

**WASHINGTON**

**AND**

**LINCOLN**

*The American Tradition*

**BY JOSEPH NORTH**

"In President Lincoln we mourn a fellow-citizen. There are no longer any countries shut up in narrow frontiers. Our country is everywhere where there are neither masters nor slaves—wherever people live in liberty or fight for it. We cast our eyes to the other side of the ocean to learn how a people which has known how to make itself free knows how to preserve its freedom.

"He who has just been struck down was a citizen of that republic where the great men are—not the conquerors who violate right and the sovereignty of peoples, but the founders and the guardians of their independence, like Washington and Lincoln."—Resolution to the American Ambassador to France from the people of Paris upon hearing that Abraham Lincoln had died at the hands of an assassin. (Quoted in *The War Years*, by Carl Sandburg.)

# WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN

## The American Tradition

BY JOSEPH NORTH

THE great men of February—George Washington and Abraham Lincoln—are passwords of freedom in every tongue of the world. Their ideas and their deeds have warmed the hearts of men and fired their imagination wherever tyranny reigns. Today their homeland is again in danger: it is locked in battle with the greatest enemy of mankind—Hitlerism—a way of life which, if triumphant, will erase forever the names and ideas of Washington and Lincoln, will throw America and all mankind back into a mechanized darkness such as even the inquisitors of the Middle Ages could not imagine. Today, more than ever in our history, it behooves us to learn the lessons of 1776 and 1861, to profit by these lessons.

What in the life and times of the Virginia planter and the Illinois backwoodsman endowed their people with that unquenchable hatred of slavery? Why did Tom Paine, the Englishman who offered his life and genius to America, later send the key of the fallen Bastille to Washington with word "that the principles of America opened the Bastille"? Why did Leo Tolstoy, the giant figure of Russian literature, write in 1865 from far-off Yasnaya Polyana (desecrated by the Nazi vandals only a month ago): "If one would know the greatness of Lincoln one should listen to the stories which are told about him in other parts of the world. . . ." And he related

the stirring story of the Circassian tribes who pleaded that he tell of the hero from America "which is so far away that if a youth should journey to reach it he would be an old man when he arrived."

What was it in the lives of our forefathers which spanned the oceans and penetrated into the remotest fastnesses of the continents?

This: George Washington led our people through the stern years of the Revolutionary War for national independence that resulted in the creation of American democracy. Abraham Lincoln led our people through the Civil War to preserve our nation unbroken and to retain our national freedom through the abolition of slavery. This is what our ancestors fought to create in the eighteenth century, what they fought to preserve in the nineteenth century, and what we must fight to defend in the twentieth.

What, in brief, do both these wars teach that has decisive bearing upon our war today? This much is clear: both great wars demanded the wholehearted unity of the people. The structure of that unity was based upon the willingness of all strata of the people, *and particularly of the working classes*, to sacrifice everything for victory. Lincoln it was who said: "Working men are the basis of all governments." More: both wars taught that international solidarity was absolutely essential for victory. Good warriors seek good allies. Furthermore, the moral and political principles which underlay both wars were the results of *international* principles, ideas that hurdle oceans, and there were men everywhere who were willing to sacrifice everything to ensure the victory of those principles in whatever lands men fought for them.

Furthermore, both wars taught that eternal vigilance against the enemy within, as well as at the fronts, was an absolute essential. The fifth column is a twentieth century term for an ageless phenomenon.

The great genius of Washington and Lincoln was that they realized these historic prerequisites for victory. Achieving

them, they led their peoples to victory. These are the fundamental lessons of those great days. If we learn them, and learn them we must, we too will win the victory they won.

In 1776 the rich wilderness of the continent stood unexploited; the mercantile capitalists were hampered by the competition from London; the farmers yearned for the Crown-owned land; the grievous taxes imposed upon the colonies fell on rich and poor alike, rendered them kin in opposition. Thus unity of interest grew up; thus the thirteen colonies overcame their isolationism, banded together in various congresses to achieve a unity for independence.

