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GERMAN-AMERICAN RADICALS, ANTEBELLUM POLITICS, AND THE CIVIL WAR

Immigration from German-speaking countries to the United States rose dramatically after the mid-1840s, especially after the failed revolution of 1848-49. By the outbreak of the Civil War close to one million Germans had settled especially in Midwestern territories and states. The German community was only surpassed numerically by the Irish who had begun to arrive earlier. Both immigrant groups contributed increasingly to the numbers of eligible voters, since Midwestern states, hoping to attract new settlers, liberalized their naturalization laws which allowed immigrants to vote even after receiving their “first papers,” i.e. after applying for naturalization as early as twelve months after their arrival in the new country. The votes of both groups were increasingly sought by the political parties. While the immigrant vote overwhelmingly favored the Democratic Party, because it offered protection and patronage in the face of nativist sentiments, the new Republican Party also made inroads into the German vote.¹

While the Irish were a relatively homogeneous immigrant group by social, economic and religious criteria, this does not hold true for the German immigrant community, which was quite heterogeneous including regional identities. Historians have also pointed out important generational distinctions within the German immigrant community itself. Thus the so-called “Grays,” i.e. early arrivals from German states in the 1820s and 1830s, were seen as having been rather indifferent to slavery, in contrast to the later ‘48er generation of “Greens”

¹ For more observations on the Republican Party’s efforts to reach the German vote, see H. Keil, A. von Humboldt (2005), *The German Immigrant Community, and Antebellum Politics*, “Przeglad Polonijny”, Vol. 31, Issue 4, Krakow: Polska Akademia Nauk, pp. 7-21.

who took up the antislavery cause immediately after arriving in the country,² while German immigrant workers in the 1850s and beyond were judged by their involvement in the struggle for workers' rights in industrializing America.

How can we account for the fact that German radicals became involved in antebellum politics, that many chose to become active in the Republican Party despite apparent ideological and generational differences, and that a considerable percentage of the German immigrant vote shifted to the new party in the latter half of the 1850s? I suggest the following hypotheses:

1. Americans and Europeans shared a tradition of humanitarian thought deriving from the common legacy of the Enlightenment. The latter's transatlantic transfer was relatively unproblematic because of a common intellectual network that facilitated the exchange of ideas. Witness the famous encounter between Benjamin Franklin and Voltaire, Jefferson and Alexander von Humboldt, and travels of many prominent Europeans, such as Harriett Martineau and Alexis de Tocqueville, who visited the young Republic and informed their countrymen of the conditions which they had observed.
2. Too much emphasis has been placed on German radicals' idealistic expectations toward American society, concomitant haughty attitudes, ignorance of American ways, and backward orientation. While many of these accusations are true, especially for the early years after these radicals arrived in the United States, it holds equally true that they soon became immersed in the heated political debate of the 1850s. The paramount issue that triggered this involvement, and helped unite liberals, radicals, and workers in this decade, was slavery and the fight for the abolition of this institution: whether in the media, or the political, and later, the military battleground.

In this paper I will include German immigrant workers who usually have not played a significant role when discussing the impact of German radical immigrants in the 1850s.

² For a discussion of the distinction between the two groups, cf. C. F. Wittke (1952), *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America*, Philadelphia; E. Bruncken (1904), *German Political Refugees in the United States during the Period from 1815-1860*, "Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter", Vol. 4.

COMMON PERCEPTIONS OF SLAVERY AND ABOLITION

Liberals and radicals of different persuasions shared their disdain for the institution of slavery. Initially – i.e. before the post-1848 Revolution tide of immigration swept the country – slavery, while deplored and attacked by Germans who had arrived earlier, was not a central issue. However, to the degree that it became the focus of the national debate in the course of the annexation of Texas, the war against Mexico, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott decision, German-American radicals became increasingly involved. While they did voice a wide array of opinions on what the right course of action should be – ranging from support of colonization to general uplifting, educational reform, gradual emancipation, financial compensation of slaveholders, prevention of the further spread of slavery into new territories and states, and immediate and unconditional emancipation – the institution of slavery as such was never condoned. Active involvement in the antislavery cause generally intensified as time wore on, leading to the support of the Republican Party by practically all these intellectuals after 1856.³

This basic agreement includes the “Grays,” contradicting the stereotypical image of their non-involvement in the debate over slavery. Three prominent intellectuals who belonged to this group were Charles Follen, Francis Lieber, and Friedrich Münch.⁴ They shared the same background of student political protest for democratic liberal principles. Their connection with radical circles at the universities of Giessen (Follen and Münch), Berlin (Lieber), and Jena (all three of them) soon forced them out of the country and into exile in the United States. Here they went their several ways until they were eventually united again in their outspoken opposition to Southern slavery and secession.

