Philip S. Foner

BRITISH LABOR AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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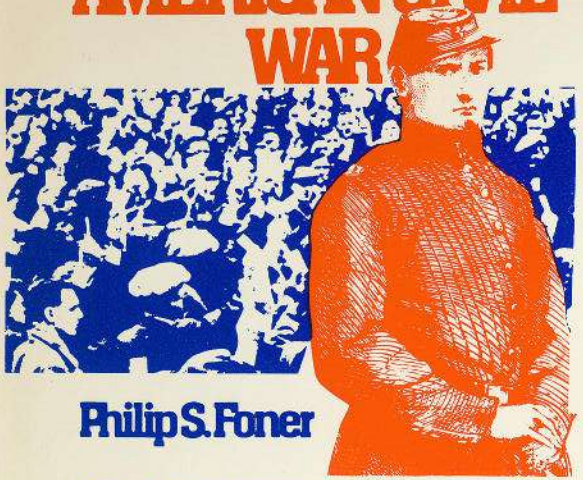

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One of the controversies in recent historiography, both in England and the United States, has revolved around the role of British workers during the American Civil War. Did British workers, especially those in the textile districts of Lancashire, support the North, as tradition has it, or did they support the Confederacy? Philip S. Foner, distinguished historian and author, examines this question in his scholarly in-depth study devoted to the role played by British workers.

In recent years, critics and scholars have adopted the interpretation set forth by Mary Ellison, who upheld the view that British workers in the Lancashire districts supported the Confederacy and not the Union during the American Civil War.

Now Professor Foner firmly challenges the Ellison thesis and establishes that British workers did indeed support the Union cause and did oppose slavery and the Confederacy. The author bases his study on careful research of newspaper, pamphlet, and other contemporary sources, especially reports in the British labor and commercial press of workingmen's meetings during the American Civil War.

This scholarly work offers a major contribution to a complex and controversial historical issue.

PHILIP S. FONER, a native New Yorker, received a B.A. from the College of the City of New York, and an M.A. and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. He has taught history at City College, Lincoln University, Rutgers University, and Humboldt University, Berlin. He has also lectured extensively at universities here and abroad. Dr. Foner is the author of many books, including the five-volume *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, the five-volume *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, the two-volume *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, and the two-volume *Women and the American Labor Movement*. The author contributes frequently to scholarly journals.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

To My Daughter Elizabeth

Contents

Preface

One of the controversies in recent historiography, both in England and the United States, has revolved around the role of the British workers during the American Civil War. Did the workers, especially those in Lancashire, support the North, as the tradition has it, or did they, on the contrary, support the Confederacy? Although the literature on this subject is enormous, there has still been no single volume devoted to the role played by the British workers throughout the island. That is the purpose of this present work.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the staffs of many libraries and historical societies. While I was able to conduct research in England in the course of several visits to that country, this work would never have been completed without the continuing assistance of the staff of the British Museum. I also wish to express my thanks to the staff of the Manchester Central Library for its cooperation and assistance. The staff of the library of McGill University in Montreal, Canada was also of great assistance, making available to me on several visits the microfilm of the *Bee-Hive* and of the George Howell Papers, as well as other valuable materials in that library relating to British labor history. The late Professor Howard Weinroth of McGill University, himself an outstanding scholar in the field of British labor history, kindly spent hours discussing several important issues with me relating to the development of British labor.

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I wish to thank my daughter Elizabeth Van der Paer and my brother Henry Foner, both of whom read the entire manuscript and made useful suggestions. Rosie Rudich of the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, Marx-Engels section, German Democratic Republic, read sections of the manuscript and also made useful suggestions for which I am grateful.

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1. The Setting

On December 20, 1860, five weeks after the election of Abraham Lincoln, the Republican party candidate, to the presidency of the United States, South Carolina formally seceded from the Union. Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama soon followed, and in February, 1861, the Confederate States of America were established as a separate government made up of seven slave states. Four more were to join to form the completed Confederacy.

The lame duck Buchanan administration did nothing to either encourage or impede secession, although pro-Confederate members of his cabinet sent shipments of arms to forts under Confederate control. In his State of the Union address on December 3, 1860, President James Buchanan announced that the federal government could not act in the then current crisis. Secession, Buchanan argued, was theoretically unconstitutional, yet neither the president nor Congress had the power to prevent it.

On March 4, 1861, Lincoln was inaugurated as president. His inaugural address combined firmness with conciliation. He assured the slaveholders that he would never interfere with slavery in their states ("I have neither the power nor the desire to do so"), but he also denounced secession as unconstitutional and vowed to uphold the laws of the United States by any means necessary.

When hostilities did break out in April, 1861, following the firing on Fort Sumter, most Americans did not envision anything like an extended war. Indeed, in his instructions to Charles Francis Adams, newly appointed Minister to England, Secretary of State William H. Seward stressed that the federal government relied upon the good sense of the citizens of the South to lead their states back into the Union. The logic of events, he felt, would speedily bring about the desired reconciliation. Offers of mediation and suggested compromise by the British government were, therefore, not to be entertained. Moreover, any recognition of the "rebels" would be considered an unfriendly act aimed at destroying the integrity of the American nation.[1]

The twenty-three-year-old Henry Adams accompanied his father as his private secretary, and as he neared England, he thought "that he was going to a friendly government and people." The very composition of the British government appeared to guarantee that it would not take any action hostile to American reunification. While Lord Palmerston, prime minister and head of

the government, was long noted for his antagonism toward the United States, he was also known to be cautious and sensitive to public opinion. He was not likely to commit himself precipitously to any policy that might lead to division and complications at home. The cabinet, moreover, was known to have widely differing views on the American question. To be sure, Palmerston's foreign secretary, Earl Russell, although antislavery, believed strongly that the South was entitled to the right of self-determination. Nevertheless, Henry Adams "could not conceive the idea of a hostile England."[2]

But within a few hours of his arrival, he was disillusioned. On May 14, the morning after the ambassador's arrival in Liverpool, there occurred the provocative publication of the Queen's Proclamation of Neutrality in which her country accorded belligerent rights to the Confederacy. While conferring these rights was not the same thing as recognizing the independence of the Confederacy, the North was indignant. For if, as was now likely, the South would be encouraged to believe that recognition might soon follow, the Confederacy would be fortified in its determination to resist. A disillusioned Henry Adams was not only convinced that recognition would soon follow, but in some of his letters, he concluded that Britain actually wanted war with America.[3]

What particularly disturbed Adams—as it did many Northerners—was the fact that there was ample evidence that Britain's real reason for the proclamation was not what the government had claimed. The public justification was based on a variety of proclamations issued by the Confederacy and the Lincoln administration. On April 17, Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, declared his intention of issuing "letters of marque for privateering." Two days later, Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of Southern ports and announced the government's intention of treating Southern privateers as pirates. Britain's response was that the only way she could avoid taking an active part in the struggle was by recognizing that the state of war existed and granting the South belligerent rights.

Yet it became clear that England had actually decided to grant belligerent rights even before the news of the various proclamations arrived. While it could be argued, as it was by even some of the most devoted friends of the Union in England, that the Queen's Proclamation of strict neutrality favored the North, the haste with which it had been issued and the lame rationale for it that was later developed served to convince many Northerners of the unfriendliness of the British government.[4]

Still, the belief that the war would be ended in a matter of months lessened fear in the North of what Britain might do next. Then, on July 21, 1861, a superior Northern army was routed in the first battle of Bull Run. Not only did it then become clear that the war would go on for an indefinite period, but discouraging news arrived of a sharp change in British public opinion, at least as far as some sections were concerned.

