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## Book Reviews

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# The Confederate conspiracy of Lords Palmerston and Russell

by Stuart D. Rosenblatt

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### **Union In Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War**

by Howard Jones

University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993

300 pages, hardbound, \$39.95.

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Howard Jones's *Union in Peril* should be required reading for President Bill Clinton as he embarks on his still tenuous "break with England." There should be no illusions as to the lengths to which the British will venture to maintain their control over the United States today, just as there was no limit over a hundred years ago (1860-65) when the British tried for the third time to reconquer their former colonial possession. Jones's book clearly delineates the ugly anti-American, pro-Confederate intentions of British foreign policy during the U.S. Civil War. His work is a vivid portrayal of the "Venetian" methods of Britain's Prime Minister Lord Palmerston: divide and conquer, "let them fight each other," and support for the "national rights of self-determination of an oppressed people"—in this case, the slave-holding South.

Unfortunately, *Union in Peril* does not explore the role of Czar Alexander II and Russia in preserving the American Union, but instead credits the legalistic arguments of British Secretary of War George Lewis for preventing Britain's entry into the conflict.

Nevertheless, we have an excellent portrayal of the evil minds at work in Victorian England. Jones captures the dynamic operating among Palmerston, Gladstone, and their accomplice, Lord John Russell, grandfather of the 20th-century's evil man, Lord Bertrand Russell.

### **Exploiting the weakness of Britain's rivals**

From the moment the Confederacy was launched in 1861, Prime Minister Palmerston was hard at work on the critical

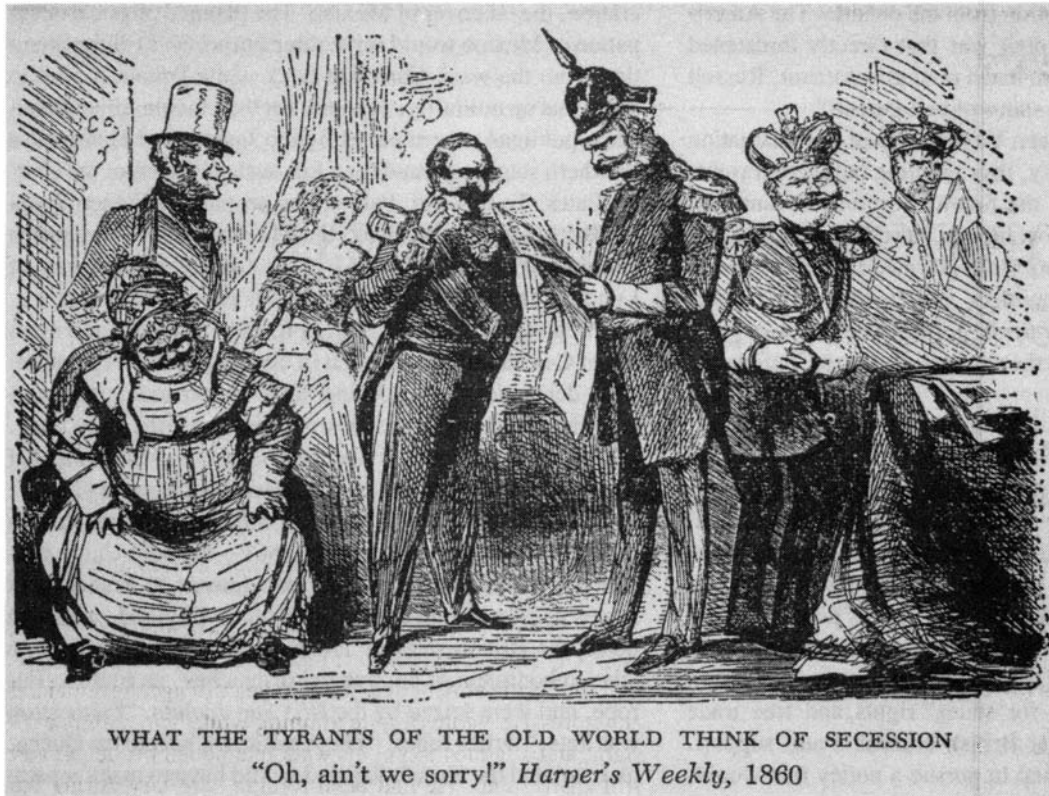
issue of official British recognition of the South. Recognition would bring with it both logistical aid and a shift in the balance of power on the American continent. Alarm signals went off in all Union quarters.

