing has done more to cool London's temper than the news of Mr. Spence's triumph.

# Karl Marx

## Controversy Over the Trent Case

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**London, December 7, 1861**

The Palmerston press (and on another occasion I will show that in foreign affairs Palmerston's control over nine-tenths of the English press is just as *absolute* as Louis Bonaparte's over nine-tenths of the French press) -- the Palmerston press feels that it works among "pleasing hindrances". On the one hand, it admits that the law officers of the Crown have reduced the accusation against the United States to a *mere mistake in procedure*, to a *technical error*. On the other hand, it boasts that on the basis of such a legal quibble a *haughty ultimatum* has been presented to the United States such as can only be justified by a gross violation of law, but not by a formal error in the exercise of a recognised right. Accordingly, the Palmerston press now pleads the *material* legal question again. The great importance of the case appears to demand a brief examination of the *material* legal question.

By way of introduction, it may be observed that not a single English paper ventures to reproach the *San Jacinto* for the visitation and search of the *Trent*. This point, therefore, falls outside the controversy. First, we again call to mind the relevant passage in Victoria's proclamation of neutrality of May 13, 1861. The passage reads:

"*Victoria R.*"

Whereas we are at peace with the United States ... we do hereby strictly charge ... all our loving subjects ... to abstain from contravening ... our Royal Proclamation ... by breaking ... any blockade lawfully ... established ... or by *carrying officers ... dispatches ...* or any article or articles considered contraband of war.... All persons so offending will be liable ... to the several penalties and penal consequences by the said Statute or by the law of nations in that behalf imposed.... And ... persons who may misconduct themselves ... will do so at their peril ... and ... will ... incur our high displeasure by such misconduct.

This proclamation of Queen Victoria, therefore, in the first place declared *dispatches* to be contraband and make the ship that carries such contraband liable to the "penalties of the law of the nations". What are these penalties?

*Wheaton*, an American writer on international law whose authority is recognised on both sides of the



Atlantic Ocean alike, says in his *Elements of International Law*, p. 565

"The fraudulent carrying of dispatches of the enemy will also subject the *neutral* vessel in which they are transported to *capture* and *confiscation*. The consequences of such a service are indefinite, infinitely beyond the effect of any contraband that can be conveyed. 'The carrying of two or three cargoes of military stores,' says Sir W. Scott [the judge], 'is necessarily an assistance of limited nature; but in the transmission of dispatches may be conveyed the entire plan of a campaign, that may defeat all the plans of the other belligerent.... The confiscation of the noxious article, which constitutes the penalty for contraband ... would be ridiculous when applied to dispatches. There would be no freight dependent on their transportation and therefore this penalty could not, in the nature of things, be applied. The vehicle, in which they are carried, must, therefore, be *confiscated*..'"

Walker, in his Introduction to American Law, says:

"...neutrals may not be concerned in bearing *hostile dispatches*, under the penalty of confiscation of the vehicle, and of the cargo also."

*Kent*, who is accounted a decisive authority in British courts, states in his *Commentaries*:

"If, on search of a ship, it is found that she carries *enemy dispatches*, she incurs the penalty of capture and of confiscation by judgment of a prize court."

*Dr. Robert Phillimore*, Advocate of Her Majesty in Her Office of Admiralty, says in his latest work on international law, p. 370:

"Official communications from an official person on the public affairs of a belligerent Government are such *dispatches* as impress an hostile character upon the carriers of them. The mischievous consequences of such a service cannot be estimated, and extend far beyond the effect of any Contraband that can be conveyed, for it is manifest that by the carriage of such dispatches the most important operations of a Belligerent may be forwarded or obstructed.... The penalty is confiscation of the ship which conveys the dispatches and ...of the cargo, if both belong to the same master."

Two points are therefore established. Queen Victoria's proclamation of May 13, 1861, subjects *English* ships that carry dispatches of the Confederacy to the penalties of international law. International law, according to its English and American commentators, imposes the *penalty* of capture and confiscation on such ships.

Palmerston's organs consequently *lied* on orders from above -- and we were naive enough to believe their lie -- in affirming that the captain of the *San Jacinto* had neglected to seek for *dispatches* on the *Trent* and therefore had of course found none; and that the *Trent* had consequently become shotproof through this oversight. The American journals of November 17 to 20, which *could not* yet have been aware of the English lie, *unanimously* state, on the contrary, that the dispatches *had been seized* and were already in print for submission to Congress in Washington. This changes the whole state of affairs. Because of these dispatches, the *San Jacinto* had the right to take the *Trent* in tow and every American prize court had the duty to confiscate her and her cargo. With the *Trent*, her passengers also naturally came within the pale of American jurisdiction.

Messrs. Mason, Slidell and Co., as soon as the *Trent* had touched at Monroe, came under American jurisdiction as rebels. If, therefore, instead of towing the *Trent* herself to an American port, the captain of

the *San Jacinto* contented himself with seizing the dispatches and their bearers, he in no way worsened the position of Mason, Slidell and Co., whilst, on the other hand, his *error in procedure* benefited the *Trent*, her cargo and her passengers. And it would be indeed unprecedented if Britain wished to declare war on the United States because Captain Wilkes committed an error in procedure harmful to the United States, but profitable to Britain.

The question whether Mason, Slidell and Co., were themselves contraband, was only raised and could only be raised because the Palmerston journals had broadcast the *lie* that Captain Wilkes had neither searched for dispatches, nor seized dispatches. For in this case Mason, Slidell and Co. in fact constituted the sole objects on the ship *Trent* that could possibly fall under the category of contraband. Let us, however, disregard this aspect for the moment. Queen Victoria's proclamation designates "*officers*" of a belligerent party as contraband. Are "*officers*" merely military officers? Were Mason, Slidell and Co. "*officers*" of the Confederacy? "*Officers*," says *Samuel Johnson* in his dictionary of the English language, are "men employed by the public", that is, in German: *Öffentliche Beamte*. *Walker* gives the same definition. (See his dictionary, 1861 edition.)

According to the usage of the English language, therefore, Mason, Slidell and Co., these emissaries, *id est*, officials of the Confederacy, come under the category of "officers", whom the royal proclamation declares to be contraband. The captain of the *Trent* knew them in this capacity and therefore rendered himself, his ship and his passengers confiscable. If, according to Phillimore and all other authorities, a ship becomes confiscable as the carrier of an enemy dispatch because it violates neutrality, in a still higher degree is this true of the *person* who carries the dispatches. According to *Wheaton*, even an enemy *ambassador*, so long as he is *in transitu*, may be intercepted. In general, however, the basis of all international law is that any member of the belligerent party may be regarded and treated as "belligerent" by the opposing party.