In 1776 the colonists—mercantile capitalist, landowner, artisan, working man, farmer, frontiersman, combined to face a common enemy—the tyrant from overseas—King George III. They sought liberty, independence, a sovereign land. America required sovereignty to work out its own destiny. Differences between all strata of the populace had to be resolved to present a common front against the common enemy: unity was the dominant essential to mobilize three million Americans against the most powerful country of the world. Unity against the enemy from without and within; unity to win on the battlefields of Saratoga and at Yorktown; unity to defeat the appeasement-ridden Tories, and the open traitors, the Benedict Arnolds. Under Washington, that unity was won sufficiently to tear away from King George. The victory resounded throughout the world: inspired the people of France a few years later—1789—to destroy their own tyrant, Louis XVI. Later a man named Lenin, who led his people against the Tsar of all the Russias, wrote: "The history of modern civilized America opens with one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars. . . . It was a war of the American people against English robbers who subjected America and held it in colonial slavery."\* Earl Browder, son of Kansas, whose fore-

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\* V. I. Lenin, *A Letter to American Workers*, International Publishers, p. 9.

bears fought in the wars of 1776 and 1861, later said: "Everything that has marked off the development of America, as distinguished from that of Europe, finds its origin in this 'great, really liberating, really revolutionary war,' which planted deeply in the American people the aspirations of democracy; its unexampled growth in wealth and productive resources, its welding of a population of manifold national and racial origin into a united nation, and its extension of the concept of the nation to embrace half a continent—all those features that made America pre-eminent among capitalist nations found their origin in the revolutionary war and the mobilization of the people to carry it to success. This war unleashed incalculable forces among the masses, which operate down to the present day."\*

To win that war necessitated more strength than the young, industrially feeble, and financially impoverished colonies could muster. Allies had to be found: and they were found. France, Holland and Spain entered the war against King George. The haughty imperialists of London had to fight on more than one front. France, France of the Jacobins, of the Marseillaise, hated and maligned by the Tories for its noble vision of "liberty, equality, fraternity," proved the closest friend and ally of this young nation. Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State under Washington, wrote to William Short, chargé d'affaires in Paris, that he "considered France as the *sheet anchor* of this country and its friendship as a first object." Washington agreed with him.

The Revolutionary War found adherents in all countries of Europe. Many within Britain itself opposed the war. The outstanding example was Tom Paine, friend of Jefferson, with whom he collaborated in writing the Declaration of Independence, and whose flaming pamphlets, written on drumheads at the front, were worth divisions to Washington in the darkest days of the war.

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\* Earl Browder, *The People's Front*, International Publishers, p. 251.

Men made their way here from all lands of the world. Lafayette came from France; Von Steuben from Prussia; Kosciusko from Poland. Many Irish revolutionaries crossed the waters to fight for Washington. The Irish immigrants here made the greatest contribution in manpower. Historians estimate that one-third of the officers and a large proportion of troops were of Irish parentage. The first brigadier general to fall was Richard Montgomery, an Irishman. The Second Continental Congress, May 10, 1775, sent a resolution to the Irish people condemning wrongs against Ireland, and offered the United States as asylum for Irish exiles. History will never forget the patriotic labors of those Irish-Americans, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, General John Sullivan, nor the first commodore of the United States Navy, John Barry. Nor the deeds of men of other nationalities: Haym Solomon, Jew, and John Paul Jones, Scotchman. We will never forget that the first Colonial to fall in the hail of British bullets at Boston Common was a Negro, Crispus Attucks. (The first American to fall in the Pacific during the bombardment of Pearl Harbor was Robert H. Brooks, a Negro.)

Liberty is not won easily and, once won, it must be guarded incessantly. After Washington's death, a small group of powerful men, those whose financial interests tied them in manifold ways to British capital, sought to circumscribe the gains of the Revolution, to place the destiny of America into the hands of a privileged handful. This group, the Federalists, was led by Alexander Hamilton. Opposed to him was Thomas Jefferson, who fought for the democratic concept. The Federalists put through the subversive Alien and Sedition laws (forerunner to the labor-hating, red-baiting legislation Congressman Dies represents today); but it was the tireless enthusiasm of Jefferson and the working classes—the small farmers, the little business men, the artisans—who rescinded the anti-popular legislation, who safeguarded the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and won through to a more democratic nation. This required the sternest measures against the fifth column of that

day: that section of the Federalists who actually sought to divide the United States, to reclaim the West and New England for the British crown. Chief Justice Marshall, for example, was deep in the councils of those who sought to rescind the gains of 1776. Aaron Burr plotted to break the Louisiana Territory away from this country and to set himself up as a dictator. It was only the vigilance of the people, led by Thomas Jefferson, that saved the fruits of the Revolution for the coming generations.