In the early months of the war, the great body of the British people and much of the British press favored the free states. But this sympathy was largely rooted in antislavery sentiment, and it soon deteriorated in the face of

assertions by Northern leaders that the main object of the war was to preserve the Union and not to touch slavery. Without a declared goal of abolition, the war, to many English people, appeared either pointless, or, as the South claimed, a crusade against states' rights and free trade.[5] Both of these principles had many sympathizers in England. In 1860, Britain had signed the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty with France, which accelerated the general downward movement of world tariffs. Therefore, it is not surprising that Richard Cobden, who later supported fully the Union side, was at first antagonized by the high tariff established by the North with the Morrill Act. With antislavery not an issue in the war, and with protectionism openly proclaimed by the North, the Union cause appeared to warrant little support—at least so argued the forces in England that were friendly to the Confederacy. Additional steps taken by the Lincoln administration only served to strengthen this view. In July, 1861, Lincoln sent to the special session of Congress a message in which all of the emphasis was placed on the preservation of the Union, thereby dismaying British supporters of the North. In October, Lincoln countermanded an order by General John C. Fremont proposing to free the slaves of disloyal commanders in his command area of Missouri. These actions overshadowed the fact that Lincoln had signed the first Confiscation Act, which declared that fugitive slaves running into the ranks of the Union Army who could prove that they had aided the Confederacy would be considered "contraband" and would not be returned to their owners.[6]

Present, but not very vocal during the first months of the war, was a section of British public opinion that openly sympathized with the Confederacy. This pro-Southern group was made up of varied and disparate elements, ranging from those who regarded the war as the struggle of "independence" against "empire," to those antagonized by the Morrill tariff. But predominantly, the friends of the Confederacy were drawn from the aristocratic and commercial classes—the former attracted to the South primarily by social and political ties, and the latter by economic interests. Aristocratic, "fashionable" England felt a natural affinity for the "genteel" South and feared, moreover, that a successful experiment in democracy abroad, symbolized by a Union victory, would eventually threaten its own position and lead to a revival and strengthening of the democratic movement in England—quiescent since the defeat of Chartism. The commercial element in Britain desired a successful secession movement in order to gain possession of the Southern market and to escape the restrictions imposed by the Morrill tariff. The manufacturing community was particularly concerned about bringing about separation peacefully and rapidly; a prolonged conflict would threaten the cotton supply, interrupt the exchange of goods between the South and England, and lead to a cancellation of debt by their former customers.

The defeat of the North in the first battle of Bull Run, added to the disillusionment over the depth and sincerity of Northern antislavery feeling, brought this sympathy for the South to the surface. For the first time, much of

the press, led by the *Times* of London, displayed open friendliness for the Confederates. Only a few of the larger organs, including the *Spectator*, the *Daily News*, the *Morning Star*, and the *Westminster Review*, remained friendly to the North.[7]

On March 30, 1861, the English magazine *Punch* carried the following jingle:

> Though with the North we sympathize
> It must not be forgotten
> That with the South we've stronger ties
> Which are composed of cotton.

In the early 1850s, British imports of cotton from the American slave states amounted to between one and two million bales per annum. Between 1840 and 1860, the United States provided approximately 80 percent of Britain's cotton, while the percentage supplied by the West Indies declined from .70 percent to .31 percent. Over three-fourths of Lancashire's cotton came from the Southern states.[8]

From the outset, the Confederacy had counted on the effects of a prolonged blockade on the cotton supply for the European (especially British) textile industry. "King Cotton," E. Merton Coulter writes in *The Confederate States of America, 1861–1865*—one of the volumes in the authoritative *History of the South*—"was to do its work through the creation of a cotton famine in England and France which would force those countries to break the blockade in order to secure the staple. As a means to this end, the Confederacy promoted the policy that the blockade, not yet effective, should be reinforced by withholding cotton from all the Southern ports. As an additional phase of its cotton policy, the Confederacy encouraged neutrals to accumulate large supplies in the Confederacy, which, of course, could be gotten only by breaking the blockade. It was believed that England would be forced to act to prevent a cotton famine, which would be followed by civil unrest.'"[9] "We have only to stop shipment of cotton for three months and a revolution will occur in England," a Confederate leader told William H. Russell, American correspondent for the London *Times*. "Hundreds of thousands of your workers will starve without our cotton, and they will demand you break the blockade."[10]

It has long been an accepted doctrine that the depression in the British cotton industry during the Civil War was caused by the inability of cotton textile firms to obtain sufficient quantities of raw cotton. There was, in short, a "cotton famine" caused by the blockade of Southern ports by the federal navy, which cut Lancashire off from its supplies of raw materials. Recently, however, Eugene A. Brady has pointed out that contemporary data and literature place the blame for the "so-called cotton famine," not primarily on a shortage of raw cotton, but "in large measure on an excess supply of cotton yarn and textiles that resulted from excess production during the years 1858 through 1861." Brady concedes that the Civil War did have some impact on the Lancashire textile industry but maintains that the "main effect was that of

inducing *expectations* of a future input shortage." These "expectations" resulted in a greatly increased price for raw cotton as a result of a speculative bidding up of the price of fairly ample stocks of cotton stored in factories and warehouses of the United Kingdom, which made cotton manufacturing relatively unprofitable. It was the uncertainty as to the future availability of raw cotton from the United States, rather than the actual shortage of cotton in Lancashire as a result of the Civil War, that constituted the significant effect of the war. The Lancashire depression, Brady insists, was caused "by the unprofitability of cotton textile manufacturing and not shortage of raw cotton."[11]

But one thing is indisputable. Whatever the precise cause, between 1861 and 1865, the British cotton textile industry suffered a period of severe unemployment. At its peak—in November, 1862—about three-fourths of the labor force of the Lancashire cotton industry was idle. Full-time employment of 533,950 workers in November, 1861 dropped to 203,200 in November, 1862, to 286,400 in December, 1863, to 303,400 in December, 1864, and to 344,300 in May, 1865. Meanwhile, the total unemployment went from zero in November, 1860 to 330,759 in November, 1862, to 247,463 in December, 1863, to 170,524 in December, 1864, to 99,545 in May, 1865.[12]

The large British manufacturers, with ample stocks of raw cotton, continued to run their factories at maximum profit, while others with capital reserves paid higher prices for the raw material. But the smaller manufacturers could not withstand the strain of the high price of raw cotton and had to close their doors.[13] For the workers of Lancashire, the years of the American Civil War were a period of unrelieved tragedy. The crisis in the textile industry gave the British manufacturers the opportunity to extend the working day, depress wages, and equip their factories with the newest laborsaving machinery. For those employed, the exploitation grew more intense.