"Union apprehensions regarding recognition appeared justified. The prime minister, Lord Palmerston, was a perennial arch-critic of America. Now 76 years of age, he remained an impressive figure despite thinning white hair, failing eyesight, and a faint stoop in his walk that belied his height and still sharp mind. He had been foreign secretary during the 1830s, when England threatened war with America over the Alexander McLeod affair. Both in and out of office during the years afterward, Palmerston had been conspicuous on the international scene, never failing to promote British interests by exploiting the weaknesses of rivals. He disliked Americans in general and [U.S. Secretary of State William] Seward in particular; nor did he approve either of American republican government or of its outspokenly Anglophobic Irish-American journalists. In foreign affairs he believed that the only way to undermine America's claim to manifest destiny was to make bold displays of British strength. . . .

"Unknown to Americans, Palmerston had already toyed with the possibility of extending recognition to the South. Less than two weeks after South Carolina announced secession in December 1860, he considered a complicated arrangement that involved the offer of recognition and the use of his longtime opposition to the slave trade as a lever to prevent the South from reopening the practice. . . . Palmerston did not abandon the plan until the summer of 1861."

At the outbreak of hostilities, British Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell declared his nominal opposition to separation; but he soon recanted and stated he would hold all support for the Union in abeyance. Jones then describes Russell's Mazzinian<sup>1</sup> world view:

"A Whig in philosophy and a Liberal in party, he thought that a people had a natural right to rebel against an established authority if it became oppressive, and he seemed to place credence in the South's claim to independence over an imperial North, which itself denied that slavery was a cause for the



A cartoon from Harper's Weekly lampoons the European oligarchs' crocodile tears over the Confederacy's secession.

war. Russell exemplified the outlook of many Englishmen in never coming to understand the North's reverence for the Union. During the Italian crisis in October 1860, he had cited the Swiss theorist on international law Emmerich de Vattel in arguing that the rebellious peoples in Naples and the Roman states were the best qualified to handle their own affairs. Although the foreign secretary insisted that he would not attempt to judge the question of secession in America, he failed to convince Dallas [George Dallas, U.S. Minister in London] that England's motives were pure. Russell, it seemed, reflected his people's opinion that peaceful disunion would benefit both North and South and, by the way, the rest of the world as well. The British did not grasp the dangers of disunion, Dallas surmised. Russell's reply also seemed purposeful. In less than a week an outspoken Southern sympathizer in Parliament, William Gregory, intended to present a motion in the House of Commons calling for recognition of the Confederacy."

### France joins the plot

As the insurrection spread, Palmerston and Russell conspired to support the South. "Southern separation seemed irrevocable. Palmerston and Russell thought so even before the Confederacy had reached full size. The prime minister had told Queen Victoria on New Year's Day of 1861 that the Union was virtually dissolved. And despite Russell's claimed refusal to judge American affairs, he had decided as early as

January that the Union should acknowledge the legal right of secession and permit separation. 'One Republic to be constituted on the principle of freedom and personal liberty—the other on the principle of slavery and the mutual surrender of fugitives.' "

At this point, the government of France joined forces with England against the Union. As Jones elaborates: ". . . Russell's support for an Anglo-French concert suggested to anxious Union officials that the two European nations were in league to encourage a breakup of the United States that would permit them to expand their interests in the Western Hemisphere." Jones quotes the correspondence between George Dallas and U.S. Secretary of State Seward as follows: "On May 22, the Union's minister in Paris, William Dayton, wrote Seward after a meeting with Thouvenel, the foreign secretary, six days earlier, 'You will not fail to have observed that the action of France and England upon this question of belligerent rights has been upon a mutual understanding and agreement' (Dayton to Seward, May 22, 1861)."

Shortly thereafter, Russell moved toward open support for the South. His rationalization included the contention that the American Civil War itself would disrupt trade with both South and North (the Southern cotton trade was financed out of Anglophile New York banks), and therefore, should be ended—with the obvious implication that the Union would be left severed. "Russell considered the Lincoln administration wrong in dismissing southern discontent as a mere rebel-

lion that deserved no attention from the outside. The American events constituted a civil war that directly threatened British interests. The South had a civil government, Russell insisted, and deserved the status of belligerent.”