"So long as a man," says *Vattel*, "continues to be a citizen of his own country, he is enemy of all those with whom his nation is at war."

One sees, therefore, that the law officers of the English Crown reduced the point of contention to a mere *error in procedure*, not an *error in re*, but an *error in forma*, because, actually, no *material violation of law* is to hand. The Palmerston organs chatter about the material legal question again because a mere error in procedure, *in the interest of the Trent* at that, gives no plausible pretext for a haughty-toned ultimatum.

Meanwhile, important voices have been raised in this sense from diametrically opposite sides: on the one side, Messrs. *Bright* and *Cobden*; on the other, *David Urquhart*. These men are enemies on grounds of principle and personally: the first two, peaceable cosmopolitans; the third, the "*last of the Englishmen*"; the former always ready to sacrifice all international law to international trade; the other hesitating not a moment: "*Fiat Justitia, pereat mundus*", and by "justice" he understands "English" justice. The voices of *Bright* and *Cobden* are important, because they represent a powerful section of middle-class interests and are represented in the ministry by Gladstone, Milner Gibson and also, more or less, by Sir Cornwall Lewis. The voice of *Urquhart* is important because international law is his life-study and everyone recognises him as an *incorruptible* interpreter of this international law.

The usual newspaper sources will communicate *Bright's* speech in support of the United States and *Cobden's* letter, which is conceived in the same sense. Therefore I will not dwell on them.

Urquhart's organ, *The Free Press*, states in its latest issue, published on December 4:

"'We must bombard New York!' Such were the frantic sounds which met the ears of everyone who traversed the streets of London on the evening of this day week, on the arrival of the intelligence of a trifling warlike incident. The act was one which England *has committed as a matter of course* [in every war] -- namely the seizure on board of a neutral of the persons and property of her enemies."

*The Free Press* further argues that, in 1856 at the Congress of Paris, Palmerston, without any authority from the Crown or Parliament sacrificed English maritime law *in the interest of Russia*, and then says:

"In order to justify this sacrifice, Palmerston's organs stated at that time that if *we maintained the right of search*, we should assuredly be *involved in a war with the United States* on the occasion of the first war in Europe. And now he calls on us through the same organs of public opinion to bombard New York because the United States act on those laws which are theirs no less than our own."

With regard to the utterances of the "organs of public opinion", *The Free Press* remarks:

"The bray of Baron Munchausen's thawing posthorn was nothing to the clangour of the British press on the capture of Messrs. Mason and Slidell."

Then humorously, it places side by side, in "strophe" and "antistrophe", the contradictions by which the English press seeks to convict the United States of a "breach of law".

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[Marxist Writers Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/uscivwar/cw04.htm)

# Karl Marx

## Progress of Feelings in England

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**London, Dec.7, 1861**

The friends of the United States on this side of the Atlantic anxiously hope that conciliatory steps will be taken by the Federal Government. They do so not from a concurrence in the frantic crowing of the British press over a war incident, which, according to the English Crown lawyers themselves, resolves itself into a mere error of procedure, and may be summed up in the words that there has been a breach of international law, because Capt. Wilkes, instead of taking the *Trent*, her cargo, her passengers, and the Commissioners, did only take the Commissioners. Nor springs the anxiety of the well-wishers of the Great Republic from an apprehension lest, in the long run, it should not prove able to cope with England, although backed by the civil war; and, least of all, do they expect the United States to abdicate, even for a moment, and in a dark hour of trial, the proud position held by them in the council of nations. The motives that prompt them are of quite a different nature.

In the first instance, the business next in hand for the United States is to crush the rebellion and to restore the Union. The wish uppermost in the minds of the Slaveocracy and their Northern tools was always to plunge the United States into a war with England. The first step of England as soon as hostilities broke out would be to recognise the Southern Confederacy, and the second to terminate the blockade. Secondly, no general, if not forced, will accept battle at the time and under the conditions chosen by his enemy.

"A war with America," says *The Economist*, a paper deeply in Palmerston's confidence, "must always be one of the most lamentable incidents in the history of England; but if it is to happen, *the present is certainly the period at which it will do us the minimum of harm, and the only moment in our joint annals at which it would confer on us an incidental and partial compensation.*"

The very reasons accounting for the eagerness of England to seize upon any decent pretext for war at this 'only moment' ought to withhold the United States from forwarding such a pretext at this 'only moment.' You go not to war with the aim to do your enemy '*the minimum of harm,*' and, even to confer upon him by the war, 'an incidental and partial compensation.' The opportunity of the moment would all be on one side, on the side of your foe. Is there any great strain of reasoning wanted to prove that an internal war raging in a State is the least opportune time for entering upon a foreign war? At every other moment the

mercantile classes of Great Britain would have looked upon a war against the United States with the utmost horror. Now, on the contrary, a large and influential party of the mercantile community has for months been urging on the Government to violently break the blockade, and thus provide the main branch of British industry with its raw material. The fear of a curtailment of the English export trade to the United States has lost its sting by the curtailment of that trade having already actually occurred. "They" (the Northern States), says *The Economist*, "are wretched customers, instead of good ones." The vast credit usually given by English commerce to the United States, principally by the acceptance of bills drawn from China and India, has been already reduced to scarcely a fifth of what it was in 1857. Last, not least, Decembrist France, bankrupt, paralyzed at home, beset with difficulty abroad, pounces upon an Anglo-American war as a real godsend, and, in order to buy English support in Europe, will strain all her power to support "Perfidious Albion" on the other side of the Atlantic. Read only the French newspapers. The pitch of indignation to which they have wrought themselves in their tender care for the "honor of England," their fierce diatribes as to the necessity on the part of England to revenge the outrage on the Union Jack, their vile denunciations of everything American, would be truly appalling, if they were not ridiculous and disgusting at the same time. Lastly, if the United States give way in this instance, they will not derogate one iota of their dignity. England has reduced her complaint to a mere *error of procedure, a technical blunder* of which she had made herself systematically guilty in all her maritime wars, but against which the United States have never ceased to protest, and which President Madison, in his message inaugurating the war of 1812, expatiated upon as one of the most shocking breaches of international law. If the United States may be defended in paying England with her own coin, will they be accused for magnanimously disavowing, on the part of a single American captain, acting on his own responsibility, what they always denounced as a systematic usurpation on the part of the British Navy!

In point of fact, the gain of such a procedure would be all on the American side. England, on the one hand, would have acknowledged the right of the United States to capture and bring to adjudication before an American prize court every English ship employed in the service of the Confederation. On the other hand, she would, once for all, before the eyes of the whole world, have practically resigned a claim which she was not brought to desist from either in the peace of Ghent, in 1814, or the transactions carried on between Lord Ashburton and Secretary Webster in 1842. The question then comes to this: Do you prefer to turn the "untoward event" to your own account, or, blinded by the passions of the moment, turn it to the account of your foes at home and abroad?