Charles Follen (who died already in 1840) became involved in the antislavery cause several years after his arrival in New England, joining the New England (after 1835 renamed Massachusetts) Antislavery Society early, serving as its

³ The journalist Otilie Assing, who regularly wrote reports for the “Augsburger Zeitung” and its “Morgenblatt” in Germany, noted that all educated Germans were on the side of the Republicans. Not only did she record the preference that other liberal Germans had for Frémont over Lincoln, but she personally and strongly advocated the same choice; “Morgenblatt”, 22 April 1864.

⁴ For their biographies, cf. E. Spevack (1997), *Charles Follen's Search for Nationality and Freedom: Germany and America, 1796-1840*, Cambridge, MA; F. Münch (1902), *Das Leben von Dr. Karl Follen*, in: F. Münch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, St. Louis, pp. 39-91; F. Freidel (1947; 1968), *Francis Lieber, Nineteenth-Century Liberal*, Gloucester, MA; F. Freidel (1943), Francis Lieber, Charles Sumner and Slavery, “JSH” Vol. 9, pp. 75-93; *Franz Lieber und die deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen im 19. Jahrhundert* (1993), Schäfer, P., Schmitt, K. (eds.), Weimar; F. Münch, *Aus dem Leben...*, pp. 107-125.

vice-president and as a public speaker.⁵ He became a relentless critic not only of slavery as such but also of its vested interests that were often represented in the North as well and were instrumental in preserving the „peculiar institution.“ Thus „in the Northern States, where slavery does not exist, you find, at least among the higher classes, so called, that by far the greater number sympathize with the vested interest of the slave-holder, infinitely more than with the friendless victim of sacrilegious force, the wretched slave.“⁶ Follen’s anti-slavery activities were the adaptation to the specific conditions of American society of his former idealistic and practical fight for freedom and liberty in Germany in which he had been so thoroughly engaged during the Wars of Liberation and the post-Napoleonic era from his student days on. Appearing before a committee of the Massachusetts Legislature in order to protest the pending gag bill, he himself referred to the continuity of his principles explaining that „[t]he principles on which the anti-slavery societies are founded, are the same which brought me to this country, and without the enjoyment of which I could not wish to remain in it.“⁷ Earlier he had remained true to them despite warnings that his position as a professor of German literature at Harvard University would be threatened. In a letter to Harriett Martineau Follen asserted that to live by such principles meant to accept people of color as equal human beings: „The admission of colored people to anti-slavery meetings“, he wrote, „is not a matter of expediency, but of vital principle. Our preaching of equality avails nothing, if we do not treat them as equals, seeking or avoiding their society on the same principles which determine our intercourse with the whites.“⁸

Francis Lieber also voiced his principled anti-slavery attitude early as well. Thus he condemned the institution of slavery in the article which he contributed

⁵ Cf. Address to the People of the United States on the Subject of Slavery, Boston 1834. The address was first given by Follen at the 1834 Convention and later published. It was signed by Charles Follen, Cyrus Pitt Grosvenor, John G. Whittier, D. Phelps, and Joshua V. Himes, i.e. the members of the committee appointed by the New England Anti-Slavery Society to issue a report. Follen gave several important speeches and wrote essays on the abolition of slavery. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the American Antislavery Society, which was founded in Philadelphia in December 1833, and he maintained close contact to both William Lloyd Garrison and William Ellery Channing, cf. E. Spevack, Ch. Follen’s (1997), *Search for Nationality and Freedom: Germany and America, 1796-1840*, Cambridge, MA, pp. 206-226.

