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Abstract

During the 1860s, no one nation attracted as much attention from the British than the United States of America as the American Civil War proved to be one of the most divisive topics in Great Britain. In one particular forum - the British Parliament - the divisiveness concerning the war was clearly evident.

This thesis examines the parliamentary debates on the neutrality policy from 1861 to 1863. In the debates, both the interventionists and the neutralists exploited numerous issues in their attempts to persuade their fellow members to support intervention or neutrality. The issues include the blockade, the cotton shortage, slavery, self-determination, and the fear of war with the United States if intervention occurred.

Previous studies of Anglo-American relations have concluded that cotton was the major reason for intervention while slavery was the major reason for neutrality. This thesis contends that slavery and cotton were not the most common reasons for but simply two of many issues which were discussed.

The British Parliament and the American Civil War

by

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....1

Parliament, the Cabinet, and Neutrality.....4

The Blockade.....30

The Economic Issues.....46

The Issues of Morality.....63

Realpolitik.....86

Conclusion.....108

Bibliography.....110

Introduction

"I said on a former occasion that it was desirable that in the House we should not only pass laws and vote Estimates, but [we] should also be the organs and feelings of large masses of the community," Palmerston once commented in reference to Parliament's role as a forum for public opinion.¹ Indeed, the aroused public opinion concerning the American Civil War was reflected in the Parliamentary debates.

However, despite the passage of the Great Reform Act over two decades before, the majority of those Members of Parliament who were elected in the 1859 election were from the upper class and the aristocracy, and thus they were not representative of the British public.² Furthermore, their attitudes towards the American Civil War were not representative of British public opinion, as a majority of the Members of Parliament tended to support the South.³ Yet Parliament never sanctioned a alternation in the neutrality policy although the interventionists desperately attempted time and time again to convince

¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, 1862, p.389.

². E.J. Evans, *The Great Reform Act* (London: Methuen and Company, 1983), pp. 37-41; Michael Bentley, *Politics without Democracy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 94.

³. Muriel Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1987), p. 114; Donald Southgate, *The Most English Minister* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 258.

their fellow members that Britain should intervene on behalf of the South.

The Parliamentary debates which resulted from the attacks on the neutrality policy reveal the most common issues which the interventionists and neutralists believed were the most persuasive for their perspective. In the process, the debates answer the question of why the Members of Parliament decided that Britain should not intervene.

The answers to this question differ from those answers provided by former studies, none of which have systematically studied Parliament. During the first two years of the war, the members concentrated on the effectiveness of the Union's naval blockade of the Confederacy, rather than on more general issues such as slavery and cotton. Furthermore, the issue of the cotton shortage, which has been often considered as the most common argument in favour of intervention, was never an especially popular issue with the interventionists. Its persuasiveness in favour of intervention was mainly undercut by the uncertainty of public opinion. Instead, the right of self-determination was one of the most common reasons argued for intervention in 1862 and 1863.

Slavery, which has been considered a popular reason in favour of neutrality, never dominated the neutralists' speeches as it remained a contentious issue even after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. While antislavery sentiment was strong

in Britain and in Parliament, the belief that the North was fighting against slavery was not. Instead, concern for Britain's national security - both in terms of a possible war with the United States and in terms of Napoleon III - proved to be a powerful argument for the continuation of neutrality.

I. Parliament, the Cabinet, and Neutrality

They were finally united. In 1859, Britain witnessed the triumph of a new political party as Whigs, Peelites, and Radicals amalgamated to form the Liberal party. As some of the Members of Parliament cheered the beginning of a new era, few of them realized that over the next four years, the most divisive foreign policy issue that they would debate would be a war that would be fought over 3,000 miles away.

The United States, one year later, also witnessed the triumph of a young political party: the Republican party. It was an amalgamation of those who had been members of the Whig, Free Soil, and Democratic party who were brought together mainly out of opposition to the extension of slavery. As P.A. Taylor, M.P., later described the result:

They (the North) would not allow the action of slavery to be extended over all the States of America and into the new territories. The South demanded this, and the answer was the election of old Abraham Lincoln, rugged, simple, and indomitable, whose name would

live after that of many a smooth and polished statesman was forgotten.¹

Indeed, the North answered, and the South seceded.

As the Americans prepared to bear arms against each other, the British looked across the ocean in deep concern and anxiety. Many of them believed in a special relationship with Americans and they wished that American blood would not be spilt in a civil war. In the Parliamentary debates, these feelings were clear. Admiral Milnes and the Sir H.S. Keating, the Solicitor General, in a debate of March, 1862, both contended that there was a sense of brotherhood between Britain and America. Milnes asserted that he had "always regarded a disruption of the American Union as a great calamity for the world, believing, with De Tocqueville, that it would do more to destroy political liberty and arrest the progress of mankind than any other event that can be possibly imagined." The Admiral believed that the "Americans are our fellow-countrymen; I shall always call them so; I see in them our own character, reproduced with all its merits and all its defects" and he could "never, for a moment, disassociate the fortunes of Great Britain from the fortunes of the United States of America." The Solicitor General stated in reference to Americans: "They are men of the same blood, language, and

¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, 1862, p.572.

religion, the children of our forefathers, who are united to us by all the bonds that unite man and man together."²

With the eruption of hostilities, people on both sides of the Atlantic anxiously waited for news as to whether Britain would support the North or the South. Through their questions to the Ministry, the Members of Parliament sought to discover the answer.

On April 29, 1861, just two weeks after President Lincoln had called for troops, the first of many debates on the American civil war commenced in the Houses of Parliament. The Earl of Malmesbury in the House of Lords rose to speak in favour of obtaining "assistance in seeking to put a stop at the outset to a civil war" and he further questioned whether Her Majesty's Government had "made any attempt to prevent the quarrel between the different States of the American Union from coming to a bloody issue."³ Lord Wreghitt, speaking for the Government, answered, "However great the interest which we may feel in the welfare of her people, and however anxious we might be to rescue them from the misfortune which appears to be impending over their heads, we yet thought that a great and independent nation might not welcome advice given

². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.1204, 1224.

³. The assistance to which he referred would have been, most likely, a concert of European nations urging the Americans to avoid a divisive and destructive war.

with respect to her internal affairs, if that advice were proffered without being solicited."⁴

On May 2, 1861, almost three weeks after the fall of Fort Sumter, Lord John Russell, the Foreign Minister in Viscount Palmerston's Cabinet, gave the first indication of the policy which would direct Britain in her relations with the United States and the Confederate States. In answering a question concerning the ominous American crisis, the statesman insisted, "We have not been involved in any way in that contest by any act or giving any advice in the matter, and, for God's sake, let us if possible keep out of it!"⁵

Beginning on May 6 and lasting until the following week, the Members of Parliament, both Northern and Southern sympathisers, continued to press their government for a proclamation concerning Britain's approach to the American Civil War. On May 9, Mr. Forster, realizing the danger to British seaman who might become involved in the war, raised the concern that Her Majesty's Subjects may participate on privateers. Sir George Lewis announced that a proclamation concerning Britain and the American war was in the works. Then, the following day, the Earl of Derby raised the question of the participation of British seaman and also asked whether both the North and the South were to be considered belligerents. Like

⁴. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 162, 1861, p.1280.

⁵. *Ibid*, p.1377.

Lewis before him, Earl Granville answered that a proclamation was being prepared by the government.⁶

In the end, Britain supported neither side. The proclamation, which was issued on May 13, determined that both the United States and the Confederate States would be considered belligerents while Great Britain would adhere to a policy of neutrality towards both parties. This was a disappointment for the North who considered the Confederates rebels, not belligerents. For the South, this was only a partial victory as the proclamation failed to grant the Confederacy recognition as an independent state.

The critical decision was made by the Cabinet, which, in the British structure of government, typically determined matters of foreign policy; Parliament more often dealt with matters of domestic legislation. Palmerston clearly believed in the merits of the *status quo* as he had no desire to have foreign policy guided by direct Parliamentary resolutions. In response to a motion by the interventionists, Palmerston insisted that they should "leave the matter of such difficulty in the hands of responsible Government" for he wanted the House to "leave it to the discretion of the Government."⁷ However, the Cabinet and its policies could survive only with the support of

⁶. Ibid, pp. 1763, 1830. Lord Derby, the leader of the Conservative Party, was, like Disraeli, a neutralist. John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party*, (London: Constable and Company, 1966) p.75.

⁷. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, pp.570-573.

the Members of Parliament. Parliament did have the power to embarrass or overthrow the Cabinet, even on questions of foreign policy, and it was precisely that power which the interventionists wanted to harness.

Those Members of Parliament who supported the South most ardently then set upon a crusade in order to force the British Government to intervene on terms favourable to the Confederacy. The forms of intervention which the interventionists advocated included offering mediation, recognising the Confederacy as an independent nation, or forcible intervention such as lifting the blockade.

Those Members who most vehemently opposed neutrality held a strong passion for the South and were usually members of the Conservative party. These included such members as Lord Campbell, Lord Robert Cecil, and William Lindsay. Sir William Gregory, although not a member of the Conservative party, was also a passionate Southern sympathiser. All four of these men became friends of ^{James}~~John~~ Mason, the Confederate emissary in London, and all joined the Southern Independence Association, an organisation established in Britain for the sole purpose of augmenting support for the Confederacy. Gregory's Southern sympathies were especially strong due to his visit to the South before the war. As one notable Northern sympathiser wrote: "A Mr. Gregory, M.P. for Galway, who lately travelled in the South...has returned well humbugged by

the Southerners."⁸ Indeed, Gregory's passion would lead him to attack the neutrality policy and support the South more often than any other member.

The most outspoken supporters of neutrality were mostly members of the faction known as the Radicals, who supported neutrality due to their Northern sympathies. John Bright, William E. Forster and P.A. Taylor were representatives of this persuasion who believed that Lincoln was against slavery. Taylor became one of the founding members of the Emancipation Society which was founded in 1862 in response to the pro-southern organizations. The hatred of slavery was especially personal to Forster for his father, a Quaker minister, died in Tennessee in 1852 while on a crusade against slavery. Proudly carrying on his father's cause, Forster would speak in favour of neutrality and the United States more than even Bright during the first two years of the civil war.⁹

The attacks on the neutrality policy by the interventionists came at a few concentrated moments during the course of the war. In the first year - 1861 - there was relatively little discussion, especially when compared to the following years. Most of the MP's

⁸. Quoted in T.Wemyss Reid, *The Life of W.E. Forster* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1888), pp.333, 338.

⁹. Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), p. 393; Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (London: Longman, Green, and Company, 1972), p. 253.

believed that the war would end in ninety days and thus debated the neutrality policy infrequently.

The discussion on May 28 provided the first indication that some of the Members were passionate Southern sympathizers. For on that day, Gregory announced that he would bring forward a motion for the recognition of the Confederacy as an independent nation on June 7. This motion was highly unusual for Gregory was attempting to make foreign policy against the wishes of the Prime Minister. Russell did not directly respond to Gregory's warning, he only concluded by saying that he hoped to conflict would be a short one which would not interfere with the prosperity of the country.¹⁰

On June 6 in the House of Commons, Mr. Crawford asked whether Gregory's motion for Southern recognition would be on the table tomorrow and whether the Foreign Secretary deemed it desirable that the subject should be debated. Gregory responded defiantly that he did intend to bring the motion forward tomorrow and he believed that the Foreign Secretary was prepared to answer the question. Russell warned Gregory, "I cannot say that I think it is desirable that it should come on." The Foreign Secretary well knew the divisiveness and the passion which would be unleashed if the motion was discussed.¹¹

¹⁰. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 163, p.188.

¹¹. *Ibid*, p. 631.

On June 7, the members gathered for what was expected to be an intense debate. Colonel Wilson Patten rose to inquire whether Gregory's motion, "To call the attention of the House to the expediency of the prompt recognition of the Southern Confederacy of America," could be postponed. Gregory, to the relief of some and to the consternation of others, agreed. After two other MP's had spoken, Mr. Monckton Milnes then questioned whether Mr. Forster would bring forward his counter motion "To call the attention of the House to the inexpediency of interfering in behalf of those citizens of the United States who are now in insurrection against their Government, by a recognition of the Confederacy which they have formed." Mr. Forster, like Gregory before him, declined to bring forward his motion because he believed that "it was most undesirable there should be a discussion on the merits of the quarrel between the States of America."¹²

The debate had been averted. Forster's letter sheds more light on the result as he wrote that Gregory "insists upon proposing to the House the absurd but mischievous notion that we should promptly recognize Jefferson Davis's Confederacy. I have met his notice of motion with corresponding counter-notice, and expected the debate to come off a week or two ago; but

¹². Quoted in T.Wemyss Reid, p.333. Betty Fladeland concluded that "William E. Forster's motion against Gregory was a strategy developed by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society." Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), p.388.

at the pressing solicitation of the Government he put it off. Most men of influence in Parliament wish him not to persist in bringing it forward, but he talks of doing so.....I wish it had fallen into the hands of a member of more experience to stand up for the North and the Union; but I must do what I can." The Members of Parliament, like most Americans, believed in June, 1861 that the war would end within a few months and thus saw no reason to begin a debate on such a divisive topic. Their hesitation would last until the following year.¹³

Between the two parliamentary sessions, relations between Britain and the United States deteriorated to a nadir due to the Trent crisis. The situation was entirely handled by the Cabinet, and since Parliament was not in session there were few subsequent references on the crisis.¹⁴ However, one of the most notable discussions of the crisis in Parliament involved a Member of Parliament complimenting both Britain and the United States for their conduct. Admiral Walcott stated that "Both countries had done well: England was firm and resolute; America did justice, though tardily, and such a peace was of the nature of a conquest when 'both parties nobly are subdued; and neither party loser.'"¹⁵

¹³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.759.

