

Carl Schurz, US minister to Spain, account of his conversation with Abraham Lincoln, January 1862. In September 1861 Schurz sent a lengthy dispatch warning Seward that while European governments favored the dismemberment of the US and the failure of the democratic experiment, the liberal public was waiting for a war to emancipate the slaves and defend republican ideals. He resigned his post in Madrid and came home to report this directly to Lincoln, who he was not certain had seen his September dispatch.

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(Chapter 6, Ambassador to Spain -- Speaking for Emancipation, p. 309)

After the first words of welcome the conversation turned upon the real reasons for my return to the United States. I repeated to Mr. Lincoln substantially the contents of my despatch of September 18th. I did not deem it proper to ask him whether he had ever seen that despatch, and he did not tell me that he had. But he listened to me very attentively, even eagerly, as I thought, without interrupting me. I was still speaking when the door of the room was opened and the head of Mr. Seward appeared. "Excuse me, Seward," said Mr. Lincoln, "excuse me for a moment. I have something to talk over with this gentleman." Seward withdrew without saying a word. I remember the scene distinctly. After the short interruption I continued my talk for a while, and when I stopped Mr. Lincoln sat for a minute silently musing. At last he said "You may be right. Probably you are. I have been thinking so myself. I cannot imagine that any European power would dare to recognize and aid the Southern Confederacy if it becomes clear that the Confederacy stands for slavery and the Union for freedom." Then he explained to me that, while a distinct anti-slavery policy would remove the foreign danger, and would thus work for the preservation of the Union — while, indeed, it might, in this respect, be necessary for the preservation of the Union, and while he thought that it would soon appear and be recognized to be in every respect necessary, he was in doubt as to whether public opinion at home was yet sufficiently prepared for it. He was anxious to unite, and keep united, all the forces of Northern society and of the Union element in the South, especially the Border States, in the war for the Union. Would not the cry of "abolition war," such as might be occasioned by a distinct anti-slavery policy, tend to disunite those forces and thus weaken the Union cause? This was the doubt that troubled him, and it troubled him very much. He wished me to look around a little, and in a few days to come back to him and tell him of the impressions I might have gathered. Then he told me how he had enjoyed some of my despatches about Spanish conditions and public men, and how glad he had been to hear from Seward that I was getting on so nicely with "the Dons." So we parted.

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