⁶ Letter to John Bowring, Philadelphia, October 10th, 1833, quoted in: *The Works of Charles Follen, with a Memoir of his Life, in five volumes* (1842), Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, p. 337.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 392-393.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 384. Cf. also his speech before the Anti-Slavery Society in January 1836, where in words anticipating Alexander von Humboldt’s formulation in *Kosmos* Follen argued: “Every human being, whether colored or white, foreigner or citizen, man or woman, is, in virtue of a common nature, a rightful and responsible defender of the natural rights of all.” *Ibid.*, p. 627.

to the *Encyclopaedia Americana* (which he established and edited), and he wrote as early as in 1834: “In the abstract, I hold slavery to be, - philosophically, an absurdity, (man cannot become property,) – morally a bane both to the slave and his owner; - historically, a direct violation of the spirit of the times we live in, and, with regard to public economy, a great malady, to any society at all advanced in industry.”⁹

Friedrich Münch initially took up farming in Missouri, after a colonization project for German immigrants had failed miserably. Only when the Republican Party was being founded did he become involved in party politics and the slavery issue, taking great personal risks in the volatile Missouri antebellum and Civil War environment. He then served as correspondent for a radical German-language paper in St. Louis and as state senator for the Republican Party.¹⁰

These radicals from an earlier period of immigration who had opposed the restoration that paralyzed Central European states in the post-Napoleonic era were thus prepared to speak out in the controversial and increasingly heated debate on slavery in the explosive political environment of the 1850s. More attention was paid, however, to the group of recently arrived young radicals who escaped to the United States after the failed revolution of 1848-49.¹¹ As the wave of German immigration in the late 1840s and early 1850s increased the demand for German-language newspapers and periodicals, new publications were founded, often by these ‘48ers, whose editorial orientation was overwhelmingly antislavery.¹² Their editors agreed with one out of their own midst, Christian Esselen, that the issue of slavery must not be evaded. The immediate task was to “keep agitation against slavery on our agenda so that the antislavery movement which has broken all

⁹ F. Lieber (1838), *Encyclopaedia Americana*, Vol. 9, new edition, Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait, & Co, pp. 429-438. The quote is from his *The Stranger in America; or, Letters to a Gentleman in Germany: Comprising Sketches of the Manners, Society, and National Peculiarities of the United States* (1835), Philadelphia, p. 289. Cf. pp. 288-302 for an extended discussion of slavery and race. For further information on Lieber’s views on slavery, also in later years, cf. H. Keil (2009), Alexander von Humboldt; and H. Keil, The Americanization of Francis Lieberin, “*Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*”, Vol. 35, Issue 3 (133), Warszawa: Polska Akademia Nauk, pp. 25-41; F. Lieber’s (2008), Attitude on Race, Slavery, and Abolition, special issue *Racial Divides*, “*Journal of American Ethnic History*”, Vol. 28, Issue 1, pp. 13-33; and ‘That Species of Property’: F. Lieber’s Encounter with Slavery and Race, in: *Paths Crossing: Essays in German-American Studies* (2011), Kluge, C. L. (ed.), Vol. 54, “German Life and Civilization”, Hermand J. (gen. ed.), Bern et. al., pp. 55-83.

¹⁰ F. Rodmann, Nachruf an Friedrich Münch, in: F. Münch, *Gesammelte...*, pp. 514-520.

¹¹ For an analysis of the ‘48ers see B. C. Levine (1992), *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War*, Urbana.

¹² One scholar (Betz) claims that of 88 German-language newspapers only eight supported the Democratic party on this issue after the mid-1850s.

locks and dams since the Nebraska bill, continues to rush forward.”¹³ No doubt this strategy helped educate and inform German immigrants and mold German-American public opinion.

At the same time, these positions also show clear limitations of perspective and purpose. Esselen’s views illustrate the underlying dilemma. He distinguished between the “slave question” and the “race question,” arguing that “the slavery issue is a matter of objective, absolute right; the race issue is a matter of changing and advancing culture and civilization.”¹⁴ Lieber likewise argued that race was the fundamental reason for enslavement and discrimination. He invented the term “negroism,” using it to characterize the source for the degradation of African Americans:

[T]he simple fact is that all and everything concentrates in *negroism* . . . the question is not slavery, but negroism. The free negro stands in every consideration here in the South almost on a level with the slave. His freedom does not elevate him, but his negroism—though it consist only in a shade of yellow—degrades him.¹⁵