But bad as conditions were for those still at work, they were far worse for those thrown completely out of work. Some workers either relied on odd jobs to eke out an existence, or, if they were able, returned to rural life as agricultural laborers. Others found work wherever they could. For all, their plight was expressed in song:

> War's clamour and civil commotion
> Has stagnation brought in its train;
> And stoppage brings with it starvation,
> So help us some bread to obtain.
>
> It's the song of the factory operatives,
> Short time, short time, come again no more;
> For we can't get out cotton from the old Kentucky shore;
> Oh, short time, short time, come again no more![14]

Even making allowances for possible exaggeration, the reality for most of Lancashire operatives was grim indeed. The accounts in the contemporary press told a sorry tale. "A Lancashire Lad" (John Whittaker) wrote in the London *Times* of April 22, 1862:

I am living in the centre of a vast district where there are many cotton mills, which in ordinary times afford employment to many thousands of "hands," and food to many more thousands of mouths. With very rare exceptions, quietness reigns. . . . Hard times have come, and we have had them sufficiently long to know what they mean. We have fathers sitting in the house at mid-day, silent and glum, while children look wistfully about, and sometimes whimper for bread which they cannot have. We have the same fathers who, before hard times, were proud men, who could have thought "beggar" the most opprobious epithet you could have hit them with, but who are made humble by the sight of wife and children almost starving, and who go before "relief committees" and submit to be questioned about their wants with a patience and humility which it is painful, almost shocking to witness. . . . But harder than this, our factory women and girls have had to turn out and plodding a weary way from door to door, beg a bit of bread. . . .

I cannot pass through a street but I see evidence of deep distress. I cannot sit at home half an hour without having one or more coming to ask for bread to eat. . . .

To see the homes of those we know and respect, though they are but workingmen stripped of every bit of furniture—to see long cherished books and pictures sent one by one to the pawn shop, that food may be had—and to see that food almost loathsome in kind, and insufficient in quantity, are hard things to bear. But these are not the worst things. In many of our cottage homes, there is nothing left by the pawning of which a few pence may be raised, and the mothers of us "Lancashire lads" have turned out to beg, and ofttimes knock at doors of houses in which there is as much destitution as there is in their own; while the fathers and lads themselves think they are fortunate if they can earn a shilling or two by street sweeping or stone breaking.

On April 10, 1864, almost three years to the day since the Civil War began, John Ward, a weaver of Clitheroe in Lancashire, wrote in his diary:

It is nearly two years since I wrote anything in the way of a diary. I now take up my pen to resume the task. It has been a very poor time for me all the time owing to the American war, which seems as far from being settled as ever. The mill I work in was stopped all last winter, during which time I had three shillings per week allowed by the relief committee, which barely kept me alive. When we started to work again it was with Surat cotton, and a great number of weavers can only mind two looms. We can earn very little. I have not earned a shilling a day last month, and there are many like me. My clothes and bedding is wearing out very fast and I have no means of getting any more, as what wages I get does hardly keep me, after paying rents, rates and firing. I am living by myself, my daughter and son-in-law having gone to a house of their own during the time I was out of work. I went twice to Preston to see my brother Daniel, but him and his family were not better off than myself, having nothing better than Surat to work at, and it is the same all through Lancashire. . . .

The principal reason why I did not take any notes these last two years is because I was sad and weary. One half of the time I was out of work and the other I had to work as hard as ever I wrought in my life, and can hardly keep myself living. If things do not mend this summer, I will try somewhere else or something else, for I can't go much further with what I am at.[15]

The Confederacy counted on this suffering, generally believed to be the result of the stoppage of raw cotton supplies, to aid their cause. Since the North was the perpetrator of the distress with its blockade, the Confederacy and its supporters in England anticipated a cry to arise out of Lancashire demanding that the blockade be broken. In fact, so worried was Richard Cobden in the fall of 1861 by this possibility that, although a friend of the Union, he warned United States Minister Adams that some way must be found to obtain a supply of cotton. He even urged an easing of the blockade as a remedy.[16]

It was precisely at this moment that a Confederate ship carrying James M. Mason and John Slidell, "Special Commissioners of the Confederate States of America," to represent the Confederacy in Great Britain and France, respectively, ran the Northern blockade and made its way to Cuba. In Havana, they boarded the British mail packet *Trent,* en route to the Danish island of St. Thomas, where they intended to book passage on a steamer bound for England. Around noon on November 8, the Northern warship *San Jacinto,* commanded by Captain Charles D. Wilkes, overhauled the *Trent* and fired a shot across her bow. When the *Trent* stopped in the water, Wilkes sent aboard a boarding party which brought Mason and Slidell, with their secretaries, back to the *San Jacinto.* The ship then proceeded to Boston, where the captured Southern envoys were locked up, albeit in comfortable accommodations.

The *Trent* affair—the boarding of an unarmed ship—does not loom large in military annals, but it occurred at a time when Northern morale was at a low ebb. The earlier "on-to-Richmond" optimism had been shattered at Bull Run, and nothing had happened to repair the damage. Suddenly, the *Trent* affair restored that morale. It was viewed in the North as a major victory—a smashing blow to the Southern cause. Wilkes was accorded a hero's welcome for his exploit.

To the British government, press, and large sections of the public, however, the *Trent* affair was an outrageous affront to England's honor. Previous friction with the North over neutral rights and other matters, and the widely held belief that Secretary of State Seward was an ardent Anglophobe, provided additional fuel for the anti-Northern fire. The pro-Confederate agents and supporters, seeing a golden opportunity for British intervention, pushed for an immediate declaration of war against the North. And, in fact, Great Britain did begin preparing for war and sent an ultimatum to Washington, demanding that Mason and Slidell be released.

No one in the Lincoln administration wanted war with Great Britain at a time when the nation was convulsed with its own civil conflict. Agreement was finally reached that Mason and Slidell would have to be released. Secretary Seward replied to the British ultimatum by agreeing to their release without actually admitting that the United States had committed any wrongdoing. Even though there was no transoceanic telegraph service, and the average passage between New York and Liverpool took twelve to fourteen days, the British government waited; Seward's message finally arrived, and the crisis was over.[17]

It was not to be the last crisis before the war ended, although the drive for

British intervention never again reached the intensity that it had during the *Trent* affair. It is well known that in the fall of 1862, Lord Palmerston and Napoleon III of France discussed jointly forcing the North to accept an armistice which they expected would lead to reconciliation with the South, with the understanding that in case of failure, England and France would recognize the Confederacy. Moreover, friction between the British and United States governments continued over the building of warships for the Confederate states in British yards and the practice of allowing partially completed ships to "escape" from the shipyards to unpoliced ports, where guns and ammunition were loaded on board.[18] Nevertheless, the fact is that Britain neither recognized the Confederacy nor intervened to break the blockade.

A number of factors operated to check any precipitous move toward intervention. There was the fear that a war with the United States would cut off the American wheat supply on which England depended. The suffering this would bring would outweigh any benefits that might be derived from reopening the supply of cotton. Then, too, there was a large supply of raw cotton on hand and a large supply of finished cloth that could be marketed at an immense profit in a rising market, and the manufacturers felt no urgent need to reopen the cotton supply.[19] Still other factors were the strong opposition in the Cabinet to any sudden change in policy, and the inability of England and France to win Russia's cooperation. (The Tsar's government, acting in its own interest, assured the North of its support against England and France.) Even England and France themselves could not work out a simultaneous timetable for intervention. Other contributing factors that can be mentioned are the many doubts Palmerston had come to entertain about the policy of intervention; the military victories scored by the Northern armies at various stages when it appeared that the Union cause was hopeless; the ability of the British government and of voluntary efforts to alleviate the worst suffering in Lancashire through charitable subscriptions; and the impact of the preliminary and final Emancipation Proclamation in convincing that government that English public opinion would not tolerate intervention in behalf of the American slaveowners. It has even been argued that the publication in England in May, 1863 of *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation in 1838–39* by the British actress Fanny Kemble—an account of a few months' stay at the homes of her then husband, Pierce Butler, on St. Simons and Butler Islands, with its hair-raising account of the treatment of slaves—was instrumental in deterring Britain from joining the Civil War on the Confederate side.[20]

The actual effects of at least two of the factors mentioned above have aroused some controversy. With respect to the Emancipation Proclamation, for example, the point has been made that since it did not free a single slave in those states or parts of states still loyal to the Union, it was viewed cynically in England and did not have the impact credited to it.[21] There is also disagreement over the extent and effect of relief for the distressed workingmen of Lancashire. One study argues that relief committees were set up too

late in the crisis; that relief for the unemployed was used to browbeat workers into accepting lower wages, or was entirely misused, or was used for public improvements of benefit only to the capitalist class.[22] But another study contends that the relief work was eminently successful and efficient; that appeals for relief were generously answered by all sections of the population; that clothing and food were provided for thousands of needy workers; and that there was neither famine nor epidemic.[23]

But by far the greatest controversy has developed over a factor not listed above but traditionally viewed as the most important of all the forces responsible for preventing British intervention on the side of the Confederacy—the role played by the working class of England, including the workers in the Lancashire cotton mill district.

