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The Civil War in the United States

Articles by **Karl Marx** in *Die Presse* 1861

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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 freebooters 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."

END