¹⁴. A special war counsel, assembled on December 9, 1861, had recommended to Palmerston that in case of war with the United States Britain should raid Union shipping, break the Union blockade of the South, and impose a counterblockade on the North. Norman B. Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis*, (Knoxville, 1977), p.65.

¹⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.92.

During February and March, 1862 numerous members such as Benjamin Disraeli, Gregory, the Earl of Malmesbury, and Mr. Peacocke requested information on the blockade's effectiveness. The pressure continued as Lord Robert Cecil pointedly asked, "How soon the Papers which have been promised upon the subject of the American blockade are likely to be laid upon the table?" Layard could only respond that he "hoped they would be laid on the table by the end of the week." On February 20, Daniel O'Donoghue, an Irish MP, while defending the blockade also wished to know the number of vessels which had broken it.¹⁶

On March 7, one of the greatest debates on the American war erupted in the House of Commons. The figures on the blockade's effectiveness had been released and the interventionists wanted to make the most of them. This debate represented the first extensive discussion of the American Civil War and as such, provided the first indication of the divisiveness in Parliament and the confusing nature of the war. The interventionists were pressing for Britain to offer mediation to the North and South, the hope being that if the offer was accepted by both sides, the war could be ended with the South established as a free and

¹⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.66, 435, 526. Although a neutralist, Disraeli was also a southern sympathiser. As he wrote on Decemeber 8, 1861: "What wondrous times are these! Who could have supposed that the United States of America would be the scene of an immense revolution...They [the events in America] must, however, tell immensely in favour of aristocracy." Quoted from Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966), p.419.

independent nation. Even if the North refused the offer, the interventionists then hoped that Britain would recognise the South and thus increase the chances that the Confederacy would endure. However, the attempt failed. The Southern sympathisers were unable to convince a majority of the members that intervention was more prudent than neutrality. As John Bright recorded in his diary that evening, the "South gained nothing by the discussion."¹⁷

From the middle of March until the end of the session, Lord Campbell and Hopwood continued to attack and question the neutrality policy as Russell and Palmerston defended their policy. However, the great antagonist would be Lindsay whose motion would spark another intense debate. On June 20, he announced his intention to introduce a resolution to recognize the Southern States of America. He agreed to postpone his motion until July 11, although he added that "before long those states must become an independent nation."¹⁸

As Lindsay was pushing for recognition, Lee was desperately defending the Confederate capital. In June, General George B. McClellan had launched the Army of the Potomac against General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. In the midst of this struggle, Lord Brougham, in the House of Lords, twice appealed to the Americans to make peace by insisting that while "the war might be explained, it could not be

¹⁷. R.A.J. Walling, ed., *The Diaries of John Bright* (London: Cassell and Company, 1930), p. 255.

¹⁸. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 167, p.810.

justified or even extenuated" and "could his voice reach them, he would, as a friend, a fellow Christian, a fellow creature, implore them to make an end of this horrible war." On the first day of July, he hoped that "this bloody and fratricidal war would soon be brought to a termination." He uttered these words on the day that the Seven Days Battle ended with Richmond safe, McClellan retreating, and America having suffered 30,000 more casualties.¹⁹

Two weeks later, on July 18, Lindsay's motion on behalf of the Confederacy was expected to be discussed. Even members of the government were beginning to take the idea of some form of diplomatic intervention seriously. On that very day Gladstone had "Pressed Ld P. to say nothing agt [sic] an offer of mediation" in hoping that Lindsay would prevail. However, Mr. Clay "requested that Mr. Lindsay not bring forward that evening the Motion which stood in his name." He supported this request by noting the "special grounds which he ventured to make his appeal to his hon. Friend were the currency of a rumour as to a success of the Confederates over General McClellan and his army." J.C. Ewort quickly seconded the motion to adjourn. Scully and Sir Robert Peel concurred. Lindsay harboured no wish to postpone the motion but, in the end, he had no choice.²⁰

¹⁹. Ibid, pp. 1201, 1284.

²⁰. Ibid, pp.503 - 504. Gladstone quote from H.C.G. Matthew, ed., *Gladstone diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), Volume 6, p. 136.

Later that same day Lindsay hurled the Commons into an intense debate on the war in America. He proposed "That in the opinion of this House, the States which have seceded from the Union of the Republic of the United States, have so long maintained themselves under a specific and established Government, and have given such proof of their determination and ability to support their Independence, that the prosperity of offering mediation, with the view of terminating hostilities between the contending parties, is worthy of the serious and immediate attention of Her Majesty's Government."²¹

Despite the fact that five members spoke in favour of the motion - Lindsay, Vane Tempest, Whiteside, Gregory, and Fitzgerald - the motion had to be withdrawn due to lack of support. The speeches by Taylor, Forster, and especially Palmerston convinced the MP's to continue on a neutral course. But, in reference to the debate on Lindsay's motion, Palmerston informed Queen Victoria that "It was indeed manifest that the feeling of the majority of the House is decidedly in favour of the South, on the ground that they are now fighting for their independence on the very same principles on which both North and South acted in their separation from England."²²

²¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.511.

²². Quoted from Brian Connell, ed., *Regina v. Palmerston: The Correspondence between Queen Victoria and Her Foreign and Prime Minister, 1837-1865* (London: Evans Brothers, 1962), p.329.

This was the last occasion during the 1862 session of Parliament in either of the Houses when the interventionists pressed to pressed for any alteration in the neutrality policy. Nevertheless, during the interim between the 1862 and 1863 sessions as Lee invaded Maryland, the Cabinet began to consider some form of intervention. The initiative came from the Chancellor of the Exchequer William E. Gladstone, who strongly advocated mediation and he acquired some support even from Russell and Palmerston but, in November, the majority of the Cabinet refused to alter policy. This decision occurred after the Battle of Antietam and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

For the first few weeks of the 1863 session, three discussions occurred concerning the neutrality policy. Two of these would involve Mr. Bentick and Mr. Hopwood directing questions to the Prime Minister. In both cases, Palmerston answered their questions with brevity. Towards the end of March, Russell would have to respond to several points as Lord Campbell would deliver a mammoth speech pressing for the termination of the neutrality policy. And on June 29, Richard Cobden would counter one of Lord Campbell's attack on the blockade. So, overall, the first months of the 1863 session ended with only two major debates on neutrality. Yet, at the end of the 1863 session, Parliament would experience one last debate on the neutrality policy.

As June progressed three storms gathered which would alter the course of the American war. In the West, Grant stubbornly besieged Vicksburg as the Confederates staunchly refused to surrender. In the East, Lee was ready to lead his army north for their second invasion. And in Britain, the pugnacious Roebuck, the Member for Sheffield, prepared to lead one of the greatest attacks upon the neutrality policy. In these three realms, supporters of North and South pensively prepared for battle. From the trenches along the Mississippi, to the small hills of Southern Pennsylvania, to the benches of Westminster, the future of the United States lay at stake.

On June 27, O'Donoghue asked whether Roebuck was intending to proceed with his "Motion for the recognition of the Confederate States of America. Roebuck adamantly replied, "My answer, Sir, is certainly; and I am only astonished that there should be any doubt upon the matter." The House of Commons was headed for a showdown. On the following days, both Lord Campbell and Forster asked about Anglo-French communication concerning possible intervention. The persistence on the part of these Members was not without basis, for Roebuck, together with Lindsay, the Member for Sunderland, had recently returned from Paris after an audience with the Emperor concerning the question of Southern recognition. Information on these

rumours would be made public on June 30 as Parliament witnessed the great debate on the neutrality policy.²³

To understand the full impact of Roebuck's speech, two points must be considered. First of all, two former ministries had resigned due to previous Roebuck motions. In one case the ministry resigned after opposing one of his motions while another resigned after accepting one. It has been speculated that this motion was intended to bring down Palmerston's Cabinet. Secondly, Roebuck was well known for his rather frank personality. This was best described in the words of one of his constituents:

Roebuck is always saying something which is lying at the bottom of other people's minds, but which other people do not say. They keep it for examination and modification before it is allowed to come into free thought or open words. Roebuck digs it up, and puts it before us, and makes us look it full in the face at once. Sometimes we do not thank him for the office.²⁴

Roebuck commenced his long speech by stating, "I now appeal to the House - to its honour and duty - to ask the Crown to enter into negotiations with the great

²³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1527.

²⁴. Robert Leader, ed., *The Life of John Arthur Roebuck*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1896), p.300.

Powers for the purpose of acknowledging the independence of the Southern States of North America." After a speech of great length which included numerous reasons to recognize the South, he concluded with the motion "That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that She will be graciously pleased to enter into negotiations with the Great Powers of Europe, for the purpose of obtaining their cooperation in the recognition of the independence of the Confederate States of North America."²⁵

The lack of support for Roebuck's motion is clearly exemplified by the fact that the next four speakers all opposed it. Montagu followed Roebuck with a critical speech which closed with the amendment "To leave out from the word "That" to the end of the Question, in order to add the words 'this House earnestly desires that an impartial neutrality should continue to be maintained by Her Majesty's Government during the present unhappy contest in the States of North America."²⁶ Clifford then rose to speak and, despite criticising the Federal Government for allowing its officers to conduct the war with "wanton barbarity," he voiced his support for Montagu's amendment,²⁷ as did Gladstone and Forster. One of the longest and most hostile speeches of Roebuck's motion was delivered by one of America's most supportive

²⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1771 - 1780.

²⁶. *Ibid*, pp.1781 - 1796.

²⁷. *Ibid*, pp.1798 - 1800.

members: John Bright. During Bright's speech, Roebuck, who was becoming visibly angered by the lack of support and the proliferation of criticism upon him, interrupted the Member for Birmingham with a clarification: "What I said I now state to the House - that the men of the South were Englishmen, but that the army of the North were composed of the scum of Europe." Roebuck's outburst only made it more apparent that of all the Members the South could have hoped to speak for recognition, he was perhaps the worst possible choice.²⁸

After Bright sat down, it was becoming evident that Roebuck's speech was not acquiring the support it required. Of the six speakers since Roebuck, only one - Lord Robert Cecil - had supported his motion despite the fact that two of them were Southern sympathisers. Similarly, Perry Wyndham asserted that there were "thousands in the North who wanted separation knowing of the hapless contest" and the "unholy war," but, in spite of these reservations, instead of supporting the motion, Wyndham moved for adjournment.²⁹

The last speaker had closed the coffin on the motion. However, the members did not wish to adjourn for there still was a fervent desire to continue discussion - not on the recognition of the South - but on the now infamous trip to Paris. His speech, which covered several of the main issues, self-destructed

²⁸. Ibid, pp.1819 - 1824.

²⁹. Ibid, p.1837.

when he introduced the hope of Britain and France jointly recognising the Confederacy as an independent nation. For in so doing, he admitted to actions which were considered improper for a Member of Parliament. He conveyed the French Emperor's personal desire to "ask them [the British] again whether they would be willing to join me in that recognition." This message to the House, which should have been passed through diplomatic channels, along with Roebuck's and Lindsay's unprecedented meeting with the French Emperor, would eventually attract more attention than Roebuck's motion. The members were far more interested in the unprecedented meeting with the French Emperor than the American war. For example, Forster's criticism had intensified when, referring to Roebuck's unprecedented meeting with Napoleon III, he sarcastically stated that France required "two ambassadors perhaps - one to communicate with the Government and the Member of Sheffield to communicate with the House of Commons." After Wyndham's comments, there were cries and shouts erupting from the floor for Lindsay, the other member who had accompanied Roebuck on the trip, to rise and speak. Lindsay did rise, but quickly and wisely sat down again.

Newgate's speech, which followed after several short speeches, was the most obvious sign that Roebuck had failed miserably. Instead of opening with a discussion of recognition, he began with an attack on Roebuck's actions. Newgate believed "the Member of

Sheffield's conduct in Paris" to be an example of "unauthorized diplomacy." He adamantly vowed that he would vote against the motion.³⁰ After a few more speeches, Roebuck requested a resumption of the debate on the following Thursday.

The Parisian escapade though, was of such interest that for the next two weeks numerous members criticized the actions of Roebuck and Lindsay. On July 10, Newdegate stated that this was the "first time in Parliament that a message of a Foreign Power had been received not through Her Majesty's Servant" for he understood that foreign messages should travel through diplomatic channels, not Members of Parliament.³¹ On July 13, Lindsay admitted to having held an audience with Roebuck with the French Emperor. His attempt at clarifying and defending the meeting failed to stem the tide against him and Roebuck. Newdegate considered the conduct of the two MP's to be "not only highly improper" but also "likely to be fraught with serious consequences."³² Then Palmerston, after Roebuck and Lindsay had spoken again in a vain hope to defend their actions, stated his hope that "this will be the last time when any Members of this House shall think it his duty to communicate to the British House of Commons that which may have passed between himself and the Sovereign of a foreign country" for "the proceeding which they have adopted is most irregular - to use no

³⁰. Ibid, p.1840.

³¹. Op cit.

³². Ibid, p.666.

stronger language." He stated that "Ambassadors are the proper organs for such communication" and "if the Emperor of the French, in consequence of the representations and information laid before him by my hon. Friend, had any proposal to make to the British Government that proposal ought to come through some responsible channel."³³

Clearly, after Roebuck's first attempt, the South's fortune had failed to materialize in this arena. Instead of a devastating attack against the neutrality policy, the debate had become a rout as the members rose to defend Her Majesty's Government. Yet the tenacious Roebuck, despite the inauspicious beginning, was determined to press forwards.