Since this day week, when I sent you my last letter, British consols have again lowered, the decline, compared with last Friday, amounting to 2 per cent, the present prices being 89 3/4 to 7/8 for money and 90 to 1/8 for the new account on the 9th of January. This quotation corresponds to the quotation of the British consols during the first two years of the Anglo-Russian war. This decline is altogether due to the warlike interpretation put upon the American papers conveyed by the last mail, to the exacerbating tone of the London press, whose moderation of two days' standing was but a feint, ordered by Palmerston, to the dispatch of troops for Canada, to the proclamation forbidding the export of arms and materials for gunpowder, and lastly, to the daily ostentatious statements concerning the formidable preparations for war in the docks and maritime arsenals.

Of one thing you may be sure, Palmerston wants a legal pretext for a war with the United States, but meets in the Cabinet councils with a most determinate opposition on the part of Messrs. Gladstone and Milner Gibson, and, to a less degree, of Sir Cornwall Lewis. "The noble viscount" is backed by Russell, an abject tool in his hands, and the whole Whig Coterie. If the Washington Cabinet should furnish the desired pretext, the present Cabinet will be sprung, to be supplanted by a Tory Administration. The

preliminary steps for such a change of scenery have been already settled between Palmerston and Disraeli. Hence the furious war-cry of *The Morning Herald* and *The Standard*, those hungry wolves howling at the prospect of the long-missed crumbs from the public almoner.

Palmerston's designs may be shown up by calling into memory a few facts. It was he who insisted upon the proclamation, acknowledging the Secessionists as belligerents, on the morning of the 14th of May, after he had been informed by telegraph from Liverpool that Mr. Adams would arrive at London on the night of the 13th May. He, after a severe struggle with his colleagues, dispatched 3,000 men to Canada, an army ridiculous, if intended to cover a frontier of 1,500 miles, but a clever sleight-of-hand if the rebellion was to be cheered, and the Union to be irritated. He, many weeks ago, urged Bonaparte to propose a joint armed intervention "in the internecine struggle," supported that project in the Cabinet council, and failed only in carrying it by the resistance of his colleagues. He and Bonaparte then resorted to the Mexican intervention as a *pis aller*. That operation served two purposes, by provoking just resentment on the part of the Americans, and by simultaneously furnishing a pretext for the dispatch of a squadron, ready, as *The Morning Post* has it, "to perform whatever duty the hostile conduct of the Government of Washington may require us to perform in the waters of the Northern Atlantic." At the time when that expedition was started, *The Morning Post*, together with *The Times* and the smaller fry of Palmerston's press slaves, said that it was a very fine thing, and a philanthropic thing into the bargain, because it would expose the slave-holding Confederation to two fires -- the Anti-Slavery North and the Anti-Slavery force of England and France. And what says the very same *Morning Post*, this curious compound of Jenkins and Rhodomonte, of plush and swash, in its to-day's issue, on occasion of Jefferson Davis's address? Hearken to the Palmerston oracle:

"We must look to this intervention as one that may be inoperative during a considerable period of time; and while the Northern Government is too distant to admit of its attitude entering materially into this question, the Southern Confederation, on the other hand, stretches for a great distance along the frontier of Mexico, so as to render its friendly disposition to the authors of the insurrection of no slight consequence. The Northern Government has invariably railed at our neutrality, but the Southern with statesmanship and moderation has recognized in it all that we could do for either party; and whether with a view to our transactions in Mexico, or to our relations with the Cabinet at Washington, the *friendly forbearance* of the Southern Confederacy is an important point in our favor."

I may remark that the *Nord* of December 3 -- a Russian paper, and consequently a paper initiated into Palmerston's designs -- insinuates that the Mexican expedition was from the first set on foot, not for its ostensible purpose, but for a war against the United States.

Gen. Scott's letter had produced such a beneficent reaction in public opinion, and even on the London Stock Exchange, that the conspirators of Downing Street and the Tuileries found it necessary to let loose the *Patrie*, stating with all the airs of knowledge derived from official sources that the seizure of the Southern Commissioners from the *Trent* was directly authorized by the Washington Cabinet.

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[Marxist Writers Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/uscivwar/cw06.htm)

# Karl Marx

## The Crisis Over the Slavery Issue

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**London, December 10, 1861**

The United States has evidently entered a critical stage with regard to the *slavery question*, the question underlying the whole Civil War. General Fremont has been dismissed for declaring the slaves of *rebels* free. A directive to General Sherman, the commander of the expedition to South Carolina, was a little later published by the Washington Government, which goes further than Fremont, for it decrees that fugitive slaves even of *loyal* slave-owners should be welcomed and employed as workers and paid a wage, and under certain circumstances armed, and consoles the "loyal" owners with the prospect of receiving compensation later. Colonel Cochrane has gone even further than Fremont, he demands the arming of all slaves as a military measure. The Secretary of War Cameron publicly approves of Cochrane's "views". The Secretary of the Interior, on behalf of the government, then repudiates the Secretary of War. The Secretary of War expresses his "views" even more emphatically at a public meeting stating that he will vindicate these views in his report to Congress. General Halleck, Fremont's successor in Missouri, and General Dix in east Virginia have driven fugitive Negroes from their military camps and forbidden them to appear in future in the vicinity of the positions held by their armies. General Wool at the same time has received the black "contraband" with open arms at Fort Monroe. The old leaders of the *Democratic Party*, Senator Dickinson and Crosswell (a former member of the so-called Democratic regency), have published an open letter in which they express their agreement with Cochrane and Cameron, and Colonel *Jennison* in Kansas has surpassed all his military predecessors by an address to his troops which contains the following passage:

No temporising with rebels and those sympathising with them. I have told General Fremont that I would not have drawn my sword had I thought that slavery would outlast this struggle. The slaves of rebels will always find protection in this camp and we will defend them to the last man and the last bullet. I want no men who are *not Abolitionists*, I have no use for them and I hope that there are no such people among us, for everyone knows that slavery is the basis, the centre and the vertex of this infernal war. Should the government disapprove of my action it can take back my patent, but in that case I shall act on my own hook even if in the beginning I can only count on six men.

The slavery question is being solved in practice in the border slave states even now, especially in

*Missouri* and to a lesser extent in *Kentucky*, etc. A large-scale dispersal of slaves is taking place. For instance 50,000 slaves have disappeared from *Missouri*, some of them have run away, others have been transported by the slave-owners to the more distant southern states.

It is rather strange that a most important and significant event is not mentioned in any English newspaper. On November 18, delegates from 45 North Carolina counties met on Hatteras Island, appointed a provisional government, revoked the Ordinance of Secession and proclaimed that North Carolina was returning to the Union. The counties of North Carolina represented at this convention have been called together to elect their Representatives to Congress at Washington.