Separating private social relations from the public, political sphere, Charles Follen made the important distinction that „[i]n his private intercourse, in his personal and domestic relations, let everyone choose his company according to his own principles, or his own whims.“¹⁶ Lieber also argued against social equality of people of color and the amalgamation of the races.¹⁷ While Esselen – and many of his colleagues – therefore fiercely defended the constitutional rights of African Americans, he was more than reluctant to also accord them equal social status. His human rights approach allowed for treating slavery as an abstract legal issue having repercussions on the political system and involving its credibility. It did not take into account, however, the specific needs of African Americans as individuals. Only in rare instances was an effort made to introduce the perspective of African Americans themselves. It is certainly not by coincidence that Otilie Assing related the slaves’ plight with sympathetic and understanding words, for,

¹³ Welches Heilmittel gibt es es gegen das Uebel der Negersklaverei?, “Atlantis”, Neue Folge, Vol. 3, (1855), p. 28.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 32. Cf. also, Technische Fortschritte gegen schwarze und weisse Sklaverei, *ibid.*, p. 186, where Esselen distinguished the “legal” from the “social” question.

¹⁵ F. Lieber, Scrapbook on Slavery (LI 29), ca. 1850; in: Lieber Papers, The Huntington Library.

¹⁶ Ch. Follen, *Works*, p. 628.

¹⁷ Cf. F. Lieber, *The Stranger*....

in contrast to most of her intellectual compatriots, she socialized with African Americans.¹⁸

In general agreement with other radical German immigrants in the North and Midwest was a minority among German immigrants in New Orleans, a city with a catholic outlook that accommodated anti-slavery intellectuals in a slave society. Legitimate claims can be made that even by ethnic and religious criteria this was not a typically southern city, since it had first been settled by the French, then the Spanish, and after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 it had become the major port for the export of cotton and, until 1853, a port of immigration for European settlers on their way to the Midwest. In this process the city's German as well as its Irish population had increased substantially. Thus the German community rather resembled its counterparts on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers further up north, i.e. in St. Louis, Louisville and Cincinnati. As in St. Louis, the debate on race relations and slavery in the German-language papers of New Orleans – particularly in the early 1850s – did not reflect the views of the slave south.¹⁹ The conflict over the Nebraska bill is a case in point. The Louisville Platform passed by radical Germans in 1854 – which denounced slavery, called for initial steps toward that institution's eventual abolition, and vehemently opposed its extension into new territories – was reprinted in full in one of the German newspapers in New Orleans.²⁰

Earlier, the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* had included some quite unorthodox reports and comments in its pages. It informed its readers that for the first time an honorary doctoral degree had been conferred on an African American by a European university. The University of Heidelberg had awarded it to Dr. James W.C. Pennington „to express the general brotherhood of mankind“.²¹

¹⁸ Thus Assing also devoted her attention to ordinary black people, showing a great sensitivity for their plight and setting the record straight against pervasive stereotypes among whites. Cf. "Morgenblatt", 4 May 1856, 431f; 1 August 1858, p. 739; 12 February 1862, p. 164; 2 April 1863, p. 334. For the intellectuals' general silence on such issues, cf. Randall Miller's observation: [They] said little about the wrong done the slaves. Introduction, in: *States of Progress: Germans and Blacks in America over 300 Years* (1989), Miller, R. (ed.), Philadelphia, p. 12.

¹⁹ For views of the St. Louis German-language press on slavery and abolition cf. *Germans for a Free Missouri: Translations from the St. Louis Radical Press, 1857-1862* (1983), selected and translated by S. Rowan, with an introduction and commentary by J. N. Primm, Columbia, MO. Two German-language dailies were published in New Orleans in the 1850s, the "Deutsche Zeitung" and the "Louisiana Staats-Zeitung".

²⁰ "Deutsche Zeitung", 8 March 1854.