As the Americans battled in the East and West, Roebuck attempted to regain the offensive on three different occasions. On July 2 he questioned when there would be a renewal of the debate. Grey requested that Roebuck wait until the following Monday. On July 3, Grey answered that "it was certain" that the debate would resume on next Monday. On July 6, Palmerston replied that he would try and give the "utmost fixity to the arrangement" although he did not answer definitively.³⁴

The inability of the interventionists' to press their case more strenuously and to insist on more parliamentary time owed much to the indecisiveness of

³³. Ibid, pp.666 - 672.

³⁴. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 172 (London: 1863), pp.67, 177, 252.

the official Conservative opposition. At this juncture, on July 9, some influential Conservatives, including Lord Derby, met to discuss "the American question." As Lord Stanley, a conservative M.P., recorded in his journal: "All, except Fitzgerald, opposed recognition of the South: the question most discussed was, whether any offer of mediation ought to be recommended to government, or whether it would be better simply to leave the matter in their [the Cabinet's] hands. The objection to the latter course is that it appears to amount to an abdication of their function by the Opposition; and also that more than one half of the Conservatives are likely to vote with Roebuck if he divides, thus breaking up the party, and indicating an absence of united action." The interventionists did not even command the support of the Opposition, let alone that of the government.³⁵

The expectation of Southern military success increased the hesitation of the Members of Parliament to further discuss Roebuck's motion. The next day, still ignorant of the current situation in America, Sir James Ferguson spoke against a resumption of the debate. Ferguson noted:

a great change had taken place in the position of the contest between the two

³⁵. John Vincent, ed., *Disraeli, Derby, and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p.199.

republics in North America. The war, which up to the present time had been a defensive one on the part of the Southern States, now appeared to have received the character of an expedition of the South against the North.

He believed that "the solution to the whole question was at hand" and saw no reason to continue the deliberations for "If the events now taking place, and the result of which could not be distant, should have the effect of enabling the Southern States to force peace on the Northern, the former would not then thank the House for the decision come to on this Motion."³⁶

Ferguson desired that the matter be dropped.

Palmerston agreed by asserting that the present was "not a moment when it is desirable to continue the discussion."³⁷

Gregory then followed and admitted:

There would, no doubt, be a large majority against the Motion of the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield; but that would not be owing to any sympathy in this House in favour of the North, because I believe that the hon. Member for Brighton [Mr. Coningham] and those who agree with him could be carried off in an omnibus. Nevertheless, it would go forth to

³⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 172 (London: 1863), pp.554 - 556.

³⁷. *Ibid*, p.556

the world at large that the opinion of the House of Commons was against the independence of the Southern Confederacy, which I believe not to be the case.

Therefore, he was of the opinion that Roebuck's motion should be withdrawn.³⁸

Forster, as pro-North as ever, realizing that the motion would be defeated, advocated a vote. He maintained that "what we have to consider is the question of whether this House is inclined to agree with the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield that our Government should recognize a seceding or rebelling State before the result of the secession or rebellion is ascertained."³⁹ Cecil claimed that "those who have urged him not to press his Motion are well-known friends of the South." The Federal supporters, he contended, desired the motion to be discussed on Monday.⁴⁰ Roebuck agreed to have the discussion postponed until Monday. After two other MP's spoke, Palmerston announced that it would be the first order of business.

The House reconvened the debate on July 13 with still no news concerning the watershed events of one week before. Roebuck, though, realized his assault had failed rather miserably. He confessed that he "brought forward the Motion under the feeling that I was about

³⁸. Ibid, p.563.

³⁹. Ibid, p.564.

⁴⁰. Op cit.

to ask the House to take a step which would be likely to put an end to the terrible carnage now going on in North America, and which would also be of infinite advantage to the commercial interests of Great Britain." Roebuck admitted his withdrawal with the statement "it is only under a feeling of great respect for the noble Lord that I now withdraw my Motion."⁴¹ This great debate had ended.

Four days later news reached Britain concerning the result of the Battle of Gettysburg. Three days after this, the British learned that Vicksburg had capitulated. The South had lost on all three fronts; never again was intervention in any form to be agitated in Parliament.

In order to understand why the Southern effort in Parliament failed, it is necessary to examine the issues which were debated by both sides. These issues can be divided into four groups: the blockade, economic issues, issues of morality, and considerations of British foreign policy. The first of these issues which were exploited by the interventionists, which dominated the debates from the beginning of the war until 1862, was the blockade.

⁴¹. Ibid, pp.661 - 668.

II. The Blockade: Laughable or Legal?

"The blockade is the laughing stock of the Southern merchant marine." - British Consul Bunch, August, 20, 1861.¹

"A great many vessels are captured; it is [a] most serious interruption to Trade." - Lord Lyons, November 29, 1861.²

On April 19, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued his proclamation for the establishment of a blockade along the entire Southern coastline. By the end of May, most of the vital Southern ports had a few warships on blockade duty.³ The resulting blockade, or lack thereof depending upon one's perspective, received the immediate attention of the British, especially in the Halls of Parliament.

The blockade was the first issue discussed concerning the American Civil War for two reasons. First of all, the war was expected to last for only ninety days. Thus, there appeared to be little reason to discuss the causes and the issues of the war in exhaustive detail. The North was expected to capture Richmond within that time or the South's determination

¹. Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p.233.

². E.D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War* (London: Longman, Greens, and Company, 1925), p.254.

³. *Ibid*, p.245.

would prevail and there would be a peaceful separation. No one anticipated a war which would last for four years and cost 600,000 lives.

The second reason that the blockade received the initial attention of Parliament was due to the fact that its effectiveness was questionable. At the beginning of the war, the United States Navy had the difficulty of coping with 3,000 miles of Southern shoreline with only two dozen steamers.⁴

The interventionists' motive in pressing the British Government to determine the blockade to be ineffective is easily understood. If the blockade was determined to be ineffective, merchant ships would have the legal right to trade with the Southern ports. No doubt, a considerable number of these ships would be British. If the United States Navy attempted to prevent passage of a British ship, Palmerston would be forced to defend the Union Jack. Scenarios like this would dramatically increase the possibility that Great Britain and the United States would become involved in a war. Either way, the Confederacy benefited.

The inevitability of conflict with the United States if the blockade was challenged was mentioned on a few occasions. In March of 1862 Russell stated that if the blockade was determined to be ineffective, "I know of no course which would have been open but war with the United States." On February 20, 1862, O'Donoghue warned that "to force the blockade meant

⁴. Owsley, p. 230.

war with America." On March 7, 1862, the Solicitor General stated:

An armed neutrality, by which a Government would break through the blockading force that was besieging a country, would set at naught all the usages of nations. It would be doing a hostile act at the point of the sword, not at the peril of war, but with war as its necessary consequence.⁵

And on March 10, 1862 Lord Abinger stated "Were they to attempt to raise the blockade, our cruisers would inevitably be brought into contact with the Federal squadron, which would not admit our right to interfere, and a collision would thus be brought on between the two nations."⁶

The interventionists failed to mention this possibility and instead attacked the blockade on the ground that it was both illegal and ineffective. In terms of legality, the blockade was judged by the provisions of the 1856 Declaration of Paris. Austria, France, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia, and Turkey had all agreed to abide by the declaration. Owing to the stipulation concerning privateers, the United States refused to subscribe by the Declaration. However at the beginning of the civil war, the Lincoln

⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.1243, 380, 1223.

⁶. *Ibid*, p.1237.

administration agreed to adhere to the Declaration as it pertained to blockades. The Declaration stated that "blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective; that is to say, maintained by forces strong enough to prevent access."⁷

This definition was rather ambiguous which allowed Members to form their own interpretations depending upon whether they supported intervention or neutrality. The interventionists interpreted the definition strictly and thus determined that Lincoln's blockade was ineffective. In May, 1861 in the House of Lords, the Earl of Ellenborough insisted that blockades "in order to be binding, must be effective - that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy." He believed that the Union one was "impossible" to maintain. The Earl of Derby, the leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords, warned that "a mere paper blockade, or a blockade extending over a space which it is physically impossible that an effectual blockade can be applied, will not be recognised as valid by the British Government."⁸

The interventionists attacked the blockade several times in 1862. On February 7, Gregory "believed he should be in a position to show that in a great measure this blockade could only be considered a paper blockade."⁹ On March 7, numerous interventionists,

⁷. E.D. Adams, p.140.

⁸. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 163, p.2077.

⁹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.92.

especially Gregory, questioned the legality of the blockade. Since Union troops had occupied southern Louisiana, Gregory did confess that "the blockade of New Orleans was an effective blockade" but "as regards other ports, this has been a delusion," for "all the evidence which can be brought forward shows that these very ports of Wilmington and Charleston are not blockaded, and that not one of those conditions which constitute an effective blockade are applicable to these particular ports." He further stated that he "must pronounce the declaration of Paris to be, as regards the Confederate States, a mockery; as regards the interpretation of international law, a delusion." He even quoted a French lawyer who stated that "Among the fictitious blockades invented by belligerents, it will be sufficient to allude to the blockade by cruisers, to which the Northern States have resorted." Ferguson asserted that "this blockade could not be defended on the ground that it had been either continuous or effective" and therefore it was an "illegal" and "ineffective" blockade.¹⁰

The neutralists countered the interventionists on this point by contending that the blockade was indeed legal and justified by using less stringent definitions for an effective blockade. In May of 1861, Russell, in

¹⁰. Ibid, pp.1158-1204. In response, on March 8, 1862, *The Times* wrote "What Mr. Gregory does not allege, and cannot allege is that the Federal Government has not done its best.....it has found means for a blockade sufficient" and "The blockade is maintained only too well."

quoting Lord Lyons, announced that "the blockade is carried into effect according to the rules established by the law of nations" and that "we must of course conform to it; and that we can only see that the blockade is sufficient and regular."¹¹ Earl Granville alleged that an effective blockade would not have to make passage "impossible" but "very difficult for vessels to obtain egress or ingress" while Lord Brougham defined an effective blockade as one which "precluded the existence of any reasonable chance of entrance."¹²

During the debate of March, 1862, the Solicitor General, Milnes, and W.E. Forster all defended the legality of the blockade. The Solicitor General, who provided one of the most extensive discussions on the legality of the blockade, opened his speech by asking the Members upon "what principles ought Great Britain to judge this question of the blockade to which the present Motion refers?" He answered that "Great Britain must judge that question according to her own principles; according to the principles of international law." He further questioned "What are the essentials involved in a legal blockade?" His answer was that there "must be a bona fide blockade by a force sufficient to maintain it on the spot, and there must also be a sufficient notification of some kind or other of that blockade." In response to the

¹¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 164, p.188.

¹². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 163, p.2077.

charge that not all of the Southern ports were blockaded he stated that "if there were some ports which were blockaded, the blockade was perfectly good at those places, although with regards to other points of the coast it could not be said to exist." By this clever definition, the United States could blockade Savannah, leave Charleston alone, and still have the blockade legally operating at Savannah while having the future possibility of blockading Charleston. The law officer had provided the United States with all the loopholes necessary to legally maintain the blockade. Furthermore, he asked:

Did the President, in his proclamation declaratory of this blockade, announce any intention of setting aside the law of nations? Quite the contrary. He said the ports should be blockaded in pursuance of the laws of the United States and the law of nations.

In continuing he noted:

But on what is the opinion of this country to be formed? It can only be formed on the reports of its consular and naval officers. And, speaking generally, what is the result of these reports? That, though, in certain places, and at certain times there was either

no blockade at all, or very great remissness in enforcing the blockade, there was at other times and in other places, and in some places at all times, a strict enforcement of the blockade.¹³

Like the Solicitor General, Milnes and Forster defended the blockade on legal grounds. Milnes stated that "This blockade scarcely appears to me to merit the criticism which has been bestowed on it" and "it appears to me that the common sense of the question must lead us to the conclusion that this blockade is effective." In referring to the Declaration of Paris provision on blockades, Forster contended that "if blockades are to be interpreted in [the] future by all the Powers who signed the treaty strictly by those words, then there is an end of all blockades." He quoted Russell's statement that the "fact that various ships may have successfully escaped through it will not of itself prevent the blockade from being an effective one by international law" and thus Forster concluded that "the argument, whether this blockade is effective

¹³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.1214-1225. The Solicitor General's speech was well remembered by the interventionists, for on June 29, 1863 Lord Robert Cecil stated that "In itself, the blockade was a thing, which, considering the obligations of the Treaty of Paris, the world could never have expected to see again," for the "blockade was kept up mainly owing to the ingenious special pleading of the Solicitor General two years ago." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1647.

or not, is really made to depend upon the number of escapees."¹⁴

Indeed, critical to the argument was the number of ships which had evaded Lincoln's blockade. The interventionists provided facts on numerous occasions which indicated that there were vast numbers of ships evading the blockade while the neutralists consistently challenged the figures.

In the House of Lords on February 10, 1862, the Earl of Malmesbury stated his desire "to know the real facts, and what is exactly that state of the blockade?" Referring to the Confederate emissary in London, he commented that "Mr. Mason.....openly declares that no less than 600 to 700 ships have broken the blockade and passed in and out of Southern ports."¹⁵

Russell proceeded to attack Mason's figures. He recalled that he had questioned Mason concerning "the tonnage of those vessels to which reference was made; and to that question he was unable to give me an answer." Therefore, if the blockade running vessels were of small size they "can hardly, from their insignificant character, be regarded as breaking the blockade."¹⁶

On March 7, 1862, the interventionists again attacked the blockade through the use of the number of

¹⁴. Ibid, p.1187-1190. The evening after this discussion Bright recorded in his diary "W.E. Forster's speech good, and his facts quite destructive of case against blockade. Solicitor General made an admirable speech, - language, facts, sentiments good."