However, there was one great drawback to the full development of the United States as a bourgeois-democratic power: that was the existence of slavery. As Earl Browder put it: "In the years 1776 to 1787, the United States won its independence as a nation, and fashioned a stable state power, within which the only serious obstacle to unfettered capitalist development was the compromise with slavery."\*

America had marched with giant strides across the continent in the years after 1776. Artisans and land-hungry workers followed the plow across the Mississippi, up the Northwest Territory. The Gold Rush of 1848 shifted a portion of the population to the West Coast. But everywhere men went, the shadow of slavery followed. The powerful plantation-owners of the South, basing their economy upon slave labor, fought tooth and nail for control over the new territories. They acted as a brake upon the full expansion of the young republic. This prevented the full maturing of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Men and women everywhere debated the paramount issue of the time. The issue was bitterly argued in the halls of Congress. By 1861 the debate had so rent the country that recourse to arms was inevitable: the Slavocracy had decided upon secession.

Abraham Lincoln determined to defend the unity of the nation. No country can long endure, he said, "half-slave, half-free." His program ensured his election by a combination of

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\* *Ibid.*, p. 336.



northern merchants, the industrial capitalists, the farmers, the proletarians, and the Negro people. Again, differences between these groups had to be submerged against the common enemy—the secessionist slaveowners. Unity was the fundamental necessity: again, the backbone of unity was the working classes. Their interest in victory of the North was clear, undeniable; Lincoln registered this fact when he met with a committee from the New York Workingmen's Democratic Republican Association. "None," he said, "are so deeply interested to resist the present rebellion as the working people." He had told them earlier, "You comprehend, as your address shows, that the existing rebellion means more, and tends to do more, than the perpetuation of African slavery—that it is, in fact, a war upon the rights of all working people." He stressed the necessity of unity of labor. He warned them to "beware of prejudice, working division and hostility" among themselves. That counsel is as wise today in this war against Hitlerism, labor's greatest enemy, as it was then.

Labor had made its position clear the very first days of Lincoln's election to office: upon his journey to the White House he was met in Cincinnati by a leader of the powerful German workingmen's society, Frederick Oberkleine, who warned the President-elect: "We firmly adhere to the principles which directed our votes in your favor." The working men were aware of powerful pressures to induce compromise on the paramount issue. Oberkleine sought assurances against half-hearted measures. "If to this end you should be in need of men, the German free working men, with others, will rise as one man at your call, ready to risk their lives in the effort to maintain the victory already won by freedom over slavery."

It was then that Lincoln uttered his famous statement: "I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, that the working men are the basis of all governments for the plain reason that they are the more numerous. . . ."

As in the Revolutionary War, half a century earlier, progressives and revolutionaries of all nations flocked to the

standard of democracy. Many exiles of the German revolution of 1848 fought in the Union ranks. They included followers of Karl Marx, who played a prominent role due to their political principles and military experience. Among them were Joseph Weydemeyer, August Willich, Friedrich Arneke. Names like Carl Schurz, the great liberal, came to the fore in the fighting. Historians estimate that some 200,000 working men and farmers of German extraction volunteered to fight for Lincoln.

Again, America's international relations played a crucial role. The British Government sympathized with the Confederacy and threatened to enter the war on the side of Jefferson Davis. But the working classes of Britain, despite the unemployment caused by the lack of cotton imports due to the conflict, stood by the North. Their pro-Union demonstrations, inspired by Karl Marx and the International Workingmen's Association, prevented the rulers of Britain from entering the fray against the North. Lincoln's cause was immeasurably aided by this support.