2. The Tradition and the Controversy

On January 28, 1862, the London *Daily News* carried a report of a "public meeting of all the working classes" held the previous evening at the Newhall, Edgeware Road, London, "to consider how Englishmen ought to receive those slaveholders from the rebel states of America, Messrs. Mason and Slidell. A "Mr. Stedman, a working man," presided, and one of the resolutions adopted unanimously stressed that the "rebel agents, Mason and Slidell," were "utterly unworthy of the moral sympathies of the working classes of this country, inasmuch as they hold property in slaves, and are the avowed agents of a tyrannical faction in rebellion against the republic of America, and are the sworn enemies against the social and political rights of the working classes of all countries." Another unanimously adopted resolution voiced the meeting's opinion that "it is the duty of the working men especially (as unrepresented in the national senate) to express their sympathies with the United States in their gigantic struggle for the preservation of the Union"; to denounce all attempts of sympathizers with the Confederate States of America, especially "the *Times* and kindred journals of the aristocracy," to "embroil" England in the American Civil War, "and to give expression to the warmest sympathy with the abolitionists in America in their efforts to convert the struggle to an ultimate settlement of the slavery question."[1]

The meeting at Newhall achieved international renown when an account appeared in *Die Presse* of Vienna on February 2, 1862, under the heading, "A London Workers' Meeting." The article was one of a series of dispatches from London on events of the American Civil War written by Karl Marx. But this particular article is of special importance, for, in reporting the "London Workers' Meeting" (and adding details not reported in the *Daily News*), Marx presented the first of his analyses of the role of the British working class in the Civil War, and advanced the thesis that was to characterize it.[2] At the beginning of the article, Marx noted that while the British working class, "so preponderant" a component part of the society, was not represented in Parliament, "it is not without political influence." He then cited the fact that "no truly decisive measure" had ever been carried through in England "without *pressure from without,*" and without the impact of "parliamentary popular demonstrations, which naturally cannot be staged without the lively

cooperation of the working class." Whether the working class was "artificially incited" or was "acting spontaneously," it had played the principal part, or according to the circumstance, "the noisy part" in the enactment of key legislation by Parliament and in the adoption of certain policies. In short, in the past, sections of the British ruling class had successfully employed the power of the working class, unrepresented though it was in Parliament, to achieve the enactment of legislation and the adoption of policies in the interests of those particular sections. In view of all this, Marx found the "attitude of the English working class" with regard to the American Civil War especially "striking."

What made it striking was the fact that circumstances appeared to insure that the British working class would once again play the principal role in forcing the government to adopt a policy favored by the English ruling class with respect to the American Civil War, namely, intervention on the side of the Confederate States of America. The blockade of the slave states by the Union Navy had halted the supply of cotton for British textile mills and resulted in a "stoppage of the factories and the shortening of the labor time," which had already produced "incredible misery among the workers in the northern manufacturing districts and was growing worse daily." While workers in other sections and industries were not suffering as greatly, they, too, were affected "severely" by a combination of factors growing out of developments in the United States—"reaction of the crisis in the cotton industry on the remaining branches of production, from the curtailment of the export of their iron products to the North of America in consequence of the Morrill tariff and from the annihilation of this export to the South in consequence of the blockade."

Not only had intervention in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy become "a bread-and-butter question for the working class," but the British ruling class, favoring the Confederacy from the outset of the war, had worked unceasingly to "inflame" the working class against the United States as the source of its misery. Even *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper,* the "sole great and widely circulating workers' organ still existing," had been purchased for the one purpose of contributing to this campaign of inciting the British working class.

As Marx saw it, the stage was thus set for British intervention, and the working class was "fully conscious that the government is waiting for the intervention cry from below, the pressure *from without*, to put an end to the American blockade and English misery." Hence the great importance of the "London workers' meeting." As Marx put it:

> Under these circumstances, the obstinacy with which the working class keeps silent, or breaks its silence only to raise its voice against intervention and *for* the United States is admirable.[3]

This was only the first of many references by Marx to the British workers as the ones responsible for averting a war with the North. In November, 1864, writing to Joseph Weydemeyer, the pioneer Marxist in the United States, Marx put it plainly and bluntly, referring to the "labor kings of London" as the men who had "prevented Palmerston from declaring war upon the United States, as he was on the point of doing, through the monster meeting in St. James' Hall. . . ."[4] A few months later, Marx wrote that it was not the wisdom of the British ruling class but the heroic resistance of the working class of England, including the workers of Lancashire, who refused to allow their sufferings to be used by pro-Confederate sympathizers, "that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic."[5]

Marx's views were echoed during[6] and after the Civil War by other contemporaries,[7] and when the war had passed into history, their influence continued to be felt in the tradition and historiography in both Britain and the United States. The traditional view can be summed up as follows: The upper classes who dominated Parliament and the press sided openly with their fellow aristocrats of the Southern states. Gleeful at the prospect of a dismembered and discredited American republic, they repeatedly brought Britain to the brink of active intervention in aid of the slaveholding government. But they were restrained by the working class—including the spinners and weavers of Lancashire. Despite the cruel deprivation brought on by the "cotton famine," the operatives refused to endorse the idea of breaking the blockade, since they would be helping the slaveowners win and be defeating the cause of freedom represented by the North, which was linked to their own struggle for greater freedom of home—including, for example, the right to vote. While there may have been a few waverers early in the war, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation settled the issue for British labor, and from that point on, all English workers rallied to the side of the North with unanimity.

