

tory, slaves simply abandoned their plantations and flocked to the military camps. Some blacks came over to the Union side through spectacular acts of individual heroism, including Robert Smalls, the pilot on a vessel in the Confederate navy, who brought his ship out of Charleston harbor and over to the Union navy. The "contrabands" as these blacks who abandoned slavery were called, provided invaluable military information for the Union forces, and many served as laborers, spies, and soldiers. Others, Du Bois points out, were put to work as free laborers on abandoned or confiscated plantations. Whether or not one agrees with Du Bois that this flight from slavery was sufficiently organized to be termed a "general strike," it is difficult to resist the conclusion that through their contribution to the Union's victory both in and out of the army, blacks in a real sense freed themselves during the Civil War.

## The General Strike

W. E. B. DU BOIS

*How the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by a general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force*

When Edwin Ruffin, white-haired and mad, fired the first gun at Fort Sumter, he freed the slaves. It was the last thing he meant to do but that was because he was so typically a Southern oligarch. He did not know the real world about him. He was pro-