²¹ "Louisiana Staats-Zeitung", 8 Oct. 1850. Cf. H. E. Thomas (1995), *James W.C. Pennington: African American Churchman and Abolitionist*, New York; the documents – the doctor of divinity degree diploma, the statement by the dean of the faculty, and the recommendation for the degree – are reprinted pp.179-186. Cf. also J. R. Washington, Jr. (1990), *The First Fugitive Foreign and Domestic Doctor of Divinity*, "Studies in American Religion", Vol. 51, Lewiston, NY, and L. Hopkins, 'Black

Commenting on events closer to home, the paper voiced its aversion time and again to the „terrible fugitive slave law,“ and it agreed with the resolution passed by a meeting of African Americans in New York which asked for resistance against it.²² Reporting on the capture and jailing of a fugitive slave, the paper wished for his successful escape.²³ It recounted incidents like the brutal treatment of slaves by their masters, explaining in one case that „the creature had dared to entertain thoughts on his own humanness and on strife for freedom“; his master was described as a „monster“.²⁴ The *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* expressed relief when the slave trade was „finally“ abolished in Brazil, and it advised a slave owners' convention that – slavery being no longer competitive – it was better to abolish it altogether.²⁵ When a mother killed her children rather than having them sold to different masters, the paper pointed out that „a black mother feels just like a white mother“ and condemned the „curse of slavery“.²⁶

Perhaps the most amazing event occurring in this small circle of German radicals was the publication of a novel in the *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung* between 1 January 1854 and 4 March 1855 called „The Secrets of New Orleans.“ This serialized novel by the young Bavarian Ludwig Reizenstein, who had immigrated only a few years earlier, caused a sensation among the German community because of its thinly veiled references to politicians and other public figures and because of the exposure of New Orleans' scandalous, licentious life including disregard of the racial divide in brothels and intimate relationships. Reizenstein was one of the rare voices who also propagated the amalgamation of the races, seeing the son of a white immigrant (a count) and a mulatto woman as the Toussaint L'Ouverture for the slave population of the American South. Along with this fictitious solution to the Southern curse Reizenstein published a column for a while under the title „The Progress of the Human Races“ that he called an „academic lecture“, i.e. a quasi-scientific treatise in which he openly called for the amalgamation of the races.²⁷

It was small wonder then that the southern establishment looked with suspicion upon German immigrants, even if they did not articulate their resentments so openly. They had come south to settle there and make a living,

Prussians: 'Germany and African American Education from J. W.C. Pennington to A. Davis, in: *Cross-currents*, McBride, D. et al. (eds.), pp. 65-68.

²² „Louisiana Staats-Zeitung“, 15 October 1850.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25 October 1850.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1852.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 November, 7 December 1852.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 January 1853.

²⁷ See „Louisiana Staats-Zeitung“, 1 and 24 January, 13 December 1854; 2 March 1855. His treatise appeared from 1 February to 17 March 1854.

not necessarily because they were in agreement with their social environment. They therefore kept quiet about slavery while privately rejecting – and sometimes taking advantage of – it. So long as there was no public pressure or need openly to take sides, they could get away with this compromising stance. However, when secession loomed on the horizon, things changed. In New Orleans, for example, immigrants overwhelmingly voted for Stephan A. Douglas, the candidate of Northern Democrats in the presidential election of 1860, rather than for the candidate of the secessionist party.²⁸

GERMAN IMMIGRANT WORKERS: PRE-MARXIAN SOCIALISTS

German working-class radicals, along with liberal intellectuals and a wider literate public, shared an ideal image of America that – for immigrants in the 1850s – turned out to be a serious hindrance to the realistic assessment of American society. This image had emerged during the American Revolution and continued to be propagated widely in an abundant body of literature, travel and personal accounts, journalistic articles and pamphlets, political and historical writings, emigrants' guides, as well as fiction. Although the picture that unfolded in this diverse body of writings was by no means uniform, German radicals identified with the positive tradition that emphasized the revolutionary and liberalizing impact of the republican experiment.

They incorporated certain elements of this liberal-republican tradition. While many of them gradually adopted socialist principles, they continued to fight for basic democratic liberties, like the right to assemble, to associate, and to vote. Wilhelm Liebknecht is an appropriate case when referring to the impact of the liberal-republican tradition on the socialists' views of the United States. Liebknecht never entirely discarded the republican ideals dating from his revolutionary days in southwest Germany.²⁹ His positive attitude toward “the great Atlantic republic”³⁰ can be documented in his personal as well as his political

²⁸ I. Berlin, H. G. Gutman (1983), *Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South*, “AHR”, Vol. 88, p. 1199.