The pressure from below, the traditional view continues, was sometimes expressed in silent suffering, and at other times, in vast public meetings. And it forced the British government to forego recognition of the Confederate states while the United States Army was completing their defeat. "It ought not to be forgotten in the United States," wrote Marx, in summing up the traditional view, "that at least the *working class* of England, from the commencement to the termination of the difficulty, have never forsaken them."[8]

Certainly, American historians did not forget. For almost a century (like their counterparts in Britain), they upheld Marx's contention that while the ruling class supported the Confederacy, the British workers unanimously condemned the Slave Power; that the Lancashire cotton-mill workers made real sacrifices to prevent British intervention from breaking the blockade and restoring the flow of cotton to the mills—a sacrifice which Lincoln himself called "an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or country," and that the British workers were a significant, if not the most important factor in preventing intervention on the side of the Confederacy.[9] In "Die Arbeiterbewegung in der Vereiningten Staaten," ("The Labor Movement in the United States"), a series of more than twenty articles he published at the suggestion of Friedrich Engels in *Die Neue Zeit*

(1891–1895), Friedrich A. Sorge, the outstanding American Marxist of the post-Civil War era, began by writing that:

> . . . England . . . would have liked to enter the war on the side of the slaveholders if —*working England,* the English workers had not raised their voices in favor of the North of the United States, in favor of abolishing slavery. . . . The proletarians of Lancashire, the weavers and spinners of the cotton factories in England who were put on half-time because of lack of cotton and overburdened by hunger and deprivation came together in mass meetings to wish Lincoln luck with the Emancipation Proclamation and openly expressed their inner sympathy with the cause of the Northern states of the Union. . . . The cause of the Union was saved in England. *Honor to the English workers for that!*[10]

And practically on the eve of the Civil War centennial, Richard B. Morris, noted Columbia University historian, completed the process when he expressed his own view and summed up the traditional view of British and American historiography in his authoritative *Encyclopedia of American History*:

> The war divided British opinion. The upper class favored the Confederacy. The commercial interests, irked at the new high tariffs imposed by the Union, looked to the opening of a vast free-trade market in the Confederacy; British manufacturers and shippers expected to benefit from the defeat of their Northern competitors. The working class, however, and a large proportion of the middle class, favored the Union.[11]

In the main, Southern historians have not challenged the traditional view. Instead, they have tended to minimize the importance of British working-class opinion. For example, Frank L. Owsley, in his *King Cotton Diplomacy*, published in 1931 (and reprinted in 1959), argued that the workers had no influence either way. "The population of Lancashire and all industrial England," he wrote contemptuously, "was politically apathetic, sodden, ignorant, and docile, with the exception of a few intelligent and earnest leaders." Such people, he maintained, were not aware of world events and not concerned about slavery and the preservation of American democracy.[12]

The first serious attack on the traditional view came on the issue of the role of the British upper classes. W. D. Jones in 1953, H. C. Allen in 1954,[13] and J. M. Hernon, Jr. in 1961 all argued that the British upper classes were not that much interested in the Southern aristocracy as to become involved in the war on their behalf. Hernon pointed out that Palmerston himself, after deciding that England should stay out of the American struggle in October, 1862 (at least "till the war should have taken a more decisive turn") rapidly became involved in the problem, closer to home, of Bismarck and Schleswig-Holstein.[14]

In 1960 Allan Nevins, twice a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, writing in *The War for the Union,* accepted the view that the Lancashire workers sided with the North, but rejected the thesis that upper-class Britons were pro-Confederacy and that the Palmerston government favored intervention on the side of the South.[15]

The first attacks on the traditional thesis with respect to the role of the English working class came in British and American dissertations. In his 1955 Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, Richard Botsford emphasized that Scottish labor leaders supported the Confederacy, while J. M. Hernon, Jr., in a 1957 Johns Hopkins dissertation, found no Irish labor support for the Union.[16] In 1957 Sheldon Van Auken, in a bachelor's thesis at Jesus College, Oxford University, entitled "English Sympathy for the Southern Confederacy: The Glittering Illusion," insisted that "there has been a persistent minimizing of the sympathy for the South, a tendency to accept uncritically such contemporary accounts as suggest sympathy for the North, and to discount or ignore those which gave a different impression." While Van Auken denied that Southern sympathy was "confined to a few, selfish and insincere wealthy men," he did not dispute the thesis that, in the main, British workers supported the Union cause.[17] Nor did Frank Thistlewaite in a 1959 study on Anglo-American relations, but he did note that the "alignment of British opinion towards the American Civil War was more complex than was once supposed." Moreover, he failed to find any "positive affinity" among the British ruling classes for slavery or for Southern aristocrats, and he argued that such pro-Southern sentiment as did exist derived "from a sense of liberty and self-determination as well as from hostility and fear toward Yankeedom." While accepting the fact that this feeling even existed among the working classes, Thistlewaite took the view that after the Emancipation Proclamation, British labor fully supported the Union, and that the Lancashire cotton operatives, transcending their economic self-interest, "took the lead in upholding the Union blockade."[18]

Perhaps the most influential of all the studies challenging the traditional thesis have been two articles by Royden Harrison of the University of Warwick—one in 1957 and the other in 1961. The first "British Labour and the Confederacy" (*International Review of Social History*), opened boldly: "There are few legends relating to the history of the Labour Movement which have enjoyed the influence and popularity of the story of how British workmen responded to the American Civil War." The legend was "their supposed unanimity in opposition to the Slave Power and their resistance to every ruling-class project for intervention on its behalf." While an occasional historian dared to venture the comment that "the response of the working class to the Civil War was more complex than has commonly been supposed," it was practically taken for granted in Civil War historiography that the entire labor movement and the working-class press had supported the Union. Harrison then proceeded to show that the conventional view—that the British working class "unanimously favored the cause of the North"—ignored the evidence which showed that while this class was deeply opposed to American slavery, "it had within it influential trade union leaders, editors, and advisors, who, in their hatred of the North, made friends to the Confederacy." In fact, "working-class newspapers and journals were, on the whole, hostile to the Federals." This was largely true before the Emancipation Proclamation, but even after 1863, Harrison insisted, a number of labor journals continued to lend their support to the Confederacy.[19]

Harrison pointed out that *Reynolds' News,* with its immense circulation, called upon the workers "to war with the Union." The *Bee-Hive,* which began publication in October, 1861 as the organ of the London Trades' Council, and which one historian had described as among the labor papers that protested vigorously "against those who would support the Confederacy for a bale of cotton"[20] turned out, in Harrison's study, to have been used by its editor "as a vehicle for his Southern sympathies," even to the extent of insisting that it would be perfectly legitimate for Britain "to break the blockade of the Southern ports."[21]

Moreover, this position was supported by "other London Trades Unionists" besides George Potter, the manager of the *Bee-Hive*. One of those labor leaders, T. J. Dunning, the secretary of the Bookbinders and the "father of London Trades Unionism," was and remained a "firm friend of the Confederacy" throughout the entire Civil War. Facey of the Bricklayers, Vize of the Painters, and Lens of the Shoeworkers also voiced distinctly pro-Southern views from the outset of the war.[22] In general, Harrison maintained, the working-class press of London, far from being solidly pro-North, was aggressively Confederate. These papers called for raising the Northern blockade and demanded armed intervention to get cotton for the mills of Lancashire.[23] Outside of London, the most important working-class paper was the *Glasgow Sentinel,* edited by Alexander Campbell, "the father of the Scottish Labour Movement." This paper, too, vigorously opposed the North, favored intervention to stop the war, and advised the North to abandon the conflict. In Lancashire and the north of England, where there were few working-class papers, the Manchester *Weekly Budget* and the *Oldham Standard* had wide circulation among workers. The former was "one of the most violently 'Confederate' papers in the country, while the latter grew increasingly hostile to the Union as the war progressed."[24]

Harrison listed a series of factors that explain Southern sympathies in British working-class circles, or at least a lack of enthusiasm for the federal cause. One was the failure of the Union to raise the issue of "emancipation"; another was the conviction, after defeat upon defeat of the Union army, that the federal cause was lost. Then again, working-class leaders, journalists, and advisors who thought of the industrial capitalists "as the main enemy," and who had come to hate John Bright and Richard Cobden for their reactionary roles in the Chartist and factory reform movements, became "the mainstay of the Confederacy in the labour movement." To these men, the very fact that Bright vigorously supported the Union was almost enough to swing them over to the side of the Confederacy. Moreover, just as they detested the hypocrisy of Bright and Cobden when it came to taking a stand on issues crucial to the workers, they shared a similar attitude toward abolitionists who were concerned about the horrors of chattel slavery, but were indifferent to the evils of wage slavery.[25] Not that these labor leaders defended slavery, Harrison was quick to point out, but rather they believed that the war against slavery should encompass wage slavery as well as chattel slavery. In any case, since the North did not proclaim the abolition of Negro slavery as its objective in

the Civil War, what point was there in the British workers starving and continuing to suffer when British intervention would quickly relieve their suffering?[26]

