

*Welcome to the archives of  
The South Carolina League of the South and  
The Palmetto Heritage Foundation.*



## The Czar Criticizes Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation

From "Lincoln and the Russians,"  
Albert A. Woldman,  
World Publishing Company, 1952, pp. 182-189  
Edited by Timothy D. Manning

"...In Washington, (Edouard de) Stoeckl expressed deep regret that the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued. In a conference with Seward, the Russian Minister told Lincoln's Secretary of State that he regarded the Proclamation 'as but a futile menace,' because 'it set up a further barrier to the reconciliation of the North and South---always the hope of Russia.'"

In a lengthy report to St. Petersburg shortly after Lincoln issued the preliminary Proclamation, Stoeckl charged the radical Republican leaders had forced Lincoln into this extreme measure in a desperate effort to maintain their waning political powers.

Their program called for immediate and unconditional emancipation; the arming of the slaves against their masters; the confiscation of all property belonging to the insurgents; and finally the inauguration in the North of a reign of terror to silence the protests of the timid conservatives.

Stoeckl described Lincoln as vacillating and resorting to half-measures because “he does not dare to go along” with the radicals, nor does he possess the courage to break with them:

He (Lincoln) signed the confiscation bill. He authorized wholesale arrests (Editor's Note: Lincoln's arrests exceeded 250,000) in the North and even suspended the writ of habeas corpus. But he would not submit to their (radical) demands for placing the entire country under martial law. These half-measures fail to satisfy the radicals. So they attack the administration, oppose the President in Congress, and climax(ed) it all by conspiring openly against him.

Some twenty prominent leaders of New York have organized a permanent committee to prosecute the war in accordance with their program. Without legal authority, this committee undertook to arm 50,000 men under the command of General Fremont, one of the extremists of the radical party who, after his disastrous campaign in Virginia, left the active service.

The chairman of the committee wrote to President Lincoln to demand his approval of the committee, declaring that if this authorization were refused they would nevertheless put their plan into operation. Governor Morgan of New York State had already sanctioned it. The President replied that such a step was illegal and that Governor Morgan, a Republican, would not dare assume the responsibility for this drastic act.

Another committee organized in the same manner in the West sent a deputation here to ask the President that he give Governor Morton of Illinois, an ultra-radical, the chief command of affairs of war in the West, and delegate to him in this part of the Union all of the powers which the Constitution invested in the Chief Executive of the Republic. The conference between the deputation and the President, who naturally refused the request, was a stormy one. Mr. Lincoln having said to one of the delegates that Providence had betrayed the cause of the Union, the latter answered, “it is the administration that has betrayed the people, and you will be held accountable.” I have been told on good authority that this deputation demanded the President's resignation.

All these committees are affiliated with one another and work hand in hand. They have skillfully employed the nation's press to spread their doctrines and attacks upon the government. Their newspapers have attributed the recent defeats of the federal army to the weakness and incompetence of the government.

The President, intimidated by these intrigues and violent attacks, decided to publish the Proclamation emancipating the slaves in all States which by January 1, 1863 have not returned to the Union. The Proclamation settles the question only halfway; slavery will continue to exist in the States which recognize the Union... Slavery would not be abolished except in the States which at that time still remain in rebellion, and where the decrees of the President could not be executed.

According to this act, the protection of the government is offered as a premium to the owners of slaves who will remain faithful to the Union flag, and emancipation is not accorded to Negroes except as a punishment imposed upon their masters. In brief, emancipation is used by President Lincoln as a military weapon to subdue his enemies and is not at all a proclamation of human liberty.

Whatever it may be, the President's act is untimely and unwise. The course which Mr. Lincoln should have taken in the present difficulty was to have complied with the will of the people, the vast majority of whom are conservative, and who want...to achieve (emancipation) in such a manner as to avert a servile war. Several well-intentioned leaders have counseled the President to take this step. Unfortunately, he adopted an entirely different course of action and yielded to the radicals who today are masters of the situation. They will not stop with the recent Proclamation. They will demand the dismissal of all Cabinet officers and all army commanders who do not share their radical views. Mr. Lincoln will be forced to submit to all their wishes, even to his own abdication, for which the radicals have already formulated secret schemes.

We are thus threatened by a revolutionary anarchy, the consequences of which will be even more disastrous than the civil war itself.

Perhaps the glaring failures of the liberation of the Russian serfs caused Stoeckl to continue reporting about the weaknesses of American emancipation. Misery loves company, so Stoeckl believed that reports of Lincoln's troubles with a kindred problem might prove comforting to the Czar liberator.

The Russian emperor's edict had satisfied neither peasants nor gentry. On the contrary it had aroused murderous animosity amongst both classes. True, no man was now the property of any other man...but the masses of redeemed serfs were to remain for decades in a state of abject poverty and economic thralldom.

Andrew Dickson White, the first president of Cornell University, who lived in Russia, first as Secretary in the U.S. legation in St. Petersburg in 1855, and from 1892-94 as Minister Plenipotentiary, has written:

I do not deny the greatness and nobleness of Alexander II and the services of the men he then called to his aid; but I lived in Russia both before and since that reform and feel obliged to testify that, thus far, its main purpose has been so thwarted by reactionaries that there is, as yet, little, if any, practical difference between the condition of the Russian peasant before and since obtaining his freedom.

Stoeckl reported to the Czar that the situation of the freed Negro slaves of the United States was even worse than that of the freed serfs....but within a few months, Stoeckl was also able to report that the Southern legislatures were already passing stringent laws---"black codes"---for the regulation of black freedmen. Not that he criticized these laws. He could sympathize with the white people of the South in whose midst millions of blacks were suddenly turned loose; and he could understand their perplexity as they undertook to deal with these

illiterate ex-slaves, most of whom had not the slightest conception of what it was all about.

The misery which the whole South was to experience during the tragic era of reconstruction was the unavoidable consequence of a revolution so radical. A massive old oak like slavery could not be uprooted without causing tremendous upheaval to the entire surrounding terrain.

But the Czar, reading such reports on American conditions as Stoeckl dispatched to the Russian Foreign Office in St. Petersburg, asserted "the time must come when many will question the manner of American emancipation of the Negro slaves in 1863."

The Czar spoke to Wharton Barker, a Pennsylvania banker who was serving as the financial agent in the United States of the Russian government. After fully discussing what he had achieved for his serfs, the Czar, according to Barker, declared "in earnest, aggressive, but sad tones:"

I am at a loss to understand how you Americans could have been so blind as to leave the Negro slave without tools to work out his salvation. In giving him personal liberty, you gave him an obligation to perform to the state which he must be unable to fulfill. Without property of any kind he cannot educate himself or his children. The vote, in the hands of the ignorant men, without either property or self respect, will be used to the damage of the people at large; for the rich man, without honor or any kind of patriotism, will purchase it, and with it swamp the rights of a free people.

Mr. Barker, who became the presidential nominee of the Anti-Fusion Populists in the election of 1900, concluded:

The hopes and dreams of the Emperor Alexander, and of the great men who helped him free the Russian serfs... have not been realized. But the fears of Alexander have been realized. The Emperor was right in thinking the solution of the Negro slave question would debauch our people and bring serious trouble to America.

END