¹⁵. Ibid, p.113.

¹⁶. Ibid, p.116.

successful blockade runners. Gregory stated that "400 ships" had run the blockade "and, as regards the trade and commerce of the world, [the blockade is] nothing but a snare."¹⁷

Forster took issue with the "400" escapees. He first began by noting that there were not 400, but 322 boats and "of the 322 boats which escaped from Southern ports, only 147 left after the 15 day grace period, 25 were river boats, 106 were coasters, all but three are 'quasi inland.'" He contended that it was "perfectly absurd to suppose that the voyage of a vessel behind lagoons, and scarcely appearing in the open sea, was a breach of the blockade." He then stated that there were "16 departures to foreign ports, 15 to American ones, chiefly to Cuba, 1 schooner from Charleston to Liverpool." Thus, according to Forster, there were not 400 escapees but only thirty-two.¹⁸

The neutralists also employed several other strategies to counter the interventionists. These tactics were usually used by one member on one particular occasion. One of these involved claiming that Britain was at fault for the blockade runners since most of them were British. Cobden admitted that:

I know that the contraband trade to the South is all from England, that it is carried, not only largely, but exclusively from England;

¹⁷. Ibid, p.1170

¹⁸. Ibid, p.1190.

and when we all know this, is it not something like affectation to come down to this House and offer complaints as if we were innocent parties.¹⁹

On February 20, 1862, O'Donoghue also used this strategy by requesting information on blockade runners. He, who believed there "to be no justification for calling the blockade a paper one," claimed that the authorities in Nassau had allowed supplies for ships destined to the South and requested that the British Government provide information on the *British* ships which had run the blockade. This was indeed an ingenious request for instead of providing figures which would show that the blockade was ineffective, the figures requested would show that British seamen were breaking the blockade in violation of the Queen's neutrality proclamation.²⁰

Layard, the Deputy Foreign Secretary, recognized the shrewd strategy and answered that he "would not feel justified in giving it, for it was hardly to be expected that the Government would lay on the table a list of wrong doers who had broken the blockade." The Solicitor General added that Her Majesty's proclamation "does not touch in any way whatever private merchant vessels." He concluded by defending the authorities at Nassau, from where many of the blockade runners

¹⁹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1653.

²⁰. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.528.

departed, for taking "the only course which it was possible to take consistently with the law of the land."²¹

Another neutralist strategy used historical precedents to determine the blockade to be effective. In this particular case, Russell was drawing a parallel between the British blockade of Europe during the Napoleonic wars and the current blockade by the United States. In June of 1863, Russell stated that:

I do not see how we can say, although we consider the blockade of 2000 miles of coast to be perfectly legitimate, a blockade of 2,500 or 3,000 miles is such a monster of illegality that we should find it impossible to recognize.²²

The neutralists also had to contend with the allegation that since the Royal Navy was the world's most powerful, and that blockades were one of Britain's most effective weapons, that it was in her self-interest to recognise an ineffective blockade as a legal one. On March 7, 1862, the Solicitor General responded to these charges by recalling that a French

²¹. Ibid, p.530.

²². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.883. One year before, on April 22, 1862, Russell wrote to Clarendon: "It is true that our ships, evading the blockade furnish them with warlike stores; but that is by reason of the impossibility of blockading effectively the three thousand miles of coast. Walpole, *Russell*, p.324.

lawyer declared "that you have a paper blockade in America, and that England, the universal patroness of paper blockades, connives at and supports it, doubtless with a view to her own advantage in future times." In response, the Solicitor General adamantly stated that "We will not have one rule for the time when we are belligerents and another for a time we are neutrals."²³ *The Times* agreed and wrote on March 8, 1862, "they [the North] ascribe our acquiescence in the blockade to our selfish regard for this; our chief weapon of maritime war; but they are as much mistaken as he [Gregory] is when he tells us that we are not honesty neutral."

Another rare neutralist strategy was to assert that Britain was at fault for being the creator and the main perpetuator of the blockade as a weapon of war. This was the argument of Richard Cobden, who, although not as passionately Northern in his sympathies as his friend Bright, did support neutrality towards the end of the war.²⁴ In this debate, Cobden first criticized blockades in general as "a mode of warfare" which "can be objected to on the ground of natural justice." He spoke of the "greater injury and suffering inflicted by this blockade on the manufacturing towns of England ...

²³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p. 1212.

²⁴. Cobden even considered supporting intervention. On September 15, 1862, Lord Stanley, a conservative M.P. wrote, in reference to Cobden, "he himself deplored the waste of blood and money, inclined to think the contest useless, acknowledged that England alone could do no good by interfering, but thought it possible that a mediation by all the leading European powers jointly might succeed." Vincent, p. 191.

than upon any town in the United States, apart from the loss of life and limb upon the battlefied." He continued by asserting that the blockade resulted in:

the misery of hundreds of thousands of innocent people deprived of the means of earning their daily bread by honest industry, by means of this war. But who are chiefly responsible for this system of warfare? Undoubtedly the public men of this country, and those who uphold commercial blockades as a means of warfare. It is only our own principle, carried out with dreadful severity against ourselves - the principle which we have cherished in the belief, that when we become belligerents, it would be of advantage to ourselves.²⁵

Cobden had ingeniously countered the allegations of the ineffectiveness of blockades by focusing his entire criticism on Britain as the mother of all blockades.

Cobden's mention of the suffering population of England was also used to bolster the arguments of neutralists. The Confederates had unintentionally provided evidence that the blockade was effective through their self-embargo of cotton. It was hoped that by exacerbating the cotton shortage, Britain and

²⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1651-1652.

France would be more inclined - out of self-interest - to support the Confederacy. However, on March 10, 1862, citing the dearth of delivered cotton in order to defend the blockade, Russell remarked that "the intelligence which we have received - shows that there has been no such uninterrupted intercourse."²⁶ On February 20, 1862, O'Donoghue noted that "the dearth of cotton seemed to show that the blockade was most effective."²⁷

The popularity of the blockade as a target for the interventionists lasted until 1862. By that time, the war's duration and intensity allowed for more exhaustive discussions on the merits of intervention. Furthermore, the North had begun making clear progress at tightening the blockade.²⁸ Thus, the blockade was replaced by a proliferation of issues. One of those

²⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1240.

²⁷. *Ibid*, p.527.

²⁸. Only a few times in 1863 the blockade was criticised. For example, on March 23, Lord Campbell stated that "allowance has been made for the difficulties which the United States had to contend with in the war; and that public law has been liberally interpreted in their favour," and "the British Government has not been ready to maintain them [the North] in the vital point that blockades must be effective to be binding." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 169, p.1726. On June 15, the Marquess of Carnarvon claimed that "The inefficiency of the blockade was the main cause of the complaint. It was no reproach to the Federal Government that the blockade, which was much more efficient at the beginning of the war, has ceased to be so now. The question was whether this was a blockade which ought any longer to be recognised; and he thought perfectly clear that it was not." *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.878. Most authorities believed that the blockade was becoming more effective, not less as Campbell claimed.

issues, which Cobden had mentioned during his discussion of the blockade, was the suffering which was a result of the cotton shortage. With the expansion in the issues debated, economic self-interest was an argument exploited by both interventionists and neutralists.

**III. The Economic Issues:
The Coup De Grace of King Cotton**

"The cards are in our hands, and we intend to play them out to the bankruptcy of every cotton factory in Great Britain and France, or the acknowledgement of our independence." *Charleston Mercury*, June 4, 1861¹

"The notion of getting cotton by interfering with the blockade is abandoned." John Bright, November 20, 1861²

On March 4, 1858, a United States Senator from South Carolina spoke the words that were in the minds and on the lips of many of the Southerners. James Hammond stated:

What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years? I will not stop to depict what everyone would imagine, but this is certain: England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is King.³

¹. Quoted from E.D. Adams, Volume 2, p.5.

². Ibid, p.15.

³. *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond of South Carolina* (New York, 1866), pp.316-317.

The belief in Britain's dependence upon cotton was not without basis. The cotton industry was Britain's largest industry and, in the case of Lancashire, eighty percent of the cotton imported was from the southern United States. The American cotton was of higher quality than Indian cotton, which had been considered as a possible replacement by the British. Furthermore, nearly two-fifths of Britain's export trade was comprised by manufactured cotton products. It is also estimated that out of the United Kingdom's total population of twenty-one million, four million people were dependent upon the cotton industry.⁴

During the war, this fear of the ramifications of the cotton shortage reached the upper levels of government. This was best exemplified by the writings of the Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone in the autumn of 1862 when he was clearly concerned with the reaction of the people of Lancashire. On September 24 Gladstone wrote to Palmerston his concern over public opinion:

The population of Lancashire have borne their sufferings with a fortitude and patience exceeding all example, and almost all belief. But if any one of the great towns,

⁴. Leland H. Jenks, *The Migration of British Capital to 1875* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963), p.470; Barrie Ratcliffe, ed. *Great Britain and Her World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p.154; Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p.8.

resignation should, even for a single day, give place to excitement, and an outbreak should occur, our position in the face of America, and our influence for good might be seriously affected: we might then seem to be interfering, with loss of dignity on the ground of our immediate interests, and rather in the attitude of parties than as representing the general interests of humanity and peace.⁵

In his essay which he prepared for the Cabinet on October 25, Gladstone again acknowledged the presence of the crisis and his concern with the public opinion of those suffering. He wrote:

The terrible distress of Lancashire has thus far been borne with heroic patience and with perfect submission to the law. But, with all our confidence in the people, who can be certain that the positive suffering, the actual hunger which we have every reason to fear is endured there, may not at some time, at some place, perhaps from some apparently trivial incident, give rise to an outbreak?

He further contended "that it is certainly the one which has inflicted, beyond all comparison, the

⁵. Guedella, p.233.

severest suffering on the other countries of the world, and has given them the best title to be heard, if they shall think fit to speak, on the question of its continuance."⁶ For Gladstone, those who were in the best position to advocate an alteration in neutrality were those who were suffering.

However, there were also those who believed that intervention because of cotton was ridiculous. Lord Clarendon wrote "A proposal from us to mediate would be attributed, I expect, to a forlorn hope of getting out cotton during the fortnight or month that the armistice would last, and this would be an additional reason for rejecting it and laughing at us."⁷

In Parliament, both the Southern and the Northern sympathisers seized upon these issues to further their arguments. The interventionists claimed that Britain should intervene to renew the cotton trade while the neutralists warned that Britain should not jeopardize her vital grain trade with the United States by intervening in the war.

As compared to other issues though, the cotton shortage was discussed much less. It never attained the dominant status as a persuasive issue that some Confederates might have expected. The reason for this minimal attention lay in the fact that Gladstone had mentioned: while it was easy to recognise the

⁶. Ibid, pp.239 - 247.

⁷. Herbert Maxwell, *The Life and Letters of George William Frederick Fourth Earl of Clarendon* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p.265.

correlation between the economic distress and the cotton shortage, it was far more difficult to determine if those suffering advocated intervention or neutrality.⁸

Curiously, in discussing the cotton shortage, both sides accepted that the shortage was the result of the war. Yet later historians have argued that the depression and the unemployment of the cotton industry was a result of other more long-term trends. In *Great Britain and her World, 1750-1914*, the conclusion concerning the Lancashire crisis was that "the Civil War was not responsible for the industrial depression in Lancashire, did not seriously deplete the stocks of raw cotton held in Britain and was important only in so far as it induced expectations of a future shortage of supplies. The depression was almost wholly upon the preceding period of production which had expanded far in excess of any existing demand." In fact, the antebellum cotton shipments were of such quantity that, according to Frank Owsley, the cotton mills by December, 1861, had 200,000 more bales of raw cotton than the previous year. However, the neutralists never challenged the belief that the distress was a direct result of the American Civil War. Thus, in the process, whether interntionally or accidently, they

⁸. Historians have also had difficulty in answering this question. E.D. Adams and ~~Eric~~ Philip Foner supported the belief that the Lancashire population overall was pro-North while Owsley and Mary Ellison contended that the population was basically of a southern persuasion.

substantiated the allegation that Britain was noticeably suffering due to the war.

The stockpile of raw cotton may explain why the cotton shortage did not become an issue in 1861. The distress was not considered worthy of mention by the Members of Parliament until ten months after Fort Sumter when the effect of the cotton shortage had reached crisis proportions.⁹ At last, on February 7, 1862, Gregory, stated that there were "effects which the lamentable war in America had produced upon the industry of the United Kingdom." He pleaded that "in justice to the suffering manufacturing populations of this country" the "House could not take too early an opportunity of discussing this subject."¹⁰

After this first mention, the cotton shortage would be discussed four more times and each time a Member would attempt to remind their fellow members that the distress was a direct result of the war. On March 7, 1862, Bentick asked whether "it was not the case that the non-recognition of the Southern States...was a great source of inconvenience to the manufacturing interests of this country?" On July 18, 1862, Lindsay called the attention of the House "to what our manufacturing districts were suffering by the stoppage of cotton from the Southern States of America," for "By the last accounts the distress had

⁹. Barrie Ratcliffe, ed., *Great Britain and her World, 1750-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p.159; Owsley, p.8.