Four years later, Royden Harrison returned to the subject of the role of English workers during the American Civil War, this time in an article, "British Labor and American Slavery," published in *Science & Society*, the American Marxist journal, in the spring of 1961 and reprinted four years later in Harrison's *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861–1881.* The first twenty-four pages of the new article were a repetition, although differently organized, of what had been presented in "British Labour and the Confederacy." But toward the end of the new article, Harrison asked the question: "How far is it still correct to speak of the pro-Federal sentiments of the British working class?" Suddenly, the answer is quite different from what we have been led to expect. Harrison puts it unequivocally: "From the end of 1862, there is overwhelming evidence to support the view that the great majority of political conscious workmen were pro-Federal and firmly united to oppose war. As soon as the feelings of the masses were tested at public meetings they showed where they stood." On the basis of evidence contained in E. D. Adams' *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, Harrison concluded that British workers organized five pro-Union meetings in 1862, fifty-six in 1863, and eleven more in 1864. Even these figures underestimated "the amount of working-class activity," he went on. Finally, whenever Southern sympathizers tried to organize pro-Confederate working-class meetings, they invariably failed, and when they tried to get workers to support efforts to recognize the South, the answer was "Never!"[27]

In his original article, "British Labour and the Confederacy," Harrison had conceded that, in the main, pro-Confederate sympathy within British working-class circles found no expression in public meetings, and when one was called in Blackburn, attended by several thousand workers, a resolution calling for mediation between the North and South "in order to bring the fratricidal war to an end," was overwhelmingly defeated. In fact, under the leadership of the Blackburn Weavers' Association, the meeting declared itself in favor of the "policies of Abraham Lincoln and the Union movement." But Harrison had then proceeded to dismiss its significance and had concluded that while the organized workers of the cotton towns "did not demand armed intervention," it was because they and their union leaders were reluctant "to discuss foreign questions." In general, he said, the attitude of Lancashire workers was and remained "noncommittal," and, in any event, meetings of workers in favor of the Union elsewhere in England were not significant either way.[28]

But in 1961, Harrison sang a different tune. Even the "celebrated silence" of Lancashire was evidence of labor's rejection of the Confederacy. Moreover, he now insisted:

> It is the record of public meetings which provide the most convincing support for the traditional account of working-class opinion on the Civil War.

> These meetings proved that while the aristocracy was overwhelmingly for the Confederates . . . the working class stood by the North American Republic.[29]

To be sure, working-class support for the Union, Harrison points out, did not prevent British intervention on the side of the Confederacy, for even before the working class "had given conclusive proof of where its sympathies lay," Palmerston had already decided that the risks of intervention outweighed its advantages. Nevertheless, the working-class stand for the Union cause was of the utmost importance: "It gave an immense impetus to the demand for democratic government in Europe and Britain in particular. In England, the demand for reform was made in direct association with the declarations in support of Lincoln."[30]

Either because his original article had been criticized as one-sided,[31] or because he himself realized that he had gone too far in 1957, Harrison had clearly modified his position. He continued the process, and in the 1971 introduction to his work, *The English Defence of the Commune, 1871*, he wrote:

> . . . the eighteen sixties were remarkable for the concern displayed by the British working class with foreign policy. They made the cause of Poland their own. They accorded to Garibaldi a reception which far surpassed in its magnitude and its enthusiasm anything which was even given to the dignitaries of established powers. Above all, during the American Civil War, ignoring the advice of many of their own leaders and most of their own journals, they came down decisively on the side of Abraham Lincoln and against all recognition and support for the Slave Power![32]

In *Abraham Lincoln and the Working Class of Britain*, published in 1960 to jointly mark the one hundredth anniversary of the election of Lincoln as president and the formation of the London Trades' Council, and issued in conjunction with the British Trades' Union Congress, J. R. Poole indicated agreement with some of Royden Harrison's findings. He conceded that the Union cause encountered difficulty because of the "strikingly hostile attitude of many of the older generation of labour leaders, particularly those who controlled the labour press." Although they opposed slavery, they "were inclined to minimize this aspect of the struggle," and were more influenced by hostility to the industrial capitalist system in England and in the United States:

> They believed they saw in the American manufacturers an alarming duplication of their own master class which they had fought so long and bitterly; and was not John Bright, the old opponent of the British factory acts, now enlisted in the cause of the North? Bright, a mill owner himself, was not their man.[33]

Yet, like Harrison in his second article of 1961, Poole emphasized that these labor leaders and the press they controlled spoke only for themselves. "They seem to have been increasingly out of touch with their following, of which, on this issue, they may have been aware, for they very seldom took the risk of adopting the usual procedure of the time of calling public meetings in support of their stand."[34]

Strangely enough, Royden Harrison's original article, "British Labour and the Confederacy," and not the amended versions he published later, became the basis for the revisionist historiography of the role of the British workers in the Civil War. By 1967, the author of a review essay in the *Journal of Southern History*, basing his thesis on Harrison's original article and ignoring the second one, could write that "possibly a majority of British workingmen sympathized with Confederate independence."[35]

But the apex of revisionist historiography with respect to the role of British workers during the Civil War was still to come. In 1965, Michael Brook had published an article, "Confederate Sympathies in North East Lancashire, 1862–1864," which was based mainly on the cotton weaving town of Burnely.[36] Then early in 1973, in the "Bibliographical Essay" at the conclusion of the first volume of his *Britain & the War for the Union,* Brian Jenkins announced flatly: "The myth of British labour's total support for the Union despite the suffering the Civil War caused them, and opposition to slavery, has now been dispelled." This conclusion, he indicated, was based largely on "the doctoral dissertation on Lancashire and the American Civil War by Mary Ellison, which is about to be published under the title *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War.*"[37]

Later that same year, Ellison's book was published, and it set out to prove that the Lancashire workers—the very workers who were supposed to have suffered unemployment and distress but nevertheless heroically supported the Union—had instead backed the Confederacy. At the close of the book, there was an epilogue entitled "The History of a Myth: British Workers and the American Civil War" by Peter d'A. Jones.[38]

Ellison asserts at the outset that by 1862, there was a cotton famine in Lancashire which forced the majority of the mills to close down. "Unemployed operatives," she continues, "were forced to choose between starvation and charitable relief. Many sought to avoid this choice by urging that some kind of aid be given by Britain to the South to help establish Confederate independence and so facilitate the renewal of cotton to Lancashire." Wherever "unemployment was extensive," there was "an explosion of sympathy for the Southern cause." But this historical fact had been distorted "by the myth of the operatives' passivity and preference for neutrality, a myth created by the misconceptions of Richard Cobden, John Bright, and William Gladstone and strengthened by one unrepresentative Manchester meeting." Moreover, since "the mass of Lancashire cotton workers had no effective way of forming a pressure group," their clear and positive stand in favor of the Confederacy and their demands for "some form of pro-Southern governmental actions," including even, if necessary, war against the North, were "passed over and then forgotten." Instead, a vast, false myth was created that these workers had actually supported the Union and opposed every effort to alleviate their sufferings by breaking the blockade.[39]