²⁹ For a general analysis of the views of European socialists on the United States, see R. L. Moore (1970), *European Socialists and the American Promised Land*, New York. Liebknecht was attacked and ridiculed by Marx and Engels for his attitude; cf. *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels* (1963), Eckert G. (ed.), The Hague, p. 21ff.; and R. L. Moore, *European...*, p. 27.

³⁰ Die Botschaft des amerikanischen Präsidenten, “Osnabrücker Zeitung”, Issue 189, 24 Dec. 1864; in: *Wilhelm Liebknecht* (1975), Eckert, G. (ed.), Hildesheim, p. 257; cf. also “Volksstaat”, Issue 6, 20 Jan. 1872.

life. Although his plans to emigrate to the United States did not materialize,³¹ Liebknecht continued to show considerable interest in American political affairs.³² Commenting on the Civil War, he expressed his admiration for the way the American people and its political institutions coped with this emergency. In his opinion “the example of the North American Union is pointed out to us by fate like the mirror image of our own defaults.” Although conceding some years later that American institutions were not perfect, he still wished for similar institutions in Germany and Europe.³³

Such expectations often ran contrary to the reality immigrants faced upon their arrival, as Nikolaus Schwenck, a young coppersmith from Württemberg also found out soon after emigrating and settling in Chicago in the mid-1850s. Although he was quite successful financially and was able to establish his own business, experience soon made him see American reality in a more critical way. He noticed that there were few family ties and no solidarity, that everyone had to “help himself”, that often there was more misery in America than in Germany. During the depression of the late 1850s he wrote a bitter commentary on the American people’s materialistic orientation, and he renamed the country “Despairica” (Jammerika).³⁴ But illusions about ownership of land and the realization of material and social independence were tenaciously held on to by immigrant workers, to the exasperation of GermanAmerican radicals like Weydemeyer who wrote incisive analyses of American capitalist development that obviously were not heeded in the 1850s.³⁵ The liberaldemocratic tradition died but a slow death, a fact that should not have come as a surprise, since it

³¹ Liebknecht almost emigrated to Wisconsin in 1847. In later years he repeatedly toyed with the idea of emigrating to America. W. Liebknecht (1976), *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten der Revolution*, Berlin, p. 16 and 82; W. Liebknecht (1887), *Ein Blick in die Neue Welt*, Stuttgart, p. VI; R. Schweichel (1900/1901), Zum Gedächtniss Wilhelm Liebknechts, “Neue Zeit” 19/2, pp. 539-544, 571-576, 602-608, *Wilhelm Liebknecht* (1973), Vol. 1: 1862-1878, Eckert, G. (ed.), Assen, p. 14f., 414, 417; F.A. Sorge, letter to J.Ph. Becker, 3 July 1867; to K. Marx, 10 July 1867; to Becker, 11 July 1870, 25 Sept. 1870, in: F.A. Sorge Papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

³² In the introduction to his travel account *Ein Blick in die Neue Welt*, p. VI, Liebknecht states: „Since my early youth... I have not lost sight of the great republic in the west, and I have been following the development of American affairs with the greatest sympathy.“

³³ “Osnabrücker Zeitung”, Issue 18, 7 June 1864; Issue 299, 8 May 1865; Issue 305, 15 May 1865; Issue 574, 5 Apr. 1866; Issue 601, 7 May 1866; in: *Leitartikel*, Eckert, G. (ed.), pp. 54, 381f., 387, 678, 705.

³⁴ Ch. Schwenck, letters of 22 January 1854; 24 Dec. 1854; 9 Sept. 1855; 3 Apr. 1859; copies of letters in the author’s hands.

³⁵ As late as in the 1890s, Michael Schwab, member of the so-called Haymarket anarchists, jailed and active in the Chicago labor movement once more after having been pardoned by Governor Altgeld, complained that workers in Chicago still clung to the old liberal middleclass aspira-

was continually being reinforced by the country's political ideology as well as its institutional mechanisms.