¹⁰. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.92.

increased to a degree almost unparalleled." He claimed that, because of the war, 15,000 were receiving relief in Blackburn while Preston had 12,000 suffering. Lord Campbell, on March 23, 1863, asserted that the "Lancashire distress" was due to the Lincoln Administration, which he considered "despotism." In this vein, Campbell claimed that, if the North won, "on this overgrown, on this portentous form of tyranny and egotism, many countries would depend for the material of that important industry which languishes at present."¹¹

On June 30, 1863, the cotton shortage received a prominent place in Roebuck's speech. To Roebuck, the cotton shortage was an additional reason to recognise the independence of the Confederacy "because it is our interest." He stated that "Thousands, nay, nearly a million, of your people are suffering from the want of these very commodities which we can supply." He demanded:

I want hon. Gentlemen to tell me why the time has not arrived [for recognition]. At present moment, a large portion of our population are suffering in consequence of the cotton famine.¹²

¹¹. Ibid, p.181; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.518; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 169, pp.1728-1733.

¹². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1776.

After establishing the fact that Britain was suffering due to the cotton shortage, the interventionists then contended that Britain could alleviate the distress by intervening on behalf of the South because of the South's agricultural products. Lord Robert Cecil on March 7, 1862 claimed:

With respect to the Southern States, the case was entirely reversed. Their population were an agricultural people. They furnished the raw material of our industry, and they consumed the products which we manufactured from it.¹³

In the same debate, Gregory stated:

It is all very well to say that at this moment the world is flooded with the over-production of past years; but I am given to understand there are orders coming in, and there would be a demand from many parts of the world if the ports of the Southern States were open to our commerce. And not only that, but presuming that these ports were open, there are 8,000,000 Southerners anxious and ready to take our manufactures, which would not be kept out by a Morill tariff or

¹³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1229.

by differential duties upon our ships. Can you wonder that the people of Lancashire and Yorkshire are turning their eyes in that direction? Can you wonder they are anxious that these ports should be opened, when they believe that if they were open, the closed gates of the mill would be thrown wide open, and gladness and plenty and cheer would revisit many a cold and desolate hearth?¹⁴

Gregory, a few months later, on July 18, 1862, again discussed the economic advantage of intervening on behalf of the South. He stated that:

The whole question of putting an end to this state of things depends on our obtaining cotton. We know we cannot get that supply from India. We do know that we can get it from the Southern States of America.

Later on during the same debate, he stated:

I contend, if you wish to put an end to this lamentable war, if you wish at once to avert that terrible calamity which is daily

¹⁴. Ibid, p.1165. The Morill Tariff to which Gregory refers was a protective tariff against manufactured goods. The "over-production" to which Gregory refers was as a result of the higher than usual harvest of the previous years as well as the over-abundance of finished products.

increasing throughout Lancashire, you will accept the Resolution before you.¹⁵

The resolution to which he was referring requested that the British Government offer mediation to the North and the South.

Fitzgerald in the same debate agreed with Gregory. He believed that the Members of Parliament "should be wanting in our duty to our own population, as well as humanity in general" if they failed to "step forward, and, by peaceful mediation, try and put an end to this odious contest."¹⁶

And, finally, the interventionists, after stating the the war had caused the cotton shortage which could be relieved through intervention, claimed that those who were suffering did not support neutrality. Yet they only mentioned this on a few occasions as when Lindsay, in 1862, revealed that a workman, in referring to the recognition of the South, had told him, "I can assure you in this part of the country we are anxious to see it."¹⁷ Apparently, the interventionists assumed that those suffering would be opposed to neutrality.

To counter the interventionists' use of the cotton shortage, three points were used. First of all, the neutralists asserted that Britain should not act out of economic self-interest. In 1862, Forster stated, in

¹⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, pp.533, 566.

¹⁶. *Ibid*, p.574.

¹⁷. *Ibid*, p.518.

reference to those who were suffering, that Britain "ought not transgress international law even for their interests' sake." The Solicitor General asked "how would it have been if, for the purpose of consulting and considering our own interests, we had been the first to break the recognised usages of established law - the first to say that the United States as a belligerent power should not exercise all belligerent rights in the ordinary manner, because we wanted cotton?"¹⁸

Some of the neutralists further claimed that the war resulting from intervention would not be economically beneficial for Britain. On being asked by Hopwood on June 30, 1862, whether Her Majesty's Government "would endeavour to put an end to the Civil War in America?", Palmerston replied that "Her Majesty's Government are deeply sensible of the sufferings now existing in the cotton-manufacturing districts" but he was "sure the House will see that anything like interference with the war now going on would only aggravate still more the sufferings of those now under privation." Forster, on July 18, 1863, stated that "we could keep the working population of Lancashire in luxury for less than the price it would cost us to interfere as the noble Lord opposite suggested." Additionally, he "believed that, considered in a merely selfish and economical point of

¹⁸. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.1195,1225.

view, such a war would be the worst alternative."¹⁹
 Lord Montagu, in opposing intervention for self-interest, claimed that war would result and no cotton would be gained. On June 30, 1863, he asked his fellow members whether anyone believed "that the mere recognition of the Southern States, without a war, would bring over a single bale of cotton? Or that recognition with war would lesson the hardship, diminish the taxes, or stop the effusion of blood?"²⁰

The opponents of intervention also insisted that those suffering intervention supported neutrality, not intervention. Forster stated that:

I do not mean to say that upon the first blush it might not appear to be the interest of the manufacturing districts that the blockade should be broken. But the manufacturing districts do not themselves think so. They are opposed to the breaking of international law.²¹

In reference to the cotton mill workers' desire for intervention, the Solicitor General stated:

Who have been the great sufferers here by the loss of that trade which has been so

¹⁹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.536.

²⁰. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1787.

²¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1195.

unhappily interrupted? The artisans and manufacturers of Lancashire...Have they demanded this [intervention]? has my hon. Friend, [Gregory] the Member for Galway spoken under their inspiration? No!²²

On March 10, 1862, Taylor denied that the working classes of Britain held the opinions of which the interventionists had accused them. Referring to the workers at Blackburn who had been originally presented with a resolution in favour of recognition, he related that "a Resolution similar to that now proposed by the hon. Member for Sunderland [Lindsay] was submitted to them; it was negatived, and a resolution in the opposite sense was carried by the working men almost unanimously." Taylor reasoned that "these people were seen to bear their sufferings, because they felt, even if a supply of cotton should be the result of intervention, that that intervention would involve a sin and produce a stain on the anti-slavery flag of England."²³

Within the second point, lay the main point of contention concerning the cotton shortage: did those suffering support neutrality or intervention? This was an extremely difficult question for either side to provide a definitive answer and for that reason, it made the cotton shortage a difficult issue for the

²². Ibid, p.1225.

²³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.525.

interventionists to use. They could not advocate intervention on behalf of those suffering if those suffering did not themselves desire it. Thus, despite the fact that few of those affected could vote, their support was desperately sought by both sides. This desperation was best manifested in the staged rallies which both sides held in order to demonstrate that the cotton mill workers supported either North or South. Therefore, King Cotton had been dethroned by the uncertainty of public opinion.

Besides cotton, there was only one other issue debated in Parliament concerning the American Civil War which also involved Britain's economic self-interest: grain. True, before the war, the grain imports from the Northern states were less than one-quarter of the total imported into Britain. However, from 1860 to 1862 the American grain imports surged to almost half of the total grain imports.²⁴

The grain issue though, was by far one of the least common debated. This was probably due to the fact that it was difficult to perceive. One could easily be aware of blockading ships, slaves, and unemployed cotton mill workers but Britain's dependence on grain shipments was far less noticeable.

The grain issue, when mentioned, was used to oppose those advocating interference based upon the

²⁴. David P, Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers* (London: John Wiley, and Sons, 1974), pp.268-272.

cotton shortage. The neutralists contended that the British were dependent upon the grain which was being produced in the North. If war was to occur as the result of intervention, Britain would no longer receive this grain and there would be the possibility of a food shortage. To those considering whether to interfere, the neutralists were hoping that the Members of Parliament would prefer to cope with unemployment rather than starvation.

Forster was the member who most often discussed Britain's dependence upon American grain. He first used the issue during the debate of July 18, 1862, when he stated that "We had a cotton famine now; but if we did that [intervention], we should stand in danger of a corn famine."²⁵ Indeed, as already mentioned, nearly half of Britain's grain imports in 1862 were from the North.

Forster's brief mention of grain probably indicated that he did not believe in its powerful persuasiveness. It was most likely used as a tactic by which a debater uses numerous points in the hope that the opposition will be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity.

The grain issue remained unmentioned after Forster's brief comment for almost an entire year despite the several debates on intervention during that time. The next and last time that grain was mentioned was the debate on Roebuck's motion on June 30, 1863.

²⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.550.

This time Forster would be joined by Montagu in using the grain issue. Montagu argued:

We imported largely of grain, our two chief sources being Poland and the North West States of America. Was it likely that we should be able to get much from Poland under the present circumstances? No. Then we must rest mainly on the supplies of North America. But how would war affect that? Would not the distress in England be aggravated by a war with America?²⁶

To fully comprehend Montagu's point, one must understand that Poland was in crisis. The population rebelled against Russian rule, primarily due to a new conscription policy, and the resulting guerrilla warfare by some of the Polish people jeopardized the possibility that Britain could continue to acquire Polish grain during 1863.²⁷

Taking up Montagu's argument during the same debate, Forster noted that "sufferings of the countrymen...would be great indeed if they were deprived of the American corn crop of this year." Forster blatantly criticized Roebuck for he "would never allow commercial considerations prevent him from

²⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1795.

²⁷. E. Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) p.315.

engaging in a just war, but when they were asked by the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield to go to war for selfish purposes - to procure cotton - it was allowable to ask 'What would be the cost of the war in corn?'²⁸

The interventionists never responded to this issue. This lack of response was probably not because the interventionists considered it impossible to counter. Rather, they probably simply considered the issue of little influence.

Judging by the unpopularity of the cotton and grain issues relative to the other issues, it would appear that the Members of Parliament apparently did not believe that they could persuade their fellow members to intervene or remain neutral simply on the basis of economic self-interest. In fact, from the perspective of economic self-interest, perhaps the best argument lay in the fact that several British industries were thriving in the manufacturing of supplies for the North.²⁹ Yet, this issue was not mentioned in any of the Parliamentary debates or the Cabinet discussions and therefore was not considered in terms of the neutrality policy. Grain, King Cotton, and manufactured commodities clearly did not reign in the Houses of Parliament.

²⁸. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1813.

²⁹. Owsley, p.549.

IV. The Issues of Morality:

Slavery and Freedom

"To those who watched the progress of events upon the American continent it appeared absurdly unnecessary, nay, even puerile, to state that any other cause than slavery could be assigned for the civil war." - W.E. Forster, October, 1861¹

"The manifestos of the South might be put forth by any State desirous of terminating an unpleasant connexion or exchanging union for independence." - *The Times*, May 30, 1861

When discussing the American Civil War, the Members of Parliament debated two issues which may be considered issues of morality: the right of self-determination, and slavery. The interventionists advocated a departure from neutrality based upon the Southerners' right of self-determination and they also strived to dismiss slavery as a crucial factor. The neutralists countered the interventionists' discussion of the right of self-determination by insisting that the South stood for, and was fighting for, the continuation of slavery.

¹. Quoted in T. Wemyss Reid, *The Life of W.E. Forster* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1888), p.339.

In the early 1830s the antislavery movement, as an organized group, became a powerful force in Britain which eventually assisted in abolishing slavery from the British Empire in 1833 and, four years later, the antislavery movement led the crusade in order to abolish the slavery-apprenticeship system which was in many ways just slavery by a different name. Yet, after the zenith of the 1830s and the 1840s, the organization of the antislavery movement gradually diminished, even though British sentiment in general remained hostile to slavery.

With the continuation of the American Civil War and the establishment of several pro-Southern organizations such as the Southern Independence Association, the antislavery movement as an organized force was temporarily resurrected. The antislavery forces supported the North and Lincoln's emancipation aims while opposing any deviation from Britain's neutrality policy.

In opposition to the pro-Northern view of the antislavery groups, the Southern sympathisers were not themselves in favour of slavery. Many of the pro-southern organizations, including the Southern Independence Association, promised emancipation.² The interventionist MP's, interestingly, never mentioned that fact but instead went to great lengths to establish that slavery was not an issue upon which

². Owsley, p.179.

Britain should make policy in respect to the Confederacy.

First of all, the interventionists contended that the war was not a war for abolition. This was in part substantiated by the the fact that Lincoln had not, until the autumn of 1862, made slavery a war aim. Lindsay used this point to strengthen his argument in July of 1862 when he stated that "slavery had very little if anything to do with the civil war." He pointed out that:

In fact, President Lincoln, in his inaugural Address, on the 4rth of March, 1861, said - 'I have no intention to interfere, directly or indirectly, with the question of slavery where it exists. I do not think I have a right to do so legally, and I am by no means inclined to do it.

Prior to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln's dismissal of General Fremont for his emancipation edict, his annulment of General Hunter's emancipation edict, and his correction of Cameron's statement that emancipation was a war aim made the task more difficult for the antislavery groups. Lindsay used this line of argument by recalling that much "had been said about slavery, and he could be no friend to slavery as an institution; but when two of the most distinguished federal generals talked about liberating

the slaves, they were immediately recalled."³ Lindsay was mistaken for only General Fremont had been "recalled" although General Hunter's emancipation edict had been revoked. Nevertheless, he was correct in believing that Lincoln had not, as of March 1862, declared that the war was a war against slavery.

The interventionists did admit that slavery existed in the South but also argued that that was no reason not to recognize the Confederacy for Britain recognized several states that permitted slavery. During his speech on June 30, 1863, Roebuck argued:

We are met by the assertion, 'Oh, England cannot acknowledge a State in which slavery exists.' Indeed, I ask, is that really the case, and is any man so weak as to believe it? Have we not acknowledged Brazil? Are we not in constant communication with Russia? And is there not slavery in both these countries?⁴

Furthermore, the interventionists asserted that the slavery system in the South was more civilized than the manner in which blacks were treated in the North. Bentinck, in 1862, contended that "the Northern and Southern States stood in precisely the same position in

³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.515.