And he desperately needed that support: treason, as in the Revolutionary War, lurked in high places. Frederick Douglass, great Negro leader, whose birthday falls, symbolically apt, in February also, wrote: "The friends of the Confederate cause here were neither few nor insignificant. They were among the rich and influential. A wink or a nod from such men might unchain the hand of violence and set order and law at defiance." The Copperhead Democrats plotted to unseat Lincoln in the election of 1864. Whispers spread about the country that a "peace could be patched up." Names like Vallandigham became synonymous with treason to the cause of the Union. (President Roosevelt likened Lindbergh to a Vallandigham last April, which resulted in Lindbergh's severance from the Army.) The plotters insinuated that the Confederacy was still powerful, could hold out indefinitely. The Mayor of New York, Fernando Wood, an unscrupulous politician (who had intrigued for the secession of New York from the Union),

stirred up anti-draft riots. But Lincoln determined to fight on to the end. His pledge to the working men made at Cincinnati was inviolate. That firm decision won the day for the cause of union and freedom. His Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, issued despite powerful opposition, enlisted full support of the Negroes on both sides of the line. It supplied the Northern cause with a new source of energy and enthusiasm. The Negro regiments, that had fought bravely heretofore, now battled like demons, demonstrated to the country how correct Lincoln's decision was.

Lincoln was triumphant at the polls. As Earl Browder writes in his book *The People's Front*: "It is because Lincoln was a fighter, a man of principle, one who never compromised the central issues of his cause once the struggle was well begun, that he carried our nation through a great crisis and opened up a new period of progress. He did not allow the forces of reaction to advance and conquer new positions while he was in office. His second campaign for the Presidency was waged on issues and slogans representing an advance, not a retreat, as compared with his first campaign. Thus it was possible for the Address of the First International, written by Marx to Lincoln, to describe the difference between his two campaigns by saying: 'If resistance to the slave power was the watchword of your first election, the triumphant war-cry of your re-election is "death to slavery."'"

Lincoln was struck down in the hour of triumph: the intrigues of the Copperheads had inspired the fanaticism of the assassin. Thus died the great leader—and a world mourned. London's *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote: "He was our best friend. He never lent himself to the purposes of that foolish and wicked minority which tried to set enmity between America and England." Again, as Sandburg put it, "In England and on the Continent, all forms of labor organization, trade unions, fraternal and mutual-benefit societies, socialist and communist bodies, spoke their words of sympathy and loss in resolutions and declarations, in addresses spread over their

journals. They could never forget, said many of these, the American statesman of power and authority who had said, 'Capital is the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed'; 'The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations, and tongues, and kindreds'; 'I feel that time is coming when the sun shall shine, the rain fall, on no man who shall go forth to unrequited toil'; 'Thank God, we live in a country where working men have the right to strike.' "

Thus died "the single-minded son of the working class," as Marx called him. But his ideas, like those of Washington, live forever. The traditions of America spanned the world. Today, the wars of 1776 and 1861 inspire whole populations, as well as the people of this country. As Earl Browder put it: "This war [the war for independence] unleashed incalculable forces among the masses, which operate down to the present day."

Generations have grown up with the dream of those principles. Peoples have produced leaders whose way of life is predicated upon liberty, upon national sovereignty, upon international solidarity. One of those, whose quotations form a large part of this pamphlet, is Earl Browder of Kansas. A discussion of our American tradition cannot be complete, even in so brief a pamphlet as this, without reference to that "inland American" as Walt Whitman called the sturdy citizens of the prairie states. Few men in our history have seen so clearly, have delved so deeply into the American tradition as has the man of Kansas. He it was who said, "Few countries have a richer heritage of traditions of revolutionary struggle for human freedom than our own United States." He it was, who, combining his knowledge of this country's experience with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, was able to see deeper, more clearly, than any of our contemporaries.

Had America heeded his counsel many things would have been different today. He had read aright the tremendous lessons of our history. He understood the need for national

unity against the common enemy; he understood the necessity for international solidarity. He warred against the most dangerous force in the world this past terrible decade—fascism. Expert in Far Eastern realities, he understood the full meaning of Japan's rape of Manchuria as far back as 1931. He ranged tirelessly up and down the country in the years Hitlerism grew to power—nay, was ceded power by the Chamberlains, the Laval and the Pétains—and he urged international unity, concerted action, to stop the aggressor in his tracks. In May, 1938, he said at Madison Square Garden: "The greatest danger to the peace of the whole world is the retreat of the peace-seeking nations before the fascist offensive." Combine, he urged, unite, work together against those who seek to enchain the world, to destroy the sovereignty of nations. He saw through the diabolic propaganda of the fascist enemy that the Axis was engaged in an "anti-Comintern" crusade. He warned that the destruction of Republican Spain was no "anti-Comintern" act; that the dismemberment and destruction of Czechoslovakia were not "anti-Comintern" acts. "If this course is not stopped," he said, "the fascist war aggression will soon be on American soil itself."

