
Socialism and War

by Morris Hillquit

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In every civil war waged by an oppressed class of the population against their compatriot-oppressors or carried on for the cause of liberty or progress, the Socialists range themselves on the side of the oppressed and of progress.

Thus in our own Civil War the sympathies of the young Socialist movement were emphatically with the Union army. The ranks of the Socialist organizations in the United States, at that time composed largely of German immigrants, were almost entirely depleted on account of the numerous enlistments of their members, and many leading Socialists of that day, such as August Willich, Robert Rosa, and Joseph Weydemeyer, gained high distinction in the Union army.

In London the newly organized International Workingmen's Association enthusiastically endorsed the cause of the North in an address to President Lincoln, drafted by Karl Marx. "From the beginning of the titanic American strife the workingmen of Europe have instinctively felt that the Star-Spangled Banner carries the destiny of their class," reads the historic document, and again: "When an oligarchy of 300,000 slave holders, for the first time in the annals of the world, dared to inscribe 'Slavery' on the banner of armed revolt; when on the very spot where hardly a century ago the idea of one great democratic republic had first sprung up, whence the first declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the 18th Century, when on that very spot the counter-revolution...cynically proclaimed property in man to be 'the cornerstone of the new edifice' — then the working classes

of Europe understood at once...that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy war of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic."

It is possible that our Civil War may yet be reenacted on a larger scale and even over more vital issues. The worldwide struggles between capital and labor, between plutocracy and the people may be determined by armed conflict in one or more of the modern countries. Whenever and wherever that should occur, the Socialists of all countries will undoubtedly be found fighting on the side of labor.

The wars which thus invite the support rather than the condemnation of Socialists have not even always been restricted to national or popular struggles for liberation or emancipation. Socialists have even been known to favor certain wars of invasion under circumstances which led them to believe that they would serve the cause of progress and civilization. Such wars are in the nature of crusades or "Holy wars" in the name of liberty. Thus in 1848, the youthful founders of the modern Socialist philosophy, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, called for "a general war of revolutionary Europe against the great stronghold of European reaction — Russia." But as the Socialist and labor movement of each country grew in strength and numbers the notion of bestowing political liberty on any people by the intervention of foreign powers gradually subsided, and today it may be said to have been entirely abandoned. The modern Socialist doctrine is that the people of each country must conquer their own political and economic emancipation, and that while the workers of all countries can and should help one another in their respective struggles, no nation can depend for its salvation entirely on another nation.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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