FROM EXILES TO IMMIGRANTS

After arriving in the United States, many radicals remained preoccupied with events back in Europe, hoping to influence them from abroad and waiting for an auspicious moment to return and help upset the old order for good.³⁶ Initially they considered themselves temporary political exiles who should not waste their time getting acquainted with, and involved in, American affairs. This orientation has been thoroughly documented for radical democrats who organized political associations, sponsored lecture campaigns to raise enthusiasm and money for the support of revolutionary leaders and movements, and propagated their political goals in the many newspapers and journals whose editorial offices they took over or which they founded soon after having set foot on American soil.³⁷

Working-class radicals were not immune to this backward orientation. Labor historians intent on describing the emergence of a German-American labor movement have emphasized organizational beginnings that helped establish an American tradition; they have therefore tended to downplay equally strong currents of a continuing focus on European affairs and developments. We should not overlook the fact that the 1850s were a decade of ideological fermentation when radical working-class leaders, too, were searching for their political identity, reluctant to surrender former accomplishments and renown for an uncertain and in many ways more difficult terrain. Only slowly did they – like radical democrats – devote their attention primarily to American society and politics. Thus, Wilhelm Weitling immediately returned to Germany after learning of the revolution's outbreak in 1848 (the liberal Francis Lieber also rushed to Frankfurt immediately³⁸); only when it had failed did he, for a limited number of years, turn his complete attention to organizing German workers in New

tions of owning a home; they therefore remained dependent upon business interests like building and loan associations and were less inclined to join workingclass organizations.

³⁶ Cf. B. C. Levine (1986), *In the Heat of Two Revolutions: The Forging of German-American Radicalism*, in: *"Struggle a Hard Battle": Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, Hoerder, D. (ed.), DeKalb, IL, p. 19-45; also B. C. Levine, *The Spirit...*

³⁷ Cf. C. F. Wittke (1957), *The German-Language Press in America*, Lexington, KY; C. F. Wittke, *Refugees...*; *The Forty-Eighters: Political Refugees of the German Revolution of 1848* (1967), Zucker, A. E. (ed.), New York; E. Bruncken, *German...*

³⁸ Lieber to Howe, 8 April 1848, box 1 letter size, South Caroliniana Library.

York City and in other urban centers.³⁹ He as well as Joseph Weydemeyer was faced with almost insurmountable difficulties because of the thin industrial and social base for a labor movement and a political consciousness among German immigrant workers steeped in artisan, Jacobin, and radical democratic traditions. In this situation Weydemeyer, too, acted much like an exile trying to publicize the European radical labor movement, opening the pages of various papers to contributions of European friends who continued their political feuds often unrelated to American concerns.⁴⁰ German-language papers were a welcome means of publicizing information at a time when the press in Germany remained inaccessible to radicals like Karl Marx. However, these disputes over past occurrences diverted energies and attention from urgent contemporary concerns.

The slavery issue and the Civil War ended this ambivalent orientation, the latter of course in a complete, thoroughly existential way for many radicals who joined the Union army and fought for, and often died for, the Union's cause. The slavery question was instrumental in finally turning radicals' attention away from past and often lost European causes, focusing it instead on the paramount social, political, and economic problem in America.

The requirements of the Civil War that were bearing heavily on the working class were voluntarily, and often enthusiastically, met by German immigrant workers without substantial opposition. Their political beliefs and aspirations, so long oriented towards ameliorating conditions back in Germany, could now be projected on the Union cause. The ideological preparation for this important psychological and active identification had already happened in Europe. There is overwhelming documentation of the high degree of involvement in, and sacrifice for, the abolition of slavery and the preservation of the Union. Like the Chicago Arbeiterverein, German workers' organizations in all urban centers were depleted by volunteers joining the army. The Chicago German Workingmen's Association, including its women's auxiliaries, collected money for the support of soldiers' families "except for women of commissioned officers"⁴¹ and for wounded soldiers, vehemently protested the conscription laws, educated the public in mass meetings and public lectures on the necessity of the war and abolition of slavery, and organized republican sharpshooters' clubs and volunteer militia

³⁹ Cf. C. Wittke (1950), *The Utopian Communist: The Life of Wilhelm Weitling, Nineteenth Century Reformer*, Baton Rouge, LA; H. Schlüter (1907), *Die Anfänge der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung in Amerika*, Stuttgart, p. 69-71; F. A. Sorge (1890-1895), *Die Arbeiterbewegung in den Vereinigten Staaten*, in: "Neue Zeit", Issues 9-14, pp. 232-233.

⁴⁰ Obermann, Weydemeyer, especially pp. 231-268.