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[Marxist Writers Archive](#)



# Karl Marx

## News From America

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### London, Dec. 13, 1861

The news of the *Harvey Birch's* fate and the presence of the cruiser *Nashville* in Southampton harbour reached New York on November 29, but does not seem to have caused the sensational effect on which certain circles here counted just as much as others, the anti-war groups, feared it. On this occasion the force of one shock wave was broken by that of another. For New York was just in the throes of an election campaign, since voting for a new mayor was to take place on December 3. Mr. Russell, the envoy of *The Times* in Washington, who ruins his Celtic talent by affected Englishness, pretends supercilious surprise at this pre-election commotion. Mr. Russell of course plays up to the illusions of the London cockney, who imagines that the election of a New York mayor is just as much a display of antiquated tomfoolery as is the election of a Lord Mayor in London. It is well known that the Lord Mayor of London is not concerned at all with the greater part of London. He is nominally the regent of the City, a mythological phenomenon which attempts to prove that it really exists by producing good turtle soup at banquets and bad judgments in cases of infringement of police regulations. Only in the fancy of Parisian writers of vaudevilles and of news items for the press does the Lord Mayor of London still remain an important political personage. The Mayor of New York on the other hand is a real power. At the beginning of the secession movement, the notorious *Fernando Wood*, the previous Mayor, was about to declare New York an independent city republic, of course in agreement with Jefferson Davis. His plan was thwarted by the energy of the Republican Party of the Empire City.

Charles Sumner from Massachusetts, a member of the Senate -- where he was attacked by a cane-wielding Senator from the South at the time of the Kansas affair -- made a brilliant speech on the origin and hidden motives of the slave-owners' rebellion at a well-attended meeting in the Cooper Institute of New York on November 27. After his address the meeting passed the following resolution:

The doctrine of the emancipation of the slaves of rebels advanced by General Fremont, as well as pronouncements subsequently made by General Burnside, Senator Wilson, George Bancroft (the famous historian), Colonel Cochrane and Simon Cameron, which point to the anticipated eradication of slavery as the cause of the rebellion, express a moral, political and military necessity. This meeting considers that

public opinion in the North is now definitely prepared to support any practical plan for the eradication of slavery -- this national misfortune -- that might be proposed, and it regards such a result as the only consistent conclusion of this fight between civilisation and barbarism.

The *New-York Tribune* makes the following remark about Sumner's speech:

"The allusion of Mr. Sumner to the coming discussions of Congress on this subject" (slavery), "will kindle a hope that that body will understand where Southern weakness and Northern strength really lie, and will seize the instrumentality by which the rebellion is to be brought to a speedy and final extirpation."

A personal letter from *Mexico* contains inter alia the following passage:

"The British ambassador plays the part of an enthusiastic friend of President Juárez's Administration.... People well versed in Spanish intrigues assert that General Marquez has been instructed by Spain to rally the scattered forces, both the Mexican and the Spanish elements, of the Church party. This party is then supposed to use an opportunity, which is expected to present itself soon, to beg Her Catholic Majesty to provide a king for the throne of Mexico. An uncle of the Queen is said to have been chosen for this office. Since the man is old he would in the natural course of events soon quit the scene, and as any clause designating a successor was to be avoided, Mexico would revert to Spain. Thus the same policy would carry the day in Mexico as in Haiti."

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[Marxist Writers Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/uscivwar/cw08.htm)

# Karl Marx

## The Civil War in the United States

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"Let him go, he is not worth thine ire!" Again and again English statesmanship cries-recently through the mouth of Lord John Russell-to the North of the United States this advice of Leporello to Don Juan's deserted love. If the North lets the South go, it then frees itself from any admixture of slavery, from its historical original sin, and creates the basis of a new and higher development.

In reality, if North and South formed two autonomous countries, like, for example, England and Hanover, their separation would be no more difficult than was the separation of England and Hanover. "*The South*," however, is neither a territory closely sealed off from the North geographically, nor a moral unity. It is not a country at all, but a battle slogan.

The advice of an amicable separation presupposes that the Southern Confederacy, although it assumed the offensive in the Civil War, at least wages it for defensive purposes. It is believed that the issue for the slaveholders' party is merely one of uniting the territories it has hitherto dominated into an autonomous group of states and withdrawing them from the supreme authority of the Union. Nothing could be more false: "*The South needs its entire territory*. It will and must have it." With this battle-cry the secessionists fell upon Kentucky. By their "entire territory" they understand in the first place all the so-called *border states*-Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. Besides, they lay claim to the entire territory south of the line that runs from the north-west corner of Missouri to the Pacific Ocean. What the slaveholders, therefore, call the South, embraces more than three-quarters of the territory hitherto comprised by the Union. A large part of the territory thus claimed is still in the possession of the Union and would first have to be conquered from it. None of the so-called border states, however, not even those in the possession of the Confederacy, were ever *actual slave states*. Rather, they constitute the area of the United States in which the system of slavery and the system of free labour exist side by side and contend for mastery, the actual field of battle between South and North, between slavery and freedom. The war of the Southern Confederacy is, therefore, not a war of defence, but a war of conquest, a war of conquest for the spread and perpetuation of slavery.

The chain of mountains that begins in Alabama and stretches northwards to the Hudson River-the spinal column, as it were, of the United States-cuts the so-called South into three parts. The mountainous country formed by the Allegheny Mountains with their two parallel ranges, the Cumberland Range to the west and the Blue Mountains to the east, divides wedge-like the lowlands along the western coast of the

Atlantic Ocean from the lowlands in the southern valleys of the Mississippi. The two lowlands separated by the mountainous country, with their vast rice swamps and far-flung cotton plantations, are the actual area of slavery. The long wedge of mountainous country driven into the heart of slavery, with its correspondingly clear atmosphere, an invigorating climate and a soil rich in coal, salt, limestone, iron ore, gold, in short, every raw material necessary for a many-sided industrial development, is already for the most part free country. In accordance with its physical constitution, the soil here can only be cultivated with success by free small farmers. Here the slave system vegetates only sporadically and has never struck root. In the largest part of the so-called border states, the dwellers of these highlands comprise the core of the free population, which sides with the Northern party if only for the sake of self-preservation.

Let us consider the contested territory in detail.

*Delaware*, the most north-eastern of the border states, is factually and morally in the possession of the Union. All the attempts of the secessionists at forming even one faction favourable to them have since the beginning of the war suffered shipwreck on the unanimity of the population. The slave element of this state has long been in process of dying out. From 1850 to 1860 alone the number of slaves diminished by half, so that with a total population of 112,218 Delaware now numbers only 1,798 slaves. Nevertheless, Delaware is demanded by the Southern Confederacy and would in fact be militarily untenable for the North as soon as the South possessed itself of Maryland.