From her study of the local and periodical press, Dr. Ellison concludes that the cotton workers of Lancashire (like their employers) were overwhelmingly pro-Southern. The workers, she maintains, were suspicious of Abraham

Lincoln's war aims from the outset, and his Emancipation Proclamation did nothing to allay their suspicions. As the war proceeded, they grew increasingly vociferous in their demands, through meetings and petitions, for some form of British action to save the Confederacy, whether through recognition, mediation, or by raising the Northern blockade. They were not indifferent to the slavery issue, but they viewed the war basically as a "glorious struggle for independence on the part of the South and a shameful attempt at oppression on that of the North." Moreover, they regarded the North's steps to abolish slavery, including the Emancipation Proclamation, as "only using abolition as a means of gaining political power," while they were convinced that the South would take steps, if independent, to end the slave system:[40] "A free South would bestow liberty on the slave and outdo the hypocritical North by introducing full integration." After all, Negroes were enlisted in the Confederate Army by 1865, "a clear step toward abolition."[41]

Ellison's methodology in proving her thesis is simplicity personified. It is to assert repeatedly that pro-Northern meetings were contrived, while pro-Southern gatherings were spontaneous. It would appear that she has read the local press, but she has simply refused to credit any reports that contradict her thesis.[42] Moreover, her judgments are boldly asserted without convincing evidence. If Rochdale takes a pro-Northern stand, then it must be because "the persuasive oratory of Cobden and more particularly Bright, dramatically influenced the attitude of Rochdale," and was the "root cause" of its pro-Unionism.[43] Meetings to gain support for the Northern cause, as she presents them, are either masqueraded as workingmen's gatherings or organized by abolition societies and conducted by outside speakers.[44] One would therefore conclude that the South made no effort of any kind to organize British public opinion. Neither *The Index* nor Henry Hotze, paid agents of the Confederacy in England, are anywhere to be found in Ellison's study.

"The most famous and most misleading meeting of the war years was held in the Free Trade Hall on 31 December 1862," Ellison writes. Her treatment of this "most famous" meeting is fairly typical of her methodology. She concedes that the "carefully arranged demonstration created an artificial but lasting impression of sincere working-class support for the North." It was "supposedly composed mainly of workingmen and called together quickly by two operatives, Edward Hooson and J. C. Edwards." Yet the "Union and Emancipation Society was strongly and vocally represented. . . . Even more ironically, the formally attired mayor of Manchester led a middle-class delegation which probably dominated the meeting and was largely responsible for resolutions that were passed denouncing Southern slavery and supporting the North's emancipation policy."[45]

It would seem that if one were going to set out to destroy the authenticity of the "most famous" meeting of the war years, one would at least make sure to provide ample evidence to justify the conclusion that it was a "contrived" meeting that in no way reflected the viewpoint of the Manchester workers. But no such evidence is presented. Instead, we are simply told that the Union and Emancipation Society "was strongly and vocally represented," and that "the formally attired mayor of Manchester" led a middle-class group that "probably" ran the show. To begin with, even that section of the local press cited by Ellison as her sources—and they are her only sources (although she significantly ignores the *Manchester Examiner*, which was friendly to the meeting)—conceded that the audience was made up mostly of workingmen. Then again, to leave us with a charge of "probable" domination by middle-class elements is proof that Ellison is afraid to assert that she really has no evidence that nonworking-class elements did dominate. Since the proceedings of the meeting prove that most of the speakers were actually workingmen, it is clear that Ellison had decided in advance to debunk this "most famous" Manchester gathering, regardless of the evidence contradicting her conclusion that it was a contrived gathering purporting to speak in the name of the working class.

Having now established, at least to her own satisfaction, that the famous a workingmen's meeting was a fraud, she proceeds to label it, whenever she has occasion to refer to it again, as "that famous delusory gathering of workingmen."[46]

Or take the meetings of workingmen held to greet the arrival of the *George Griswold*, the relief ship bearing supplies from the United States for the distressed operatives of Lancashire (which we will examine in detail below). Aside from failing to study any American sources, and therefore incorrectly crediting John Bright with originating the idea of a relief ship, she minimizes the significance of the meetings, ignores the number held outside of Manchester, and asserts, without the slightest supporting evidence, that the Manchester meeting was attended by "a small number of operatives," when even the local press conceded that the Free Trade Hall was so jammed with operatives that an outside meeting had to be assembled to handle the overflow. Ellison does grudgingly acknowledge: "No doubt affected by this generosity, the meeting passed a resolution pledging its gratitude and asserting its allegiance to the principle of neutrality."[47]

At no point does Ellison prove that meetings held in Lancashire to support the Confederacy were "workingmen's" meetings, a difficult task, to be sure, since even most of the pro-Southern papers in those towns did not make this claim.[48] Nor does she prove that petitions to the Cabinet and Parliament calling for a pro-Confederacy policy were signed by any workingmen. It is merely asserted.[49] Indeed, in the only case where she lists the names of individuals associated with the petitions, there are no workingmen among them.[50] Again, the very paper she cites in connection with a delegation to the government on behalf of the Confederacy made the point that the group consisted of "aristocrats and reverends," with not a single workingman among them.[51]

In the entire study, there is only one worker quoted. This is on page 142, where the anonymous "A Working Man" is briefly quoted as expressing "his satisfaction" at the possibility that "peaceful intervention" by Britain "to end the war peacefully" was being approved by "earnest men" of Bolton. Apart from the fact that the tone of this only quotation from a workingman in a work

of several hundred pages is a far cry from the belligerent one ascribed earlier by Ellison to Lancashire workers, one is inclined to ask what kind of credibility should be accorded this major dependence on an anonymous letter in the *Bolton Chronicle*[52]—especially when statements by pro-Union workingmen of Lancashire whose names are featured prominently in the local press are either dismissed by her as "contrived" or are ignored.

In the epilogue, "History of a Myth: British Workers and the American Civil War," Peter d'A. Jones does not concern himself with such mundane issues as the credibility of Ellison's assertions. He has not the slightest doubt that she has "effectively demolished" the "century-old belief" that the "British working class in general . . . driven by a deep hatred of slavery and a yearning for the creation of American-type democratic government at home, formed a massive bloc of opinion that restrained the pro-Confederate, 'aristocratic' leanings of the English government class." In his enthusiasm for his task, Jones does not seem to be aware that he is claiming more for Ellison than she does for herself. She does not assert that she is demolishing the "myth" as it applies to the "British working class in general," but only its application to the workers in Lancashire.[53]

Having thus disposed of the "myth" to his own satisfaction, Jones goes on to ask why the "myth" developed in the first place, and he answers that the theme of the self-sacrificing, devoted, pro-Union British worker has political origins with "at least three sides." First, there was the role of John Bright. Fearing that the defeat of the democratic experiment in America might retard its advent in England, Bright, together with his "famous colleague Richard Cobden," preached the story of the noble sacrifice of the Lancashire workingmen to public meetings in the years from 1861 to 1865, and, through their correspondence with important political figures in the United States, convinced even the American government and people that the starving British workers were rejecting the siren song of the "blockade opening" propagandists and remained firm to the North and freedom.[54]

Then there was the role of William E. Gladstone, who is also part of the first of the three sides. Eager to bolster a shaky case for extending the franchise, Gladstone conveniently forgot his "Jeff Davis has made a nation" Newcastle speech of 1862 and cited the "astonishing" behavior of the cotton operatives as proof that they could be trusted with the ballot. "They knew," Gladstone declared, "that their distress lay in the war, yet they never uttered the wish that any effort should be made to put an end to it, as they held it to be a war of justice, and for freedom." Then came the point of his argument:

> The admirable conduct of the suffering workpeople cannot be sufficiently acknowledged by any passing tribute of mere words; it must surely tend to increase the confidence reposed in them by other classes of society; nor can I refrain from repeating here what I have said elsewhere, and expressing my hope that whenever again the time arrives for considering the question of the franchise, that conduct will be favorably and liberally remembered."