⁴¹ "Illinois Staats-Zeitung", 13 Aug. 1862.

companies in the city.⁴² Despite the significant numbers of workers who served in the Union army, the Association witnessed a tremendous membership increase during the war years; from May 1862 to the end of 1863, its membership almost quadrupled.⁴³ Although radicals were in the forefront when it came to demanding the emancipation of the slaves, still they could acquiesce in Abraham Lincoln's priority for the war, i.e. the preservation of the Union. For them the central state as yet did not have any negative meaning, on the contrary: For European radicals, and especially for the left in Germany with its desolate political disintegration, it stood for the rights and liberties of citizens against the encroachments by particular, feudal, and absolutist interests. Thus in his editorial columns on the Civil War Wilhelm Liebknecht could write enthusiastically that "nowhere else but in the United States is the citizen a free, selfdetermining member of the commonwealth.... The state is not a hostile entity confronting the citizen, nay, it is completely bound up, it is identical with him."⁴⁴ German workers thus genuinely shared the general attitude of Northern workers toward the Civil War so fittingly described by David Montgomery:

"Varied as the views of Northern workers may have been... toward Lincoln, slavery, the draft, and the various military leaders, one fact remains clear: they were ardently devoted to the cause of preserving the Union intact.... This devotion was rooted in the intense nationalism of the working classes--their commitment to the world's only political democracy."⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The contest over the abolition of slavery forced German radicals into forming a coalition in the face of this overarching threat, a coalition on the one hand pragmatic and highly effective for the purpose for which it was created, but on

⁴² Cf. for several examples "Illinois Staats-Zeitung", 2 Feb., 22 Apr., 2 and 11 May, 19 June, 8 and 28 Aug., 25 and 30 Sept., 6 Nov., 23 Dec. 1861; 26 May, 13 Aug., 6 Sept. 1862; 27 Jan., 28 Feb., 3 Mr., 9 and 13 May, 22, 24, 28 and 29 July, 31 Dec. 1863. "Chicago Times", 2 and 25 Mr. 1863.

⁴³ Membership numbers are: 389 in May 1862, 935 in June 1863, 1,027 in August 1863, and 1,085 in December 1863; "Illinois Staats-Zeitung", 26 May 1862, 10 June, 31 August, 2 December 1863.

⁴⁴ Was die Amerikaner thun, "Osnabrücker Zeitung", Issue 18, 7 June 1864, in: *Wilhelm Liebknecht: Leitartikel und Beiträge in der Osnabrücker Zeitung 1864-1866* (1975), Eckert, G. (ed.), Hildesheim, p. 54; cf. Also "Demokratisches Wochenblatt", Issue 15, 11 Apr. 1868.

⁴⁵ D. Montgomery (1967), *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans 1862-1872*, New York, p. 92.

the other hand tenuous, since it welded together for the last time politically and ideologically divergent, increasingly disparate forces.⁴⁶ When the Civil War successfully completed and consummated this coalition, it broke apart. Freed from the one issue that, for different reasons, had been able to hold together radicals of different ideological bent, divergent interests now came into the open, sharply separating radical workers from radical democrats. The latter's goals had been accomplished. Social and political developments after the Civil War indicate that the embourgeoisement of the majority of '48ers progressed quickly, when they soon became integrated into American society and respected by their fellow citizens. They turned increasingly self-complacent and conservative, all the while believing that they kept clinging to their old values. They were thus able to also reconcile themselves with political developments in their home country. Having actively fought oppression in their fatherland in their youth, the majority of them made a complete turnabout on the occasion of the creation of the German Reich in 1871, putting national unity above their old republican ideals. After 1871, they remained admirers of Bismarck, and they also discarded whatever idealistic notions they might have held for American society, becoming wholehearted supporters of the status quo. Working-class radicals with some justice branded former radical democrats for what they perceived as a betrayal of their principles. Workers now laid claim to the radical tradition among German-Americans, announcing that they were its true heirs. Whereas '48ers had a historic task to fulfill by opposing and fighting slavery, they had grown self-satisfied and unwilling to adapt to changing times and issues, thus quickly becoming obsolete in the Gilded Age context of unbridled capitalist exploitation.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Cf. B. C. Levine, *The Spirit...*

⁴⁷ H. Keil (1986), *The Impact of Haymarket on German-American Radicalism*, "International Labor and Working-Class History", Issue 29, p. 17.