In *Maryland* itself the above-mentioned conflict between highlands and lowlands takes place. Out of a total population of 687,034 there are here 87,188 slaves. That the overwhelming majority of the population is on the side of the Union has again been strikingly proved by the recent general elections to the Congress in Washington. The army of 30,000 Union troops, which holds Maryland at the moment, is intended not only to serve the army on the Potomac as a reserve, but, in particular, also to hold in check the rebellious slaveowners in the interior of the country. For here we observe a phenomenon similar to what we see in other border states where the great mass of the people stands for the North and a numerically insignificant slaveholders' party for the South. What it lacks in numbers, the slaveholders' party makes up in the means of power that many years' possession of all state offices, hereditary engagement in political intrigue and concentration of great wealth in few hands have secured for it.

*Virginia* now forms the great cantonment where the main army of secession and the main army of the Union confront each other. In the north-west highlands of Virginia the number of slaves is 15,000, whilst the twenty times as large free population consists mostly of free farmers. The eastern lowlands of Virginia, on the other hand, count well-nigh half a million slaves. Raising Negroes and the sale of the Negroes to the Southern states form the principal source of income of these lowlands. As soon as the ringleaders of the lowlands had carried through the secession ordinance by intrigues in the state legislature at Richmond and had in all haste opened the gates of Virginia to the Southern army, north-west Virginia seceded from the secession, formed a new state, and under the banner of the Union now defends its territory arms in hand against the Southern invaders.

*Tennessee*, with 1,109,847 inhabitants, 275,784 of whom are slaves, finds itself in the hands of the Southern Confederacy, which has placed the whole state under martial law and under a system of proscription which recalls the days of the Roman Triumvirates. When in the winter of 1861 the slaveholders proposed a general convention of the people which was to vote for secession or non-secession, the majority of the people rejected any convention, in order to remove any pretext for the

secession movement. Later, when Tennessee was already militarily over-run and subjected to a system of terror by the Southern Confederacy, more than a third of the voters at the elections still declared themselves for the Union. Here, as in most of the border states, the mountainous country, *east Tennessee*, forms the real centre of resistance to the slaveholders' party. On June 17, 1861, a General Convention of the people of east Tennessee assembled in Greenville, declared itself for the Union, deputed the former governor of the state, Andrew Johnson, one of the most ardent Unionists, to the Senate in Washington and published a "declaration of grievances," which lays bare all the means of deception, intrigue and terror by which Tennessee was "voted out" of the Union. Since then the secessionists have held east Tennessee in check by force of arms.

Similar relationships to those in West Virginia and east Tennessee are found in the north of Alabama, in north-west Georgia and in the north of North Carolina.

Further west, in the border state of *Missouri*, with 1,173,317 inhabitants and 114,965 slaves-the latter mostly concentrated in the north-west of the state-the people's convention of August 1861 decided for the Union. Jackson, the governor of the state and the tool of the slaveholders' party, rebelled against the legislature of Missouri, was outlawed and took the lead of the armed hordes that fell upon Missouri from Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee, in order to bring it to its knees before the Confederacy and sever its bond with the Union by the sword. Next to Virginia, Missouri is at the present moment the main theatre of the Civil War.

*New Mexico*-not a state, but merely a Territory, into which twenty-five slaves were imported during Buchanan's presidency in order to send a slave constitution after them from Washington-had no craving for the South, as even the latter concedes. But the South has a craving for New Mexico and accordingly spewed an armed band of adventurers from *Texas* over the border. New Mexico has implored the protection of the Union government against these liberators.

It will have been observed that we lay particular emphasis on the numerical proportion of slaves to free men in the individual border states. This proportion is in fact decisive. It is the thermometer with which the vital fire of the slave system must be measured. The soul of the whole secession movement is *South Carolina*. It has 402,541 slaves and 301,271 free men. *Mississippi*, which has given the Southern Confederacy its dictator, Jefferson Davis, comes second. It has 436,696 slaves and 354,699 free men. *Alabama* comes third, with 435,132 slaves and 529,164 free men.

The last of the contested border states, which we have still to mention, is *Kentucky*. Its recent history is particularly characteristic of the policy of the Southern Confederacy. Among its 1,135,713 inhabitants Kentucky has 225,490 slaves. In three successive general elections by the people-in the winter of 1861, when elections to a congress of the border states were held; in June 1861, when elections to the Congress in Washington took place; finally, in August 1861, in elections to the legislature of the State of Kentucky-an ever increasing majority decided for the Union. On the other hand, Magoffin, the Governor of Kentucky, and all the high officials of the state are fanatical supporters of the slaveholders' party, as is Breckinridge, Kentucky's representative in the Senate in Washington, Vice-President of the United States under Buchanan, and candidate of the slaveholders' party in the presidential election of 1860. Too weak to win over Kentucky for secession, the influence of the slaveholders' party was strong enough to make this state amenable to a declaration of neutrality on the outbreak of war. The Confederacy recognised the neutrality as long as it served its purposes, as long as the Confederacy itself was engaged in crushing the resistance in east Tennessee. Hardly was this end attained when it knocked at the gates of Kentucky with

the butt of a gun to the cry of: "*The South needs its entire territory. It will and must have it!*"

From the south-west and south-east its corps of free-booters simultaneously invaded the "neutral" state. Kentucky awoke from its dream of neutrality, its legislature openly took sides with the Union, surrounded the traitorous Governor with a committee of public safety, called the people to arms, outlawed Breckinridge and ordered the secessionists to evacuate the invaded territory immediately. This was the signal for war. An army of the Southern Confederacy is moving on Louisville, while volunteers from Illinois, Indiana and Ohio flock hither to save Kentucky from the armed missionaries of slavery.

The attempts of the Confederacy to annex Missouri and Kentucky, for example, against the will of these states, prove the hollowness of the pretext that it is fighting for the rights of the individual states against the encroachments of the Union. On the individual states that it considers to belong to the "South" it confers, to be sure, the right to separate from the Union, but by no means the right to remain in the Union.

Even the actual slave states, however much external war, internal military dictatorship and slavery give them everywhere for the moment a semblance of harmony, are nevertheless not without oppositional elements. A striking example is *Texas*, with 180,388 slaves out of 601,039 inhabitants. The law of 1845, by virtue of which Texas became a State of the Union as a slave state, entitled it to form not merely one, but five states out of its territory. The South would thereby have gained ten new votes instead of two in the American Senate, and an increase in the number of its votes in the Senate was a major object of its policy at that time. From 1845 to 1860, however, the slaveholders found it impracticable to cut up Texas, where the German population plays an important part, into even two states without giving the party of free labour the upper hand over the party of slavery in the second state. This furnishes the best proof of the strength of the opposition to the slaveholding oligarchy in Texas itself.