On May 13, 1861, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation of official British neutrality, thus granting belligerent rights to the South. “This gave the South enormous advantages, including the right to borrow money, purchase war matériel, enter British ports with loot from privateering, commission vessels from British shipbuilders, and, as long as the actual equipping and fitting for wartime purposes did not take place in England, to incorporate the new vessels into a Confederate navy.”<sup>2</sup>

### Free trade: a cause for war

The declaration of neutrality enraged the North, forcing Russell to publicly clarify his position. “The British sympathized with the North, Russell declared, but they were not pleased with the Union’s blockade, the high Morrill Tariff, and the designation of Southern privateers as pirates.” Jones further elaborates the free trade madness of Britain’s lordships as a key element of the British support for the South: “The South’s arguments for states’ rights and free trade emerged as principles that British citizens could support. England seemed determined to pursue a policy that would, even if inadvertently, endanger relations with the United States.”

The North became increasingly hostile to Britain, realizing that British “neutrality” was but one short step from “recognition.” As diplomatic relations worsened, Palmerston began openly contemplating war against the United States. He called for sending three battalions of troops to Canada to shore up a weak military flank. In June 1861, France and England began escalating plans for war against America, but they received a big shock when the Union expanded the military buildup and initiated a full coastal blockade. The British secretly worried that if Lincoln were to suppress the rebels, he would turn on England next.

### The Mexican flank

This concern was quickly extinguished with the stunning Union loss at Bull Run. Palmerston was gleeful, quipping that “Bull’s Run should be known as ‘Yankees Run.’” Russell thought the division of the United States was now all but a *fait accompli*. Palmerston began beating the drums for recognition, launching a series of dirty operations, including the Bunch-Mure Affair, involving the misuses of diplomatic pouches by a British consul. The moves were coordinated with the French puppets, who stepped up their call for intervention. The French sent Prince Napoleon Jerome Bonaparte on a grand tour of the South, and, moreover, admonished the Union against any interference with their trade in the South.

With the move for intervention now initiated, Palmerston switched gears and cooked up an Anglo-French flanking op-

eration, the takeover of Mexico. The planned physical occupation of Mexico would serve three purposes: 1) divert attention from the weak Canadian flank while Britain moved to shore that up militarily, 2) knock out the Lincoln-allied Mexican republican movement of Benito Juárez, and 3) provide a Southern staging ground for a full-scale invasion of the United States. To this end, Palmerston proposed a Franco-Spanish-British intervention into the Mexican Civil War, which culminated on Oct. 31, 1861 in the signing of the Treaty of London. The invasion of Mexico was now operational.

Meanwhile, John Russell, Lord Robert Cecil, and a number of Conservatives came out in open support of separation. They demanded the reopening of the cotton trade, preposterously saying that this was the only way to end the slave trade, because the South would find itself isolated on a continent of free countries and would be forced to give up slavery!

Lincoln countered Palmerston with what became known as the Trent Affair in November 1861—the bold Union capture of John Slidell, Confederate Minister to France, and James Mason, Confederate Minister to England, while on board the British steamer *Trent*. They were deemed to be “the embodiment of contraband dispatches” en route to Europe, and were seized by the *USS San Jacinto*. “Palmerston was irate,” writes Jones. “The Americans, he told the Queen, had violated the British flag and would have to make reparations. He fumed to Russell that they had intended this ‘deliberate and premeditated insult’ to ‘provoke’ a quarrel. Russell called for a strong stand and warned that the Americans were ‘very dangerous people to run away from.’” The British were now openly gunning for war. Palmerston gave the United States seven days to release the captives and issue an apology. The British government also imposed an embargo on saltpeter, the primary component of gunpowder. Of course, France backed the British ultimatum, as did U.S. Commanding Gen. George B. McClellan, who joined the call to release the prisoners! Russell commented glibly on British agent McClellan, “I wish McClellan could be made Dictator.”

Lincoln would eventually release the prisoners, but only after he had forced all players to show their cards, including his own generals.

### Britain’s hypocrisy about slavery

Realizing the courage of Lincoln and, at least in these situations, Secretary of State Seward, the increasingly harried British now began to move for open recognition of the South. The new argument was simple: Since the Union did not make slavery an issue, the British asserted that the South wanted “independence,” while the Union obviously desired an “empire.” Hence the British, arguing in the tradition of their agent Mazzini, would have to support the South’s right to self-determination.