⁴. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1774.

regards to this institution."⁵ In 1863, Roebuck stated:

Moreover, does anybody believe that the black slave would be at all improved in his condition by being placed in the same position as the free black in the North? I ask whether the North, hating slavery, if you will, does not hate the slave still more?

This last comment elicited the response of a few "Noes!" which were subsequently drowned in cheers. He insisted that the "blacks are not permitted equal station in the North." In contrast, he argued "in the South the feeling is very different," for there "black children and white children are brought up together" to which a "No!" was shouted. He continued by noting that "In the South there is not that hatred, that contempt of the black man which exists in the North." Roebuck stated that he was not "speaking in favour of slavery" but "although I hate slavery, I cannot help seeing the great distinction between the condition of the black in the North, and his conditions in the South." He further believed that "to-morrow the North would join with the South, and fasten slavery on the necks of blacks, if the South would only re-enter the Union."⁶

⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1181.

⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1774-1775.

Clifford, in the same debate, claimed that slavery in the South was not cruel or that the North was not against slavery. He confessed that he "did not wish it to be supposed that he was at all in favour of the institution of slavery, for he thought it equally degrading to the master and the slave; but he did not believe that the majority of the Southern masters were cruel masters." He indicted "the whole power of the North" for being "engaged to support the system."⁷

For those who remained unconvinced, the interventionists further claimed that separation of the United States into two separate republics would curtail slavery. Gregory contended that "reconstruction of the Union was the circumstance most likely to lead to the strengthening of the one (slavery) and the spread of the other (slave trade)." Lord Campbell on March 23, 1863, asserted that in "the event of separation, there will no longer be the possibility of extending negro bondage into territories in which it does not now exist." According to this line of argument which even William Lloyd Garrison originally accepted, the secession of the slave states would prevent the extension of slavery into the western territories. However, if the slave states remained part of the Union, slavery would be spread from ocean to ocean.⁸

⁷. Ibid, pp.1798-1799.

⁸. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1161; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 169, p.1730; It should be noted that for a time, the New Mexico territory had a secessionist government.

In fervent opposition, the neutralists continually stressed the fact that the Confederacy stood for slavery. In 1862, the Solicitor General declared that "after having made such sacrifices as we have done for the sake of liberty" Britain should not engage in "active cooperation with a country which, perhaps, without the fault of the present generation, is still one of the last strongholds of slavery." P.A. Taylor, who contended that slavery in the South "might be described as the wickedest and most infernal system the world had ever seen," like the Solicitor General stated that "What an extraordinary instance of inconsistency to see a nation that expended £20,000,000 in order to emancipate the slaves in its own colonies, now discussing in Parliament a proposition for the establishment of the independence of new States whose independence was exclusively based on the recognition of slavery." W.E. Forster stated that he "believed it was generally acknowledged that slavery was the real cause of this war," to which there were shouts of "No!, No!" and "the tariff." He continued by noting that "Vice President Stephens said that the South went to war to establish slavery as the corner-stone of the new Republic," while there was "no allusion to tariff in the election or declaration of independence by the Southern Confederacy."⁹

⁹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, p.1224; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, pp.527,537.

In the autumn of 1862, Abraham Lincoln made a dramatic step which altered the focus of the war. After the Union victory at the battle of Antietam, he issued his famous preliminary Emancipation Proclamation which declared that after January 1, 1863, all the slaves in those states which were in rebellion would be free. Lincoln considered the proclamation one of his greatest achievements.

The proclamation was not a particularly popular issue for either the neutralists or the interventionists. It was not mentioned in Parliament until almost six months after Lincoln had first read it. However, when the Southern sympathisers mentioned it, they proceeded to criticize it intensely.¹⁰

Lord Campbell on March, 23, 1863, in moving to the issue of slavery, became the first Member in Parliament to mention the Emancipation Proclamation. He claimed that:

At one time they [the North] boasted of their disposition to maintain it [slavery]. Soon after, they desired the Border States to be delivered from it. After that emancipation was declared, but only in the States which

¹⁰. The Emancipation Proclamation did not alter Palmerston's views of the war. Chamberlain, p.115. Douglas Lorimer claimed, in reference to the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation, that "Liberal opinion, already fragmented over the question of support for the South or the North, did not find that the Emancipation Proclamation clarified the issue." Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class, and the Victorians* (Leicester, 1978), p.169.

were resisting them. The loyal region must preserve the institution - but seceders must renounce it.

He believed that "swelding with omnipotence, Mr. Lincoln and his colleagues dictate insurrection to the slaves of Alabama."¹¹

During the discussion on Roebuck's motion, both Clifford and Gladstone declared their opposition to recognizing the Confederacy. Yet they too displayed their Southern sympathies in criticising the Emancipation Proclamation. Clifford asserted that even "Mr. Lincoln's proclamation was admitted to be an illegal act, and to be justified only as a war measure." Gladstone did not "believe that a more fatal error was ever committed than when men ... came to the conclusion that the emancipation of the negro race was to be sought, although they could only travel to it by a sea of blood."¹² Similarly, Lord Robert Cecil, who was the only one to speak in favour of Roebuck's motion, also stated his opposition to Lincoln's emancipation edict. He noted that:

In almost every case it [slavery] had been gradually rooted out; but never in consequence of the pressure of armed force.

¹¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 169, p.1222.

¹². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1799, 1807.

It was eradicated in every instance by the influence of public opinion.¹³

Despite the abolitionist nature of the Emancipation Proclamation, only one member of Parliament ever used it as a major point to bolster the neutralist argument. That member was John Bright. On June 30, 1863, he chastised the House for he had "not heard a word to-night of another question - I mean the proclamation of the President of the United States." He attacked Roebuck for his apparent ignorance of this document:

I make no allowance for that, because if he is ignorant, it is his own fault, for God has given him an intellect which ought to keep him from ignorance on a question of this magnitude.

He continued:

We have our Consuls in the South, but recognising only one legislature, one President, one law. So far as we are concerned, that proclamation is a legal and effective document.

Furthermore, he stated:

¹³. Ibid, p.1819.

We see that the Government of the United States has for two years past been contending for its life, and we know that it is contending necessarily for human freedom. That Government affords the remarkable example - offered probably for the first time in the history of the world - of a great Government coming forward as the organized defender of law, freedom, and equality.

This last comment received an "Oh!" and cheers from the assembly.¹⁴

However, while only Bright mentioned the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln's document allowed Forster and Bright to claim that the Confederacy stood for slavery and the Union stood for emancipation. In 1863, Forster inquired "How was the line drawn between the two sets of states?" and he answered explicitly that the line was drawn "Exactly by slavery, not the protective tariff." Forster asserted that "they [the North] were giving up slavery" and:

The Government of this country were now called on to do something, which if it meant anything, meant intervention. ['No!' 'Hear!]

¹⁴. Ibid, pp.1835-1836. *The Times* had a slightly different report than Hansard's. It claimed that Bright's last comment received not just one "Oh!", but several.

He felt great anxiety for the success of the siege of Vicksburg, for he believed two things depended on it - peace and freedom. He could not help thinking that if Vicksburg were taken, and the other side of the Mississippi cut off from slave territory, we should see an end of the war.¹⁵

To Forster, the fall of Vicksburg and the success of the North would then prevent a further spread of slavery.

Bright believed that there was no question that the States had divided due to the South's "peculiar institution." He asserted that Roebuck "would throw the weight of England into the scale in favour of the cause of slavery," while Bright maintained "that the war that is now raging in America is more likely to abolish it than not." The cotton mill owner questioned whether there was "any Gentleman in this House who will not agree with me in this - that it would be far better for our great Lancashire industry that our supply of cotton should be grown by free labour rather than by slave labour?" He appealed to the House to "consider what the state of things [were] before the war" when "every year in the slave States of America there were 150,000 children born into the world - born with the badge and loom of slavery."¹⁶

¹⁵. Ibid, p.1816.

¹⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1830-1834.

The primary way the interventionists countered the slavery issue was through by the use of the right of self-determination. The right of self-determination, put simply, was a belief that people should be free to choose the government which governs them. By describing the war as one which was caused by Northern-imposed tariffs or one that was caused by the gradual loss of Southern political power, the Southern sympathisers could press the claim that the South had a right to secede and a right to rebel.

In the debate of March 1862 in the House of Commons, four of the Southern sympathisers - Gregory, Bentinck, Lindsay and Cecil - used the the right of self-determination to bolster their argument in favour of the South. Gregory confessed that his "sympathies were with one portion of the American people - not that portion that is fighting for empire, but with that portion that is struggling for independence." He contended that "secession was a right, that separation is a fact, and that reconstruction is an impossibility." In a historical view, Bentinck supported Gregory in his claim that the Thirteen Colonies had rebelled against Britain because of "taxation" and that "was exactly what the Southern States were doing now in respect to the North." Lindsay declared that if "the Americans of 1784 had a right to rebel against the mother country, surely the Southern States had a still greater right to free

themselves from merely Federal obligations to the Northern States."¹⁷

Of the four who spoke on self-determination, only Cecil used Britain's recognition of past rebellions to strengthen his argument. He recalled that the "English Government had always been prone to recognise insurrectionary Powers" and that his nation's "principle" had always been "that the people should choose their own governors, and that when the will of the people was clearly pronounced the assent of foreign Governments should follow." He maintained that Britain "had always recognized States as soon as an independent Government was established within their borders." Cecil cited the British recognition of Belgium, Greece, Italy, and the Spanish colonies of South America as historical examples in the last fifty years. Despite these past actions, he believed that "the first instance in which they had departed from that principle was in the case of the Confederate States of America."¹⁸

The right of self-determination became an especially popular issue with the interventionists as the South displayed its ability to form and survive as the Confederate States of America. The durability of the Confederacy beyond the ninety day expectation was held to justify its claim to the right of self-determination. In July 1862 Vane Tempest pointedly

¹⁷. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 165, pp.1160, 1182, 1207.

¹⁸. *Ibid*, pp.1228-1229.

questioned "what were the chances that the North would restore the Union?" He believed the chances slim, for the South "after an interval of sixteen months" had "gallantly held their own." Whiteside stated that "It therefore becomes a matter of fact whether the seceding states have established a Government, and have shown a power and determination to resist any force that can be brought against them; and, if so, whether there is any ground to believe that at any time that can be named the North will be able to subjugate the South."

Lindsay claimed that "recognition of the Southern States on the part of this country would be perfectly justifiable" for the South could neither be "conquered" or "brought back into the Union." Lindsay believed "the time had arrived when the Southern States should be received into the family of nations." Gregory, who believed that it was "perfectly clear that the Southern Confederacy" was "of one mind and of one heart," thought the "Resolutions of the hon. Member (Mr. Lindsay) and my noble Friend (Lord A.V. Tempest) are rightly worded in calling on the Government to unite with the other European Powers in a joint and immediate course of action in this great emergency," for "we are justified in recognising the Confederate States as a Sovereign Republic; that they have every element constituting a de facto Government." Fitzgerald alleged that "the Confederate States had maintained not only a Government perfectly distinct from that from which they had separated themselves, but an established

Government, with a recognised constitution, a President, a Senate, and House of Representatives, duly elected, constituencies who exercised an independent choice, and elections freely conducted."¹⁹

In another debate of March, 1862, the right of self-determination for the Southern people was used to bolster the arguments of three of the interventionist MPs. Borrowing a phrase from American history, Lindsay concluded that "the real cause of this disruption was taxation without representation." Whiteside stated that the "loss of power may have been an important element in the dispute." Gregory failed to view slavery as a factor, describing the war instead as "a war for independence on the one side, and for vengeance on the other."

In opposition, only one neutralist directly responded to this line of argument. Forster maintained that the South was "fighting in order to make themselves an independent nation, and in order to destroy the Union" while the "Federalists were fighting in order to maintain the Union." Forster then drew an interesting parallel by noting that "if any disturbance arose in Ireland, if a contest were going on there, and if another Power stepped in, saying to us, 'Let the Irishmen alone, and let them govern themselves, should we be prepared to submit to dictation in such a

¹⁹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, pp. 530, 542, 511-512, 544, 574.

matter?" Forster well knew the British would hardly submit to intervention of that nature.²⁰

The argument pressing for intervention based upon the right of self-determination was so powerful that it persuaded a member of the government: William E. Gladstone. He began to question neutrality not out of a particular fondness for the South nor a hatred of the North, but out of a political philosophy that would later also cause him to support Irish Home Rule and the independence of the Balkan States. Despite his vehement disdain of slavery, he maintained, throughout the entire conflict, that the Southern people had a right to determine their own form of government. In the autumn of 1862, Gladstone believed that the time was right for mediation and he went public with his views in the most dramatic of ways by stressing the durability and the tenacity of the South. At his Newcastle speech on October 11, he declared:

We know quite well that the people of the Northern States have not yet drunk of the cup - they are still trying to hold it far from their lips - which all the rest of the world see they nevertheless must drink of. We may have our own opinions about slavery; we may be for or against the South; but there is no

²⁰. It should be noted that Forster spoke after Gregory, and his example of Ireland was especially relevant to Gregory who was a Member of Parliament representing an Irish constituency.

doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy, and they have made what is more than either - they have made a nation!²¹

By November, 1862, Gladstone believed that these considerations were causing public opinion to swing in favour of the Confederacy. In his Cabinet memorandum, he wrote:

Another reason which seems to me to tell materially in favour of early action is this, that the people of England are being rapidly drawn into Southern sympathies.