*Georgia* is the largest and most populous of the slave states. It has 462,230 slaves out of a total of 1,057,327 inhabitants, therefore nearly half the population. Nevertheless, the slaveholders' party has not so far succeeded in getting the Constitution imposed on the South at Montgomery sanctioned by a general vote of the people in Georgia.

In the State Convention of *Louisiana*, meeting on March 21, 1861, at New Orleans, Roselius, the political veteran of the state, declared:

"The Montgomery Constitution is not a constitution, but a conspiracy. It does not inaugurate a government of the people, but *a detestable and unrestricted oligarchy*. The people were not permitted to have any say in this matter. The Convention of Montgomery has dug the grave of political liberty, and now we are summoned to attend its burial."

Indeed, the oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders utilised the Congress of Montgomery not only to proclaim the separation of the South from the North. It exploited it at the same time to reshape the internal constitutions of the slave states, to subjugate completely the section of the white population that had still preserved some independence under the protection and the democratic Constitution of the Union. Between 1856 to 1860 the political spokesmen, jurists, moralists and theologians of the slaveholders' party had already sought to prove, not so much that Negro slavery is justified, but rather that colour is a matter of indifference and the working class is everywhere born to slavery.

One sees, therefore, that the war of the Southern Confederacy is in the true sense of the word a war of conquest for the spread and perpetuation of slavery. The greater part of the border states and Territories

are still in the possession of the Union, whose side they have taken first through the ballot-box and then with arms. The Confederacy, however, counts them for the "*South*" and seeks to conquer them from the Union. In the border states which the Confederacy has occupied for the time being, it is holding the relatively free highlands in check by martial law. Within the actual slave states themselves it is supplanting the hitherto existing democracy by the unrestricted oligarchy of three hundred thousand slaveholders.

Were it to relinquish its plans of conquest, the Southern Confederacy would relinquish its capacity to live and the purpose of secession. Secession, indeed, only took place because within the Union the transformation of the border states and Territories into slave states seemed no longer attainable. On the other hand, were it to cede the contested territory peacefully to the Southern Confederacy, the North would surrender to the slave republic more than three-quarters of the entire territory of the United States. The North would lose the whole of the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, except the narrow strip from Penobscot Bay to Delaware Bay, and would even cut itself off from the Pacific Ocean. Missouri, Kansas, New Mexico, Arkansas and Texas would draw California after them. Incapable of wresting the mouth of the Mississippi from the hands of the strong, hostile slave republic in the South, the great agricultural states in the basin between the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghenies, in the valleys of the Mississippi, the Missouri and the Ohio, would be compelled by their economic interests to secede from the North and enter the Southern Confederacy. These north-western states, in their turn, would draw after them into the same whirlpool of secession all the Northern states lying further east, with perhaps the exception of the states of New England.

What would in fact take place would be not a dissolution of the Union, but a *reorganisation* of it, a *reorganisation on the basis of slavery*, under the recognised control of the slaveholding oligarchy. The plan of such a reorganisation has been openly proclaimed by the principal speakers of the South at the Congress of Montgomery and explains the paragraph of the new Constitution which leaves it open to every state of the old Union to join the new Confederacy. The slave system would infect the whole Union. In the Northern states, where Negro slavery is in practice unworkable, the white working class would gradually be forced down to the level of helotry. This would fully accord with the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom, and as the actual labour is the lot of the Negro in the South, so in the North it is the lot of the German and the Irishman, or their direct descendants.

The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other.

If the border states, the disputed areas in which the two systems have hitherto contended for domination, are a thorn in the flesh of the South, there can, on the other hand, be no mistake that, in the course of the war up to now, they have constituted the chief weakness of the North. One section of the slaveholders in these districts simulated loyalty to the North at the bidding of the conspirators in the South; another section found that in fact it was in accordance with their real interests and traditional ideas to go with the Union. Both sections have equally crippled the North. Anxiety to keep the "loyal" slaveholders of the border states in good humour, fear of throwing them into the arms of secession, in a word, tender regard for the interests, prejudices and sensibilities of these ambiguous allies, has smitten the Union government with incurable weakness since the beginning of the war, driven it to half measures, forced it to dissemble

away the principle of the war and to spare the foe's most vulnerable spot, the root of the evil-*slavery itself*.

When, only recently, Lincoln pusillanimously revoked Frémont's Missouri proclamation on the emancipation of Negroes belonging to the rebels, this was done solely out of regard for the loud protest of the "loyal" slaveholders of Kentucky. However, a turning point has already been reached. With Kentucky, the last border state has been pushed into the series of battlefields between South and North. With the real war for the border states in the border states themselves, the question of winning or losing them is withdrawn from the sphere of diplomatic and parliamentary discussions. One section of slaveholders will throw off the mask of loyalty; the other will content itself with the prospect of a financial compensation such as Great Britain gave the West Indian planters. Events themselves drive to the promulgation of the decisive slogan-*emancipation of the slaves*.

That even the most hardened Democrats and diplomats of the North feel themselves drawn to this point, is shown by some announcements of very recent date. In an open letter, General *Cass*, Secretary of State for War under Buchanan and hitherto one of the most ardent allies of the South, declares emancipation of the slaves the *conditio sine qua non* of the Union's salvation. In his last *Review* for October, Dr. *Brownson*, the spokesman of the Catholic party of the North, on his own admission the most energetic adversary of the emancipation movement from 1836 to 1860, publishes an article *for* Abolition.

"If we have opposed Abolition heretofore," he says among other things, "because we would preserve the Union, we must *a fortiori* now oppose slavery whenever, in our judgment, its continuance becomes incompatible with the maintenance of the Union, or of the nation as a free republican state."

Finally, the *World*, a New York organ of the diplomats of the Washington Cabinet, concludes one of its latest blustering articles against the Abolitionists with the words:

"On the day when it shall be decided that either slavery or the Union must go down, on that day sentence of death is passed on slavery. If the North cannot triumph *without* emancipation, it will triumph *with* emancipation."

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[Marxist Writers Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/uscivwar/cw09.htm)



# Karl Marx

## The Dismissal of Frémont

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**London, December 19, 1861**

Frémont's dismissal from the post of Commander-in-Chief in Missouri forms a turning point in the history of the development of the American Civil War. Fremont has two great sins to expiate. He was the first candidate of the Republican Party for the presidential office (1856), and he is the first general of the North to have threatened the slaveholders with emancipation of slaves (August 30, 1861). He remains, therefore, a rival of candidates for the presidency in the future and an obstacle to the makers of compromises in the present.

