

**Excerpts from Rally, Comrades!
“Understand Change, Influence its Direction”
<http://www.lrna.org/2-pt/555/v17ed4art3.html>**

... The capitalist class doesn't have to "know" things in order to do what is good for itself. A decision that makes them money is a correct decision. Revolutionaries have no such practical guidelines. They cannot give leadership by opportunistically projecting temporarily popular ideas. They must understand what creates social motion and makes it move in a definite direction. They cannot guide the masses in these times of social and economic change without the proper understanding of the relationship of base to superstructure.

Revolution in economy opens way for change

“... The political and ideological changes that marked the coming of the Civil War were based upon and preceded by profound changes in the American economy. The ending of the British blockade and the War of 1812 opened European markets to American goods. The growing cities in the Northeast were clamoring for foodstuffs and raw material. The explosion of road and canal building made markets a hundred miles away accessible. The result was the rapid shift from subsistence agriculture in the Northwest to a market economy.

The invention of the cotton gin in 1794 brought about an increase in the slave trade. That in turn expanded the shipbuilding industry. The expansion of the market for lumber, iron, rough brogans, and the wherewithal of slave agriculture made the fledging Northern manufacturing very dependent on the slave South. That economic dependency was expressed as political support for the slave system.

In 1808, the slave trade was abolished. This was not a moral decision. Slave breeding in the areas where the soil had been depleted was more profitable than importing slaves. Massachusetts, the main supporter and benefactor of the slave trade was thrown into turmoil as shipbuilding and shipping went into depression. Massachusetts turned from a pillar of support of slavery to its most determined enemy. The linkage between morality and economics was embarrassingly clear.

Frederick Engels, in a dialectically beautiful statement, wrote that the development of the double-acting steam engine completed the journey from making fire with friction to making friction with fire. The new, powerful, reliable source of power allowed the capitalists to meet the expanding market in the North and begin to compete for the British-dominated luxury markets in the South. The North, increasingly based on the advanced productive relationship of wage-labor and capital, became more urban and more bourgeois, with a rapidly expanding network of universities, factories and economic infrastructure dominated by an increasingly aggressive and wealthy class of industrial capitalists. The South, strapped by the most backward productive relation – slave and master – was

unable to keep up. The introduction of slavery into its fledgling industries (Tredegar Iron Works had 900 slaves working in its foundries by 1861) could not resolve the contradiction.

The slave South, wealthier than the North, became concerned that the rapid accumulation of wealth by industry would threaten its control of the country. Using its control of Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts, the South began blocking the development of economic infrastructure so necessary to the expansion of industry. Southern politicians refused to protect Northern industry by imposing tariffs on foreign imports. The clash of economic interests of the two sections of the country was expressed by a growing cultural, moral, and political hostility. The country was beginning to divide. It was clear to the North that the slave owners – the Slave Power – were the dominant, anti-democratic, irreconcilable, political force in the country.

In a powerful and celebrated speech given on January 25th, 1860, Henry Wilson, Senator of Massachusetts outlined the growth of that power.

"Sir, this expansion and growth of the system of African slavery, this development of the slave power, during the past seventy years, have wrought a ... change, a complete revolution, in the sentiments and opinions of the public men who control the councils of America. What a contrast between slavery in America in 1789 and slavery in America in 1860! Then it was weak; now it is strong. Then its influences over the nation were impotent; now it holds the Government in its iron grasp."

It was not clear to the opponents of the slave power, however, that it was slavery itself that gave the slaveholders their power.

Civil War to unite economic and political power

As the objective economic forces moved inexorably toward war, the subjective – the political forces – attempted reconciliation. Their common property relations – private property – held them together while their contradictory productive relations – wage labor versus slavery – drove them apart.

Had the North understood that the destruction of slavery was the historically strategic goal of the war, that war could have been won in a year. They did not understand this. Neither side could have raised an army to defend or overthrow slavery. The Northern General Staff made a halfhearted attempt to militarily defeat a friendly enemy without disturbing the social and economic foundations of their enemy's strength. The bungling, pro-slavery, pro-Union Northern military leadership could not escape the reality that economic and political power must be united. Economic power belonged to the North. Political power belonged to the South. They could not be united without the destruction of slavery – so the war ground on.

As the war entered its third bloody year, the North had to accept that only by denying the South its base of strength could it be defeated. The Emancipation Proclamation changed the character of the

war. Two hundred thousand African Americans joined the fight, tipping the balance in favor of the North. A new military leadership took over and developed a strategic plan to subdue the rebellion. General Tecumseh Sherman, who was no friend of the African-Americans, struck at the strategic base of the Confederacy, liberating more slaves than all the Union Armies combined. Rampaging through Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina his army, with the loss of only 600 troops, brought the Confederate States of the Deep South to their knees.

As the war ended, political and economic power were united on the basis of industry. Society expanded on its protected, united economic foundations. This unity of base and superstructure became the driving force behind the birth of what the Northern monopolies termed "the American century."

Unity in the interests of the class

We are again, under different circumstances, seeing the beginnings of a vast American revolution. The emergence of new productive forces antagonistic to the existing industrial productive relations is wrecking the foundations of society as we have known it. Giant global corporations are replacing local and national companies. Wage-labor is replaced by computer-controlled robotic, wage-less production. Value, which is based on labor, is becoming disconnected from price, which is now set arbitrarily by global corporations. Consequently, wealth and poverty polarize. Each stage of this process further disconnects base from superstructure.

The social destruction that we have seen in the past twenty-five years is only the beginning of the process. Homelessness will increase, education of working class youth will continue to decline, war will become part of the American way of life, health care will slip further and further from the grasp of the poor. All this will become the school where the American people learn of class and class solidarity. This is where the people grasp the concept of revolution and a vision of a peaceful and abundant future. Let us shoulder our revolutionary responsibilities to bring this education and vision to the masses. Again, the die has been cast and there is no turning back.