It is one thing to anticipate an issue of the war favourable in the main to the Southern view: it is quite another to sympathize with men whose cause is, as I think, seriously tainted by its connection with slavery. Yet the sight of a minority, heroically struggling against the effort of a much larger number to place them in a political connection that they abhor, probably with a withdrawal or limitation of their rights as freemen, has an irresistible tendency to arouse active sympathies in England on behalf of the weaker side, even

²¹. Matthew, p.152.

apart from the disgraceful circumstances which have attended the forcible re-establishment of the Northern rule, particularly in New Orleans.

The more these positive Southern sympathies increase, the less shall we be able to maintain a friendly and impartial aspect in any proceeding that may be taken.

But public opinion, not yet too widely committed for the South, appears to me to be in that state in which it would hail with cordial satisfaction any judicious effort for the termination of the war.

In one particular paragraph, Gladstone clearly showed that in the case of the American Civil War, he emphasized the right of self-determination more than slavery for he did not believe that slavery could be exterminated by war. He wrote:

One concluding word on slavery. I cannot suppose that we are to refuse to cure, or to aim at curing, one enormous evil, because we cannot cure another along with it. But I feel it would be most desirable, in a process of interference by which the South would be ostensibly, though perhaps not really, the greatest gainer, to use every moral influence with a view of mitigation,

or, if possible, the removal of slavery. But if we are right in anticipating, as most of us seem to anticipate, that the course of the war from month to month, and year to year, will, on the whole, bring the South nearer and nearer to an independence achieved by its own daring and tenacity, then it is plain that the longer interference is delayed, the less favourable will be our position, and the less clear our title, for urging on the Government of the Southern Confederacy the just claims of the slave.²²

The discussion of the Roebuck motion, the last time the neutrality policy was discussed in Parliament, provided an elaboration on the right of self-determination by Roebuck himself. Basically, his advocacy of recognition of the Confederacy was based upon the right of self-determination. Roebuck contended that:

Now, not only did the American people establish their independence, but they also established two points of international law, which I think of very great importance at the present time. The first was, that any body of people, determining to throw off their

²². Guedalla, pp.239 - 247.

allegiance, were justified, if they had the power, in so doing.

The Member then asserted that the "second point was very remarkable" for "we admitted, when we made peace, that France was justified in acknowledging them [the Thirteen Colonies] before we ourselves did so."

Roebuck, in reference to the Confederate States and recognition, "they had a right to claim it" as the colonies did in 1776.

In explaining why the South seceded, Roebuck contended that:

The Northern States of the Union resolved to make the Southern States, the great producers of the continent, subservient to themselves. They established a tariff which threw the whole carrying power of the continent into their own hands and compelled the Southern States to be purchasers of all manufactured commodities from the North.

He further maintained that the South seceded for "their object being to free themselves from the thralldom of the North, and to acquire the rights of free trade."

Cecil, in bolstering Roebuck's argument, reminded the House that, in reference to the Spanish South American

colonies, there was a precedent for recognition when troops were still present.²³

Roebuck had provided the neutralists with plenty of ammunition with which to respond. Since his two points of international law were not universally accepted, the neutralists pressed their attack upon that part of his argument. Montagu completely disagreed with Roebuck:

'a great point in international law,' - namely, that a state may throw off the rule of its Constitutional governors whenever it likes, and may separate from the mother state whenever it can! He proceeded to say, in like manner, that because the French had assisted in obtaining that independence, 'therefore another great principle had been established in international law,' - namely, that all nations have a right to do the like! Had ever such logic been heard in the House?

Montagu further questioned "Should we then really do wrong because we had been insulted?" He sarcastically replied, "If so, we should thereby establish another point in international law."²⁴

This was the last debate on the neutrality policy and this the last mention of the right of self-

²³. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp. 1771-1773, 1820.

²⁴. *Ibid*, pp.1783-1784.

determination. It had proved popular with the interventionists as an issue to attack neutrality. When countering this issue directly, the neutralists had disagreed with its application to the South.

As antislavery sentiment remained strong in Great Britain, slavery remained an unpopular institution. Yet, antislavery sentiment did not necessary lead to a neutralist position - though it clearly did in the case of the Radicals Bright and Forster - because of the ease of arguing that the war was not one fought for emancipation and because of the countervailing commitment to self-determination. Thus, even after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, slavery remained a contentious topic and the right of self-determination continued as a common issue of the interventionists.

V. Realpolitik:

The Fear of War and the Fear of France

"They who in quarrels interpose,
will often get a bloody nose"

Palmerston to Russell, December 30, 1860¹

With each new problem in foreign policy, Palmerston relied on the philosophy of *realpolitik*. He sought to act in what was Britain's best interest and expected that other leaders would act in the interest of their respective nations.² Thus when the Members of Parliament were faced with the question of whether to intervene in the American Civil War, some, like their Prime Minister, were guided by the philosophy of *realpolitik*.

The British had to consider their policy towards the United States in terms of a global perspective. Within this perspective, the United States was not of especial significance. Since the loss of the colonies in 1783, Britain had ceased to have a great interest in North America relative to the other areas; even Africa and India received more attention than North America. The region which attracted the most attention, due to

¹. This comment was made concerning the probable effects of British intervention in America. Herbert Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, (London: Longman, Green, and Company, 1936), p.275.

². Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830 - 1902* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.86.

concerns about British national security, was the European continent, especially France.

The European continent was a tense arena during the time when the neutrality policy was being debated. The balance of power among the European nations continued to be maintained in order to prevent the domination of a single state. Italy was still struggling to become a nation and both Palmerston and Russell continued to provide lukewarm support since a united Italy was considered to be an effective check against French expansion. However, at Italy's expense and against Palmerston's wishes, France was vying for an increase in influence while Austria was attempting to hold on to her territory bordering the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Palmerston desired that Austria remain strong to check the power of Prussia while he wanted Prussia to check the influence of Russia and France. As he had written to Lord Granville on January 30, 1859: "I am very Austrian north of the Alps, but very anti-Austrian south of the Alps."³

As the considerations of the European continent were of paramount importance to Britain, in the parliamentary debates on the neutrality policy one of the main arguments used by the neutralists was the danger of the possibility of war with the United States, a nation of less strategic importance to

³. Edmund Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson Gower Second Earl Granville*, Volume 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1905), p.325. Palmerston appeared to hold to that view throughout his last ministry.

Britain than the Great Powers of Europe. The neutralists asserted that any form of intervention - whether mediation, recognition, or forcible intervention - would risk the possibility of an Anglo-American war which would have horrific ramifications for Britain. In countering the neutralists, the interventionists claimed that war would not follow intervention, in part due to the assistance of France.

In March of 1862, the Southern sympathisers moved that Britain should offer to mediate between the North and the South. Taylor, Forster, and Palmerston all asserted that war was a likely outcome of intervention. Taylor perceptively noted that the "Amendment they were now discussing had been once or twice changed, and each time it was more diluted than before" for he understood that "Intervention was only a longer word for war." Forster announced that the present Motion would "so far from staying the war, would rather aggravate and prolong it, and, possibly would drag us into it." The member pointedly inquired whether the motion called for "friendly mediation or forcible intervention?" Forster believed that the intervention would result in a war with the United States which would be "wicked and unjust" and "foolish to the greatest possible degree." Palmerston asserted that "Acknowledgement would not establish a nation unless it were followed by some direct active interference" and "any attempt to put an end to it by active interference would only produce greater evils, greater sufferings, and greater

privations to those on whose behalf interference had been attempted."⁴

Similarly, on June 30, 1863, three Members of Parliament objected to Roebuck's motion on grounds that war was to be the result of intervention. Lord Montagu maintained that "the Resolution of the hon. Member for Sheffield amounted, therefore, to a desire for an alliance to go to war with the North." To those who believed that Britain could recognise and remain neutral, Montagu countered that these "two things were incompatible." Forster adamantly believed that an "Alliance with France for the purposes of intervention was apt to lead to war," while "intervention would destroy the hopes of the peace party." Bright considered the real purpose of the motion to be quite clear, for "taken in connection with his character and with the speech he has made to-night, and with the speech he has recently made elsewhere on this subject, I may say that he would have come to about the same conclusion if he had proposed to address the Crown inviting the Queen to declare war against the United States of America."⁵

Even some Southern sympathisers publicly stated the fear that intervention could lead to war. In response to Roebuck's motion, Clifford confessed that he "should give his cordial support to the Amendment,

⁴. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, pp.524, 534-535, 572.

⁵. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1788-1789, 1814, 1825.

for he thought that if any precipitate act plunged this country into hostilities with the United States, a new feature of horror would be added to those now witnessed in America." On the same occasion, Gladstone contended that "it is very difficult as far as I know to find cases where there has been recognition pending the contest, and where that recognition has not been followed by war." He advised that recognition must only come if the war was "virtually at an end." Gladstone maintained that "as long as doubt exists, that doubt ought to be ruled on the side of safety."⁶

Earlier, in the autumn of 1862, Gladstone had attempted to persuade the Cabinet that the time had come for Britain to extend an offer of mediation to the North and the South. When Lord Granville heard of this, he wrote to Russell and defended the continuation of the neutrality policy on the ground that the alternative would lead to war. He believed that mediation would fail for either just one or neither party would accept the proposal and then hostilities with Britain would be inevitable. On September 27, he wrote:

It would not be a good moment to recognise the South just before a great Federal success. If, on the other hand, the Confederates continue victorious, as it is to

⁶. Ibid, pp.1797, 1809, 1811.

be hoped, we should stand better then than now in recognising them.

In any case I doubt, if the war continues long after our recognition of the South, whether it will be possible for us to avoid drifting into it. The expectation of an immediate supply of the best cotton will have been raised in this country. The dislike which now exists between us will be much increased. The North will become desperate, and even against their intentions will give us innumerable *casus belli*. The result of such a war under present circumstances is not doubtful, but much valuable blood would be unnecessarily spilt, infinitely more treasure would be spent than is sufficient to maintain the cotton operatives during their temporary distress; and whether the French went with us or not, it is not unlikely that circumstances might arise which would enable the Emperor more freely to adopt any foreign policy either in Italy or elsewhere which might suit him.⁷

I am afraid your message was not intended to produce such a long rigmarole, but you will see by it that I have come to the conclusion that it is premature to depart

⁷. Like Palmerston, Granville was clearly concerned with Napoleon's meddling in Italy.

from the policy which has hitherto been adopted by you and Lord Palmerston, and which, notwithstanding the strong antipathy to the North, the strong sympathy with the South, and the passionate wish to have cotton, has met with such general approval from Parliament, the press, and the public.⁸

In a *realpolitik* framework, one would have to ask what Britain was to gain in a war with the United States as opposed to what was to be lost. The neutralists believed that Britain stood to lose in three ways: her British North American colonies, her merchant shipping, and her resources.

Britain's interests in North America were mainly invested in the British North American colonies which would later form the nation of Canada. Her primary concern for the colonists lay in their protection from the United States. In both the American Revolution and during the War of 1812, the colonies had been a prime target for the American forces. Furthermore, it had been no secret that the Americans had often considered the possibility of annexing the colonies into the expanding young nation.

From a military perspective, the British North American colonies were especially vulnerable during the civil war. The possibility of American success was greater since there were nearly 2.1 million men in the

⁸. Fitzmaurice, pp.443-444.

United States Army during the war whereas the Canadian border guards numbered around 10,000. During the *Trent* crisis, Palmerston's concern for Canada's defence was vividly displayed when he sent 5,000 regular troops. The defensive capability of these guards was further diminished since they were scattered all along the Canadian-American border. Additionally, due to the poor annual weather of the winter months, the British could not hope to supply the Canadian forces throughout the entire year.⁹

The danger to the colonies was clearly understood by Palmerston. In the autumn of 1862, In considering the ramifications of intervention he wrote in private:

As regards possible resentment on the part of the Northerners following upon our acknowledgement of the independence of the South, it is quite true that we should have less to care about that resentment in the spring when communication with Canada opens, and when our naval force could more easily operate upon the American coast than in winter, when we are cut off from Canada and the American coast is not so safe.¹⁰

⁹. James McPherson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 306; Norman Ferris, *The Trent Affair*, p.65.

¹⁰. G.P. Gooch, *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell 1840 - 1878*, (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1925), p.326.

These concerns were also discussed in the public forum of Parliament. On June 30, 1863, Lord Montagu stated "Besides, we had to take into account that the North is now a great military power, while we had but few troops, widely scattered over Canada, and an easy prey to an invader. The capture by the North of our scattered garrisons there would make us look rather small in the eyes of the world."¹¹

The interventionists attempted to counter the neutralist's claim that Canada's defence should guide British policy. In the June 30 debate, Lord Robert Cecil advocated support for Roebuck's motion and argued against the fear of war by criticising those who had mentioned the questionable state of Canadian defense. He asserted that he "did not imagine that our possession in Canada influenced our judgement one way or another."¹² This was not a popular strategy though, and Cecil was the only member to advocate no consideration of Canadian defence.

Britain's merchant shipping was also in danger during a war with the United States. Britain's navy was unquestionably too powerful for the Americans to challenge on the high seas. However, Britain's merchant marine was vulnerable to American privateers. As the United States had not signed the 1856 Declaration of Paris, it had left open the option of issuing letters of marque. The British did not have to

¹¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1794.

¹². *Ibid*, p.1820.

consider the past wars to appreciate the danger of privateers, they had only to look at the Confederacy's successes with privateers. The *Alabama* and the *Florida*, to name but two, had a devastating effect from March 1862 until 1864 upon the United States merchant marine. Yet the overall effect of the Confederate privateers was due to only a few ships. There was no question that the United States could produce more privateers than the Confederates and therefore could also cause more damage.