During the last two decades the singular practice developed in the United States of not electing to the presidency any man who occupied an authoritative position in his own party. The names of such men, it is true, were utilised for election demonstrations, but as soon as it came to actual business, they were dropped and replaced by unknown mediocrities of merely local influence. In this manner Polk, Pierce, Buchanan, etc., became Presidents. Likewise Abraham Lincoln. General Andrew Jackson was in fact the last President of the United States who owed his office to his personal importance, whilst all his successors owed it, on the contrary, to their personal unimportance.

In the election year 1860, the most distinguished names of the Republican Party were Frémont and Seward. Known for his adventures during the Mexican War, for his intrepid exploration of California and his candidacy of 1856, Frémont was too striking a figure even to come under consideration as soon as it was no longer a question of a Republican demonstration, but of a Republican success. He did not, therefore, stand as a candidate. It was otherwise with Seward, a Republican Senator in the Congress at Washington, Governor of the State of New York and, since the rise of the Republican Party, unquestionably its leading orator. It required a series of mortifying defeats to induce Mr. Seward to renounce his own candidacy and to give his oratorical patronage to the then more or less unknown Abraham Lincoln. As soon, however, as he saw his attempt to stand as a candidate fail, he imposed himself as a Republican Richelieu on a man whom he considered as a Republican Louis XIII. He contributed towards making Lincoln President, on condition that Lincoln made him secretary of State, an office which is in some measure comparable with that of a British Prime Minister. As a matter of fact, Lincoln was hardly President-elect, when Seward secured the Secretaryship of State. Immediately a singular change took place in the attitude of the Demosthenes of the Republican Party, whom the

prophesying of the "irrepressible conflict" between the system of free Labour and the system of slavery had made famous. Although elected on November 6, 1860, Lincoln took up office as President only on March 4, 1861. In the interval, during the winter session of Congress, Seward made himself the central figure of all attempts at compromise; the Northern organs of the South, such as the *New York Herald*, for example, whose *bête noire* Seward had been till then, suddenly extolled him as the statesman of reconciliation and, indeed, it was not his fault that peace at any price was not achieved. Seward manifestly regarded the post of Secretary of State as a mere preliminary step, and busied himself less with the "irrepressible conflict" of the present than with the presidency of the future. He has provided fresh proof that virtuosos of the tongue are dangerously inadequate statesmen. Read his state dispatches! What a repulsive mixture of magniloquence and petty-mindedness, of simulated strength and real weakness!

For Seward, therefore, Frémont was the dangerous rival who had to be ruined; an undertaking that appeared so much the easier since Lincoln, in accordance with his legal tradition, has an aversion for all genius, anxiously clings to the letter of the Constitution and fights shy of every step that could mislead the "loyal" slaveholders of the border states. Frémont's character offered another hold. He is manifestly a man of pathos, somewhat high-stepping and haughty, and not without a touch of the melodramatic. First the government attempted to drive him to voluntary retirement by a succession of petty chicaneries. When this did not succeed, it deprived him of his command at the very moment when the army he himself had organised came face to face with the foe in south-west Missouri and a decisive battle was imminent. Frémont is the idol of the states of the North-west, which sing his praises as the "pathfinder." They regard his dismissal as a personal insult. Should the Union government meet with a few more mishaps like those of Bull Run and Ball's Bluff, it has itself given the opposition, which will then rise up against it and smash the hitherto prevailing diplomatic system of waging war, its leader in John Frémont. We shall return later to the indictment of the dismissed general published by the War Department in Washington.

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[Marxist Writers Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/uscivwar/cw10.htm)

# Frederick Engels

## Lessons of the American War

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When, a few weeks back, we drew attention to the process of weeding which had become necessary in the American volunteer army, we were far from exhausting the valuable lessons this war is continually giving to the volunteers on this side of the Atlantic. We therefore beg leave again to revert to the subject.

The kind of warfare which is now carried on in America is really without precedent. From the Missouri to Chesapeake Bay, a million of men, nearly equally divided into two hostile camps, have now been facing each other for some six months without coming to a single general action. In Missouri, the two armies advance, retire, give battle, advance, and retire again in turns, without any visible result; even now, after seven months of marching and counter-marching, which must have laid the country waste to a considerable degree, things appear as far from any decision as ever. In Kentucky, after a lengthened period of apparent neutrality, but real preparation, a similar state of things appears to be impending; in Western Virginia, constant minor actions occur without any apparent result; and on the Potomac, where the greatest masses on both sides are concentrated, almost within sight of each other, neither party cares to attack, proving that, as matters stand, even a victory would be of no use at all. And unless circumstances foreign to this state of things cause a great change, this barren system of warfare may be continued for months to come.

How are we to account for this?

The Americans have, on either side, almost nothing but volunteers. The little nucleus of the former United States' regular army has either dissolved, or it is too weak to leaven the enormous mass of raw recruits which have accumulated at the seat of war. To shape all these men into soldiers, there are not even drill-sergeants enough. Teaching, consequently, must go on very slow, and there is really no telling how long it may take until the fine material of men collected on both shores of the Potomac will be fit to be moved about in large masses, and to give or accept battle with its combined forces.

But even if the men could be taught their drill in some reasonable time, there are not enough officers to lead them. Not to speak of the company officers -- who necessarily cannot be taken from among civilians -- there are not enough officers to make commanders of battalions even if every lieutenant and ensign of the regulars were appointed to such a post. A considerable number of civilian colonels are therefore

unavoidable; and nobody who knows our own volunteers will think either McClellan or Beauregard overtimid if they decline entering upon aggressive action or complicated strategical manoeuvres with civilian colonels of six months' standing to execute their orders.

We will suppose, however, that this difficulty was, upon the whole, overcome; that the civilian colonels, with their uniforms, had also acquired the knowledge, experience, and tact required in the performance of their duties -- at least, as far as the infantry is concerned. But how will it be for the cavalry? To train a regiment of cavalry, requires more time, and more experience in the training officers, than to get a regiment of infantry into shape. Suppose the men join their corps, all of them, with a sufficient knowledge of horsemanship -- that is to say, they can stick on their horses, have command over them, and know how to groom and feed them -- this will scarcely shorten the time required for training. Military riding, that control over your horse by which you make him go through all the movements necessary in cavalry evolutions, is a very different thing from the riding commonly practised by civilians. Napoleon's cavalry, which Sir William Napier (*History of the Peninsular War*) considered almost better than the English cavalry of the time, notoriously consisted of the very worst riders that ever graced a saddle; and many of our best cross-country riders found, on entering mounted volunteer corps, that they had a deal to learn yet. We need not be astonished, then, to find that the Americans are very deficient in cavalry, and that what little they have consists of a kind of Cossacks or Indian irregulars (rangers), unfit for a charge in a body.