Lincoln pulled the rug out from beneath the British hypocrites by circulating his proposal to free the slaves; frantic,

the British labelled this a move toward potential race war! British Ambassador Lyons stated in a letter to Russell, " 'The question is rapidly tending towards the issue either of peace and a recognition of the separation, or a Proclamation of Emancipation and the raising of a servile insurrection.' Russell expressed alarm that the President should want a 'war of emancipation.' "

How ironic: the British racial imperialists accusing the U.S. republic of conducting a racist imperialist war. Perhaps they were worried about the consequences of Lincoln's emancipation moves on their own Empire?

### Free trade and blockade running

On a different front, the Union blockade of the South was beginning to show some success, and Foreign Minister Russell moved to invoke free trade as a way to break the blockade. The British were particularly upset at its success in halting cotton shipments, and they were increasingly worried about the strategic threat posed by the growing U.S. Navy. This issue burst on the scene in late March 1862, with the clash of ironclads *Monitor* and *Merrimack* at Hampton Roads, Virginia. While the military result was a standoff, the significance of a powerful new Yankee navy was not lost on the British.

Despite all the obvious setbacks to the Confederates, the British never flagged in their support, even if it brought them into clearly contradictory arguments. As author Anton Chaitkin has amply documented in his book *Treason in America*, the Confederacy was a British creation, the Rebellion was their doing. They were dumbfounded at the resiliency of Lincoln, and his ability to render impotent their every move.

### The U.S.-Russian alliance

A substantial portion of Jones's book is occupied with chronicling the titanic struggle of Lincoln to defend the American republic against the desperate attempt of Palmerston, Russell, et al. to fracture the Union. Jones unfortunately fails to locate the ultimate cause for the rebuff of the English efforts: the 1863 alliance of Czar Alexander II of Russia with Abraham Lincoln. This alliance broke the back of the British interventionists and changed the course of history, as documented by Konstantin George in *EIR's Feature* of June 26, 1992 ("The U.S. Russian Entente That Saved the Union.")

That this lesson of 1863 should not be lost on Americans today is quite important. The United States republic is locked again in a life or death struggle to free the world from the ideological and political grip of the decaying British imperium. President Clinton's recent declarations in that direction underscore this concern. To sever the "special relationship with England" once and for all would pay appropriate homage to Abraham Lincoln.

### Notes

1. Giuseppe Mazzini, 1805-1872, was an agent of Prime Minister Palm-

erston who steered British revolts under cover of so-called liberation struggles against monarchies or empires, which happened to obstruct the British road to world empire.

2. As the Civil War closed, Queen Victoria's diaries contained more references to her fear of a U.S. attack against Britain because of the latter's support for the South during the war (particularly in the area of shipbuilding), and because of Irish-American activity.

## Books Received

**Lincoln in American Memory**, by Merrill D. Peterson, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, 482 pages, \$30

**Tainted Breeze: The Great Hanging at Gainesville, Texas, 1862**, by Richard B. McCaslin, Louisiana State University Press, 234 pages, hardbound, \$22.95

**The South Was Right!** by James Ronald Kennedy and Walter Donald Kennedy, Pelican Publishing, Gretna, La., 1994, 432 pages, hardbound, \$22.50

**I Am Roe: My Life, Roe v. Wade, and Freedom of Choice**, by Norma McCorvey with Andy Meisler, HarperCollins, New York, 1994, 216 pages, hardbound, \$23

**When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleets of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433**, by Louise Levathes, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994, 252 pages, hardbound, \$23

**Perspectives on Modern China: Four Anniversaries**, edited by Kenneth Lieberthal, Joyce Kallgren, Roderick MacFarquhar, and Frederick Wakeman, Jr., M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1991, 433 pages; hardbound, \$59.95; paperback, \$18.95

**The Making of a Soviet Scientist: My Adventures in Nuclear Fusion and Space from Stalin to Star Wars**, by Roald Sagdeev, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1994, 352 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

**Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality**, by Robert Pynsent, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, 244 pages, hardbound, \$45

**Multilateral Debt: An Emerging Crisis**, by Percy Mistry, Forum on Debt and Development (Fondad), The Hague, Netherlands, 1994, 76 pages, paperback, \$15

**The Normandy Diary of Marie-Louise Osmont, 1940-1944**, by Marie-Louise Osmont, Random House, New York, 1994, 118 pages, hardbound, \$17