To justify the vote, the workers of England had to prove that they could suffer admirably, hence their willingness to sacrifice for the noble cause of

freedom represented by the North had to be invented! So, at any rate, argues Jones in explaining the development of the "myth."[55]

On the American side, the second side of the three-part conspiracy was the role played by Charles Francis Adams and Henry Adams: "Father and son both hated British high society, and its patronizing, arrogant attitude towards the United States." Henry, who is accused of having penned many of his father's letters to Washington, took revenge on the British aristocracy by making the working class the real heroes of England: "By March 1863 Henry Adams had formulated the myth complete, in both its sections: the upper class were hateful and the lower noble."[56]

We come now to the third side of the conspiracy, and it is represented by one man—Karl Marx. It was he, and the Machiavellian role he played, more than any other factor perhaps, that was responsible for giving the myth currency. With his dispatches during the Civil War, the message to Lincoln, written for the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association (First International)—an organization we will discuss below—Marx created the image of the heroic British working class, who, despite the terrible hardships flowing from the cotton blockade, prevented the ruling class of England, which controlled the government, from intervening on the side of the Confederacy and breaking the blockade.

Two disparate ideological faiths, Jones argues, have worked since the Civil War against questioning the myth. For the Marxist movement, the story of the workers' defiance of the feudal slavocracy has served as an inspiring example of working-class solidarity. Americans who do not share the Marxist viewpoint have proudly accepted the idea that their Civil War was the touchstone of English progressivism, and that the sacrifices made by the British workers for the Union were rewarded after the war with the granting of suffrage. Historians, both in England and the United States, proved to be as gullible as ordinary citizens, and general histories and monographs in both countries recited the myth of the British workers' heroic support for the Union.[57]

Jones then traces briefly the reaction in historiography against the myth, highlighting particularly the contributions of Royden Harrison, but conveniently overlooking Harrison's position in his second article, in which he came down firmly on the side of the contention that the pro-Confederacy union leaders and the workers' press did not reflect the views of the British workers who, especially after 1863, almost unanimously and from one end of the island to the other, supported the Union and opposed the Confederacy. In doing this, it is worth noting, Jones followed Ellison's lead, for she writes that in several articles Harrison has "shown . . . that there was among English workingmen a considerable amount of support for the Confederacy."[58] Harrison, of course, showed nothing of the kind. He showed that there was much support among some trade union leaders and in the labor press, but in one of the articles Ellison herself cites—"British Labour and American Slavery"—he clearly asserts that the vast majority of English workingmen, especially after January 1, 1863, repudiated this position and fervently supported the Union.

Finally, Jones concludes triumphantly that the revisionist studies, climaxed by Ellison's work, have demolished the myth of the noble worker during the Civil War—the long-standing "illusion, necessary alike to the Marxist and American world views." Fortunately, it "is now evaporated."[59]

It is doubtful whether in the entire catalogue of the conspiracy theory of history, one can find a presentation so questionable as the twenty-page "The History of a Myth: British Workers and the American Civil War." It boggles the mind and strains the imagination to the breaking point to be asked to believe that so many reliable and careful twentieth-century scholars were, up to the 1950s, when the reaction got underway, taken in by a plot that was carefully hatched by John Bright, Richard Cobden, William E. Gladstone, Henry Adams, and Karl Marx.

But Jones and his defenders might respond, what about Ellison's carefully researched study of the Lancashire press? As demonstrated above, Ellison's methodology should not convince any real student of this controversial subject. To be sure, in keeping with the general tendency in current historiography to accept uncritically works that denigrate the working class,[60] Ellison's study has been hailed for having proved conclusively that the workers of Lancashire were pro-Confederate. The newly published *The Hungry Mills* by Norman Longmate, a study of Lancashire during the American Civil War, is a case in point. Longmate accepts Ellison's thesis without any further study of the subject, and, according to a review in *The Guardian*, in a "chapter based on Mary Ellison's recent research, kills the myth that the Lancashire workers were pro-Union in the American Civil War."[61]

But even a scholarly reviewer who considers Jones's epilogue "excellent," and unequivocally accepts the view that British labor support for the Union is a "myth" and a "liberal legend," finds *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* a "disappointing book." He charges the author with passing remarks and conclusions with "no elaboration" to develop her thesis; notes that "only two or three of the fifty-five Lancastrian journals listed in her bibliography have a distinctly working-class orientation"; observes that her sweeping conclusions are based on only six public meetings, none of which could be called working class, and then points to the most serious defect in this widely hailed work:

> . . . while Dr. Ellison tends to take reports of Copperhead meetings at their word, she treats those of pro-Federal gatherings as aberrations which can safely be ignored. Thus, while a pro-Confederate resolution adopted at a meeting in Preston is automatically judged "a sure indication that the majority of the people in the town were behind the South" (p. 65), a series of pro-Northern meetings held in the west of the county are abruptly dismissed as "the long arm of the Manchester Union and Emancipation Society" (p. 94). All in all, the picture which emerges is an exaggerated and oversimplified as that which prevailed before.[62]

Where, then, does the truth lie? We shall attempt to answer this question.

3. The Labor Press

What was probably the first comment by a British labor paper during the Civil War was one that struck a pro-Union note. In "The Political Week" column of the *National Co-Operative Leader* of May 17, 1861, C. C. Cosmopolitan predicted that the war in the United States "will be the source of no end of misery," not only in the United States, but also in the manufacturing districts of England, through the failure of the cotton supply, and in the whole community, through the large decrease in the export of manufactures to the American market, which would inevitably take place. As a result, "not only will the labour market be crowded with men out of work, but the food and clothing will have to be sold at an increased rate." Yet even these were not the only concerns of the *Leader*, for:

> . . . there is another danger which we must signalize; it is that, through the blind interest of the day, some of the cotton lords might be induced to sympathize with the slave-owners, and give them covert or avowed help. This must not be. England cannot, for the sake of interests endangered today, deny the noble stand she has taken against slavery. Whatever may be the amount of misery, produced by this struggle, we have no doubt that, ultimately, it will turn out to be productive of great advantage to the cause of free labour.[1]

The *Bricklayers' Trade Circular* of October, 1861 also took a pro-Union stand, although not as vigorously as the *Leader*. It briefly summed up the issues involved in the Civil War. The Southern states, it explained to its readers, claimed that they were exercising the right of self-government and that they had as much right to do so as the American colonies had to separate from the mother country in 1776. But, the *Circular* argued, it was necessary not to be confused by this analogy, for there was a real difference. The colonies "had a great grievance to complain of, which they could not get redressed, while the Southerners are fighting for greater despotic power in relation to slavery." The *Circular* made it clear that it stood with the Northern states, but it urged them to "repudiate slavery altogether, and then they will have the sympathy of all lovers of progress and liberty."

But the views of the *National Co-operative Leader* and the *Bricklayers' Trade Circular* were distinctly the exception, and Royden Harrison's evaluation of the pro-Confederate stance of the leading British labor papers early in the Civil War is substantially correct.[2] A study of the labor press confirms