For artillery, they must be worse off still; and equally so for engineers. Both these are highly scientific arms, and require a long and careful training in both officers and non-commissioned officers, and certainly more training in the men too, than infantry does. Artillery, moreover, is a more complicated arm than even cavalry; you require guns, horses broken in for this kind of driving, and two classes of trained men -- gunners and drivers; you require, besides, numerous ammunition-waggons, and large laboratories for the ammunition, forges, workshops, &c.; the whole provided with complicated machinery. The Federals are stated to have, altogether, 600 guns in the field; but how these may be served, we can easily imagine, knowing that it is utterly impossible to turn out 100 complete, well-appointed, and well-served batteries out of nothing in six months.

But suppose, again, that all these difficulties had been overcome, and that the fighting portion of the two hostile sections of Americans was in fair condition for their work, could they move even then? Certainly not. An army must be fed; and a large army in a comparatively thinly-populated country such as Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri, must be chiefly fed from magazines. Its supply of ammunition has to be replenished; it must be followed by gunsmiths, saddlers, joiners, and other artisans, to keep its fighting tackle in good order. All these requisites shone by their absence in America; they had to be organised out of almost nothing; and we have no evidence whatever to show that even now the commissariat and transport of either army has emerged from babyhood.

America, both North and South, Federal and Confederate, had no military organisation, so to speak. The army of the line was totally inadequate, by its numbers, for service against any respectable enemy; the militia was almost non-existent. The former wars of the Union never put the military strength of the country on its mettle; England, between 1812 and 1814, had not many men to spare, and Mexico defended herself chiefly by the merest rabble. The fact is, from her geographical position, America had no enemies who could anywhere attack her with more than 30,000 or 40,000 regulars at the very worst; and to such numbers the immense extent of the country would soon prove a more formidable obstacle than any troops America could bring against them; while her army was sufficient to form a nucleus for

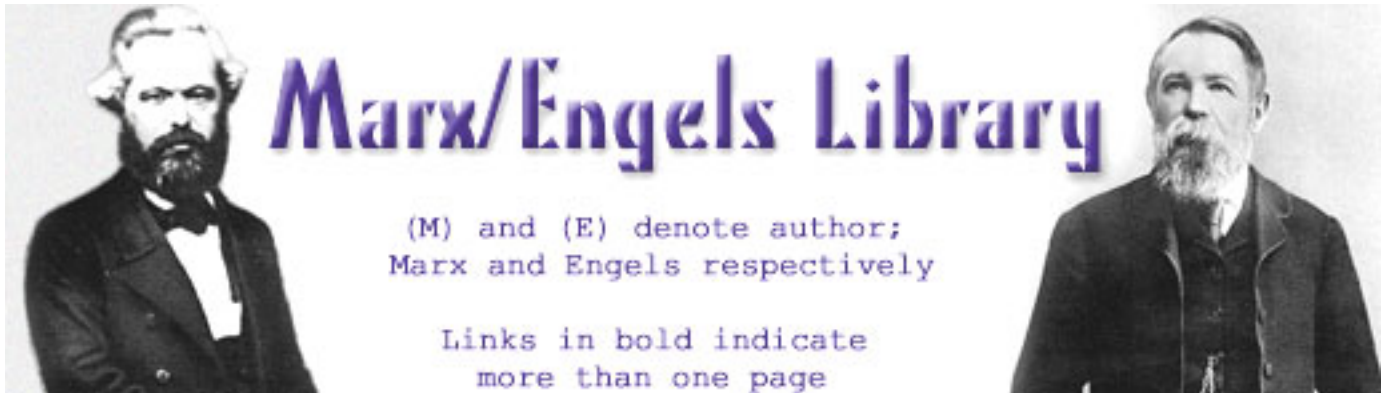
some 100,000 volunteers, and to train them in reasonable time. But when a civil war called forth more than a million of fighting men, the whole system broke down, and everything had to be begun at the beginning. The results are before us. Two immense, unwieldy bodies of men, each afraid of the other, and almost as afraid of victory as of defeat, are facing each other, trying, at an immense cost, to settle down into something like a regular organisation. The waste of money, frightful as it is, is quite unavoidable, from the total absence of that organised groundwork upon which the structure could have been built. With ignorance and inexperience ruling supreme in every department, how could it be otherwise? On the other hand, the return for the outlay, in efficiency and organisation, is extremely poor; and could that be otherwise?

The British volunteers may thank their stars that they found, on starting, a numerous, well-disciplined, and experienced army to take them under its wings. Allowing for the prejudices inherent to all trades, that army has received and treated them well. It is to be hoped that neither the volunteers nor the public will ever think that the new service can ever supersede, in any degree, the old one. If there are any such, a glance at the state of the two American volunteer armies ought to prove to them their own ignorance and folly. No army newly formed out of civilians can ever subsist in an efficient state unless it is trained and supported by the immense intellectual and material resources which are deposited at the hands of a proportionately strong regular army, and principally by that organisation which forms the chief strength of the regulars. Suppose an invasion to threaten England, and compare what would be then done with what is unavoidably done in America. In England, the War-office, with the assistance of a few more clerks, easily to be found among trained military men, would be up to the transaction of all the additional labour an army of 300,000 volunteers would entail; there are half-pay officers enough to take, say three or four battalions of volunteers each under their special inspection, and, with some effort, every battalion might be provided with a line-officer as adjutant and one as colonel. Cavalry, of course, could not be improvised; but a resolute reorganisation of the artillery volunteers -- with officers and drivers from the Royal Artillery -- would help to man many a field-battery. The civil engineers in the country only wait for an opportunity to receive that training in the military side of their profession which would at once turn them into first-rate engineer officers. The commissariat and transport services are organised, and may soon be made to supply the wants of 400,000 men quite as easily as those of 100,000. Nothing would be disorganised, nothing upset; everywhere there would be aid and assistance for the volunteers, who would nowhere have to grope in the dark; and -- barring some of those blunders which England cannot do without when first she plunges into a war -- we can see no reason why in six weeks everything should not work pretty smoothly.

Now, look to America, and then say what a regular army is worth to a rising army of volunteers.

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[Early](#) | [1840](#) | [1850](#) | [1860](#) | [1870](#) | [1880](#) | [1890](#)

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- 1846: [\[A Critique of\] German Ideology](#) (M/E)  
1847: [Principles of Communism](#) (E)  
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1849: [Wage-Labor and Capital](#) (M)  
1859: [Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy](#) (M)  
1867: [Capital, Volume 1](#) (M)  
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1875: [Critique of the Gotha Program](#) (M)  
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*See Also:* A Subject Index [On Historical Materialism](#)

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1848-9: Articles in the [Neue Rheinische Zeitung](#) (M/E)  
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