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Karl Marx, *Address to the National Labour Union of the United States*⁹¹

Fellow Workmen: [...] In a congratulatory address to Mr Lincoln on his re-election as president, we expressed our conviction that the American Civil War would prove of as great import to the advancement of the working class as the American War of Independence had proved to that of the middle class. And, in point of fact, the victorious termination of the antislavery war has opened a new epoch in the annals of the working class. In the States themselves, an independent working-class movement, looked upon with an evil eye by your old parties and their professional politicians, has since that date sprung into life. To fructify it wants years of peace. To crush it, a war between the United States and England is wanted.

The next palpable effect of the Civil War was, of course, to deteriorate the position of the American workman. In the United States, as in Europe, the monster incubus of a national debt was shifted from hand to hand, to settle down on the shoulders of the working class. The prices of necessities, says one of your statesmen, have since 1860 risen 78 per cent, while the wages of unskilled labour rose 50 per cent, those of skilled labour 60 per cent only. 'Pauperism,' he complains, 'grows now in America faster than population.' Moreover, the suffering of the working of the working classes set off as a foil the newfangled luxury of financial aristocrats, shoddy aristocrats, and similar vermin bred by wars. Yet, for all this, the Civil War did compensate by freeing the slave and the consequent moral impetus it gave to your own class movement. A second war, not hallowed by a sublime purpose and a great social necessity, but of the Old World's type, would forge chains for the

⁹¹ This text is an excerpt from an address written by Karl Marx (see note 1), and approved by the GC 11 May 1869. It was published 4 days later in *The Bee-Hive*. The full version is in GC, III: 319–21.

free labourer instead of tearing asunder those of the slave.⁹² The accumulated misery left in its track would afford your capitalists at once the motive and the means of divorce the working class from its bold and just aspirations by the soulless sword of a standing army.

On you, then, depends the glorious task to prove to the world that now at last the working classes are bestriding the scene of history no longer as servile retainers but as independent actors, conscious of their own responsibility, and able to command peace where their would-be masters shout war.

⁹² The threat of war with Britain loomed due to American claims for shipping destroyed by the British-built ship *Alabama* under the Confederate flag. Belligerent politicians demanded compensation of as much as \$2 billion.