In the same speech at Madison Square Garden, he pleaded for clear thinking. "Those for whom I speak," he said, "and on this I am sure I speak the mind of the majority of the American people, see in every victory of the fascist war-makers, a darker gathering of clouds of war over the world, including America." To those who cried that the United States is entirely immune from foreign invasion, he said in 1938 with almost clairvoyant wisdom, "that is true only for the immediate period and the present world relation of forces, but will be changed substantially if the fascist governments succeed in subjugating Western Europe and China, and second, it is true only for continental United States and does not apply to the Philippines, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, or Alaska." How history has corroborated his wise counsel!

Like Jefferson in his day, urging close collaboration with

France, that country so hated and feared by the Tories, Browder urged the unity of the United States with that great republic, the Soviet Union. He pleaded years ago for what today has become a wartime necessity for victory, the full, active coalition of all countries who wish to safeguard their sovereignty—the United Nations.

And where is this man who saw so clearly, who read the present and foresaw the future from his deep knowledge of the past? Like Tom Paine, in his day, who was thrown into prison in Paris through the intrigues of the Tories, who could not bear his plain talk, Earl Browder today languishes in the penitentiary at Atlanta. Tried on a ridiculous charge, a trumped up charge of passport irregularity, he was sentenced to four long years in prison. And there he is today. Today, at a time when America, more than ever in its history, needs its most clear-sighted sons to stand at the parapets of our democracy.

It is one of the tragic ironies of our time that he who upheld the American tradition of democracy, who understood it more deeply than any other man of our time, who urged the people to act upon that tradition, is imprisoned, while Copperheads, and Vallandighams like Charles A. Lindbergh, like Martin Dies, like the fascist Rev. Charles Coughlin, like the Tory appeaser Herbert Hoover, are at liberty to sow confusion and defeatism. They seek to blind America, to becloud our main objectives.

Paramount in the teachings of Lincoln and Washington—as this brief pamphlet shows—was the warning: “Never lose sight of your main enemy.” *They* never did: despite all Tory and Copperhead intrigue. They would today solemnly advise us to keep the sights leveled at Hitler, who ordered the Japanese attack in the Pacific to shunt us from the main front—the battlelines of Europe. They would demand unceasing vigilance against the appeasers’ new tricks: against those secret friends of fascism who labor to undermine the growing alliance of the United Nations. Today’s Copperheads preach disruption

when victory requires total domestic and international unity; demands a full military, political, economic alliance of all nations fighting the Axis. If, as our history has shown, that international solidarity was imperative to win in 1776, in 1861, how much more necessary is it today when the war burns on all continents and on all seas. Hitler can triumph only by division of his opponents.

We must ponder, this month of February, the month of the great men Lincoln, Washington, Douglass, what they would say to their countrymen. This is a month when the principles they enunciated, fought and bled for must be evaluated and adjudged more deeply than ever in our history by the people of America. The democratic tradition must be translated fully into today's realities. If it is, then national unity will be achieved; our workshops will turn out all the cannon, guns, planes, tanks necessary for our brave troops and our allies; our alliance with Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, all United Nations, will be totally completed; our people will work together in fullest harmony based upon the complete unity of labor, and we will be in an impregnable position to finally annihilate the beastly hosts of fascism.

If Lincoln or Washington lived today, they would say: White and black, native and foreign-born, Republican, Democrat, Communist, let us work and fight side by side against the common enemy. They would favor the liberation of such a clear-sighted champion of the people as Earl Browder; they would urge the silencing of such apostles of defeatism as Martin Dies, of Charles Coughlin. They would urge—as they did in their day—fullest collaboration with our allies. That way we won in 1776, in 1861.

That way we will win in 1942. There is no other way to victory.

# To America at War

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