Lord Montagu, on June 30, 1863, discussed this point by asserting that if war would occur between the United States and Britain:

Our commerce would also certainly have something to fear from the *Alabamas* and the *Floridas* which the North could put upon the seas. He was not appealing to the fears of the Englishmen, but was simply pointing out some of the consequences that would inevitably follow our intervention in this contest.¹³

Bright also discussed the danger to commerce in this same debate:

I have not said a word with regard to what may happen to England if we go into war with

¹³. Ibid, p.1794.

the United States. It will be a war on the ocean - every ship that belongs to the two nations will, as far as possible, be swept from the seas.¹⁴

The other fear of war lay in the loss of life and resources. The British had only to observe the vast cost that the North and South were paying to conduct the conflict and to recall the immense cost of previous conflicts in order to appreciate the financial burden of war. On June 30, from an financial standpoint, Forster "did not believe that the sympathies of any class of the people in this country went so far as to submit to an additional income tax for the purpose of defending Canada."¹⁵

The loss of life, though, was the most feared aspect of a war with the United States. While the past two wars with the United States had resulted in relatively low casualties, the battles of the American Civil War were resulting in casualties beyond any previous expectations or previous conflicts. The British had to take into consideration that they would have to expect to suffer casualties of the proportion that the North and South were suffering if a war occurred between Britain and the United States.

In March of 1862, Taylor used this aspect of the fear of war to bolster his argument:

¹⁴. Ibid, p.1837.

¹⁵. Ibid, p.1813.

War without bloodshed and suffering was impossible; but why must we run into it? Did experience teach us no lessons? There was the war with Russia, and who would say that game was worth the light it cost? There was the intervention in Mexico, the only good step which was when we stepped out of it. There was immediate danger of war with China. Yet all these wars would be petty and insignificant as compared with a war between us and the United States of America. No war in the century would be a parallel for such a terrible conflict. It would be a fratricidal war, almost as that which was being fought between the South and the North - a war which would strike terror into all the friends of progress and liberty, and be rejoiced at by all who were their foes.¹⁶

Lord Montagu, in 1863 asserted that of all the menaces of war, the loss of life was the greatest to be feared. He first opened his discussion with the question "how was an armistice to be enforced?" and further asked "Did the hon. Member mean to say that they should have a war at once to carry that armistice into effect?" He answered this question with a

¹⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.524.

comprehensive consideration of the ramifications of war with the United States:

If we recognised the South, the North would infallibly declare war upon us, our own blood would then be shed in addition to that of the South, and also of the many recruits who had left this country for the North. But if the hon. and learned Member meant war, then let war be deliberately declared, let them not profess to recognize merely, let them not deceive the people of the United States and our own nation also, by copious professions of amity and friendship. Why should the hon. and learned Member not say what he really meant? Because he knew that war would be unpopular, because he and all the world were aware that war meant heavy burdens and onerous taxes. The hon. and learned Member would, indeed, do well to beware of war; not because we should have to operate at a distance of 3,000 miles; not because our shipping in every nook and corner of the world would have to be protected from American privateers; nor yet because the Guards, so sparsely scattered over Canada, would be taken prisoners; but because in such

a war we should be arrayed against our own flesh and blood.¹⁷

In 1863, Forster also argued this point by asking his colleagues "what would England gain by such a war?" in which the "great Anglo-Saxon race would be torn." He concluded by stating the he "prayed that England might be saved from such an unjust, barbarous, and un-Christian war, waged, as it would be, against the spirit of civilization, and against every principle of religion and morality."¹⁸

Another way, although not an especially popular one, by which the interventionists countered the fear of war was to suggest that Britain's military power could easily defeat the United States. The argument contended that Britain, as a world power, could easily overcome the United States which was not considered a military power of equal proportion to the nations of Europe.

J.A. Roebuck used this line of argument to contradict those who believed that the fear of war justified a neutral stance towards the civil war. His argument relied on the immense power of the Royal Navy which was unquestionably the most powerful navy in the world. Her prestige had further grown with the inclusion of the new ironclads *Warrior* and the *Black Prince*. These ships, which brought together several

¹⁷. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p. 1786.

¹⁸. *Ibid*, pp. 1817-1818.

revolutionary ideas, were the pride and the new backbone of the Royal Navy.¹⁹

On June 30, 1863, in concluding his speech, Roebuck challenged the belief in the fear of war by asserting that:

With this before them, are they not prepared to act in concert with France? Are they afraid of war? War with whom? With the Northern States of America? Why, in ten days, Sir, we should sweep from the sea every ship. [Oh,oh!] Yes, there are people so imbued with Northern feeling as to be indignant at the assertion. But the truth is known. Why, the *Warrior* would destroy their whole fleet. Their armies are melting away; their invasion is rolled back; Washington is in danger....²⁰

One of the Northern sympathisers countered Roebuck's point. Ridiculing Roebuck's claims, Forster said that he "would hardly like to see the seas covered with Northern Alabamas preying on their commerce notwithstanding the boast of the hon. and learned Member for Sheffield that one *Warrior* would sweep them all away."²¹

¹⁹. Peter Padfield, *The Battleship Era* (London: The Military Book Society, 1972), pp.23-24.

²⁰. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1778.

²¹. *Ibid*, p.1813.

The Southern sympathisers hoped to increase their support by recommending that Britain, in concert with other European nations, offer the offices of mediation. In this way, they stated that the United States would be more willing to accept an armistice if more than one European nation suggested that course of action. Secretly though, the Southern sympathisers well knew that the offer of mediation would be accepted readily by the South while the North would defiantly refuse on the premise that the war was an internal affair. When the North declined the offer of mediation, the interventionists could then propose recognizing the Confederacy. Their chances of succeeding would be far greater if the North had refused an offer of mediation.

The concert of nations that were recommended to make an offer of mediation with Britain were France and Russia. Of these, France was considered far more often than Russia because the Russian czar - Alexander II - was pro-North while Napoleon was pro-South and France was suffering from the lack of Southern cotton like Britain. This economic common ground was hoped to increase the chances that the two nations, which did not trust each other, might be brought together on this issue. On July 18, 1862, Lindsay used this point to bolster his argument. He noted that due to the cotton shortage Britain would not have to act alone in offering mediation for the "Emperor of the French, whose people were known to be suffering even more severely than ours from the stoppage of the cotton



supply, would only be too happy in joining England in offering mediation."²²

The neutralists contended that cotton could not be obtained by intervention and furthermore the resulting war would cost far more than the cotton shortage was costing Britain. On March 10, 1862, W.E.Forster dismissed the cotton shortage as a *casus belli*, for Britain "could keep the working population of Lancashire in luxury for less than the price it would cost us to interfere as the noble Lord opposite suggested."²³

Similarly, on June 30, 1863, Lord Montagu questioned the immediate economic benefits of recognition:

but could any man believe that the mere recognition of the Southern States, without a war, bring over a single bale of cotton? Or that recognition with war would lessen the hardship, diminish the taxes, or stop the effusion of blood?²⁴

Outside Parliament John Bright stated that it would be cheaper to feed the affected workers on champagne and venison than to have Britain intervene in the war.²⁵

The most dramatic discussion of an Anglo-French intervention occurred on June 30, 1863, when the civil

²². *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 168, p.521.

²³. *Ibid*, p.535.

²⁴. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, p.1785.

²⁵. Owsley, p. 546.

war had reached a watershed. During his long speech, Roebuck declared that "the great Powers of Europe" were really just France, noting that "No other Power, with the exception of Russia, has a fleet that we need think about." He conveyed the French Emperor's personal desire to "ask them [the British] again whether they would be willing to join me in that recognition."²⁶

Lindsay also described the meeting for the Commons:

All the Emperor meant, so far as I understood him, was that if the House of Commons should pray Her Majesty to address him on the subject of the recognition of the Southern States, he would be only too happy to enter into negotiations with that object, believing, as he did, that if the great Powers of Europe thought it advisable to recognize the Southern Confederacy, the moral effect would be such as to stay the terrible carnage now going on in America.²⁷

When considering the mistrust that existed between France and Britain, one can better appreciate the criticism that Roebuck received, for the French were not allies of the British nor was Napoleon III popular across the Channel. As Palmerston had stated in

²⁶. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1778-1779.

²⁷. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 172, p.664.

reference to Napoleon III and the French Government "I hate the man, I detest the system, but it is the only thing for the present."²⁸ In terms of Europe, Britain's main concern was France. Napoleon III, hoping to follow in the footsteps of his great Uncle, was constantly investing in France's military. As for Britain, this took the most threatening turn when he decided to construct several ironclads. The British, who prided themselves on their great navy, were able to more than match him ship for ship. Nevertheless, Napoleon's attempt to outbuild the British was a clear sign that he was Britain's main naval challenge and perhaps her main adversary.

Since according to Roebuck, Napoleon desired to offer mediation, clearly the French Emperor considered the offer in the best interest of France. As Napoleon III in the language of *realpolitik* once stated, "When people ask one ... for what is called a policy the only answer is that we mean to do what may seem to be best upon each occasion as it arises, making the interests of one's country one's guiding principle."²⁹ It was not likely that the Members of Parliament were to consider intervention in Britain's interest simply because Napoleon considered it in his best interest.

The deep suspicion of France was clearly evident when several months prior, as the Cabinet was wrestling

²⁸. Muriel Chamberlain, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* (London: Longman, Green and Company, 1980), p.33.

²⁹. Bell, p.165.

with the question of whether to offer mediation with France, Palmerston wrote to Russell:

As to the French scheme of proposals to the United States, we had better keep that question till the Cabinet meets, which would be either Tuesday 11th or Wednesday 12th, as would be most convenient to you and my colleagues. But it is likely that the Federals would consent to an assistance to be accompanied by a cessation of blockades, and which would give the Confederates means of getting all the supplies they may want? The blockade might indeed be continued against contraband of war, admitting commerce to go in and out; but if the Southernns could send any large quantity of cotton to Europe they would contrive somehow or other to get the value back in muskets and warlike stores. Then comes the difficulty about slavery and the giving up of runaway slaves, about which we could hardly frame a proposal which the Southernns would accept, the Northernns agree to, and the people of England would approve of. The French Government are more free from the shackles of principles and of right and wrong on these matters, as on all others, than we are. At all events it would be wiser to wait till the elections in N. America are

over before any proposal is made. As the Emperor is so anxious to put a stop to bloodshed, he might try his hand as a beginning by putting down the stream of ruffians which rolls out from that never failing fountain at Rome.³⁰

John Bright, the adamantly pro-American member, recognized that Roebuck's mention of the French Emperor was clearly a weak point which he sought to exploit. A substantial portion of his speech dealt with the Parisian escapade. He recalled that the Member of Sheffield requested "us to accept the lead of the Emperor of the French on, I will undertake to say, one of the greatest questions that ever was submitted to the British Parliament." However, he recalled that this same individual two years prior had confessed "I have no faith in the Emperor of the French." He charged that Roebuck had "become as it were in the palace of the French Emperor a co-conspirator with him to drag this country into a policy which I maintain is as hostile to its interests as it would be degrading to its honour." Lindsay, the Member for Sunderland, had accompanied Roebuck to Paris. Bright noted "I saw the Member for Sunderland near me, and I noticed that his face underwent remarkable contortions during the speech of the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I felt perfectly

³⁰. Gooch, p.329. As fighting continued in Rome, Palmerston believed that Napoleon could exercise some influence in order to prevent any further loss of life.

satisfied that he did not agree with what his colleague was saying."³¹

In terms of *realpolitik*, the neutralists had the advantage. The mistrust towards France made any hope of gaining support for a joint offer of mediation difficult. The British simply had no desire to follow the lead of a man whom they perceived as an adversary. As for the possibility of war with the United States, it was difficult for the interventionists to contend that war would not follow or that if it did, the British military would easily overwhelm the American forces. The fear of war and the fear of France proved to be persuasive arguments in advocating the continuation of neutrality.

³¹. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 171, pp.1826-1827.

Conclusion: The Golden Rule Prevails

During the debate on Roebuck's motion, Lord Montagu had described neutrality as the "golden rule" in politics and private life and he claimed that "we should observe the golden rule." Indeed, Montagu and a majority of his fellow members had decided, in respect to the American Civil War, that Britain should observe the golden rule and not intervene.

The question that then follows is "Why did Parliament, in which a majority of the members represented the pro-southern upper classes, continually support neutrality?" First of all, the support for intervention in 1861 was rather lukewarm since the common belief was that the war would be one marked by brevity instead of longevity.

As the war carried over into early 1862, perceptions gradually changed and the interventionists began to press their case. However their main focus, the blockade, failed to acquire support for intervention since the legal definition was rather ambiguous and since the interventionists never had the figures necessary to prove the blockade ineffective.

In the middle of 1862, the interventionists broadened the debate with several issues but none of them proved persuasive to the majority. The cotton shortage was offset by the uncertainty of public opinion and the right of self-determination was

countered by the slavery issue. And finally, due to the possibility of war with the United States and the suspicion of France, the interventionists had great difficulty in proving that intervention was in the best interest of Britain. Ultimately, the arguments in favour of neutrality were not strong enough to persuade most of the pro-Southern Members of Parliament, including such notable ones as Palmerston and Russell. Even Gladstone, who had adamantly supported intervention in the autumn of 1862, spoke against intervention in 1863 during the debate on Roebuck's motion. A majority of the Members of Parliament supported neutrality as it was considered the policy which was best for Britain.

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