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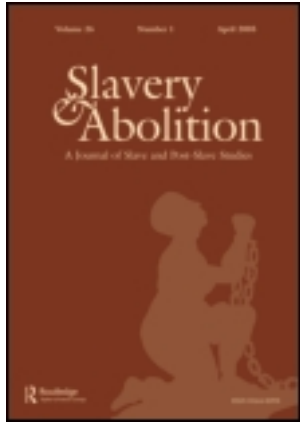
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The Aborigines Protection Society, 1837–1909

CHARLES SWAISLAND

For many in the abolition movement the Emancipation Act of 1833 seemed the end of a long road. Certainly it was the end of the mass movement,¹ but for the battle-hardened leadership it was no more than a significant milestone in a much longer journey. Slavery was still legal in some countries and their dependencies, and the slave trade still carried on in ships under their flags. Although now illegal in British colonies, had slavery stopped in all of them? In reality not, for slavery-like conditions prevailed in many parts, encouraged by the periods of apprenticeship imposed by the Act.²

The campaigners regrouped, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society³ being formed to combat continuing chattel slavery and, in direct response to the report of the Parliamentary Committee on Aborigines (British Settlement) 1834–37, the Aborigines Protection Society (APS) was established to oppose the exploitation of indigenous peoples in British colonies. For 70 years until they amalgamated in 1909, the two Societies worked together, usually in harmony, but with divergent viewpoints on some issues and occasional acerbity as their secretaries sought to defend from threatened encroachment the interests and territories they considered their own.⁴

One reason for the infrequency of such clashes was the early sharing out of the world. The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) concentrated on the continuing slave trade and slavery outside the British Empire, while the APS mainly addressed problems caused by British imperialism. There was some overlap; for historical reasons the BFASS retained the main interest in the West Indies and, in 1890, the APS was active in famine relief on the Red Sea coast of the Sudan, territory over which the sister organization had long campaigned. Both were engaged in the south Pacific, where labour recruitment had started before Britain had any political authority in the region, and where practices were sometimes indistinguishable from slave-raiding. Indian matters were left to the British India Society,⁵ until the traffic in indentured labour became a major movement and brought both in.

Organization and methods were similar and the two Societies shared not a few members. Each had a world-wide network of correspondents, some of

whom supplied information to both. Members of Parliament were lobbied⁶ and representations, often cocooned in sonorous generality,⁷ were made to Secretaries of State. The chance was rarely lost of writing long, closely-reasoned letters to newspapers. Most of their activity was reported in the *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* and *The Aborigines Friend* together with, in the latter, the text of correspondence with the Colonial Office.⁸

Who were the people mounting a challenge to the government of Empire by setting up and belonging to a body of ill-defined membership and an annual income of three to four hundred pounds? Some of the anti-slavery bodies and other groups at work before abolition had enjoyed royal and aristocratic patronage. The short-lived African Civilisation Society had the Queen's husband at its head and the BFASS would one day have the King of England as its patron. The APS never had such connections. One or two relatively minor peers associated themselves with it from time to time over particular matters, as did a few bishops, while a sprinkling of baronets and knights of the shires gave more constant service. But beyond them the membership was largely made up of middle-class professionals and others in commerce and industry. In religious affiliation they were mostly Nonconformist or, if Anglican, evangelical. Most voted Liberal in general elections.

A more fruitful question is: who provided and maintained motivation in the work? Two men were of particular importance in the history of the Society. Indeed, the minutes of correspondence in Colonial Office files justly claim that each in turn *was* the Society.⁹ The two men were its successive secretaries. Frederick William Chesson (1855–88) had spent some of his adolescent years in New York State where the case of a fugitive slave made him a committed abolitionist. Henry Richard Fox Bourne (1889–1909), who had once been a clerk in the War Office, was the son of a magistrate in the West Indies.

Next in importance in the work was the network of correspondents. Most representation and much of the content of *The Aborigines Friend* was based on the information they supplied. Except where the person was too well known,¹⁰ identities were kept secret even from other correspondents in the territory. That was a help in testing the reliability and independence of the reporting. After one or two unhappy experiences when the Colonial Office, in communicating with governors, had not respected confidential disclosure, identification of sources was firmly refused. Unfortunately, in Whitehall and colonial secretariats that was often used as an excuse for not taking effective action.

Correspondents came from many walks of life. There were traders and clerics, the latter mainly missionaries from Britain. Two prominent clerics, whose integrity was never in question, were Bishop John William Colenso

of Natal, whose voluminous correspondence was maintained by members of his family after his death in 1883, and the African Bishop James Johnson of Lagos, whose letters also lack any suggestion of self-interest. Most correspondents were European, but there were some highly educated West Africans and a much smaller number of South Africans. Tengo Jabavu and Kirkland Soga, both newspaper men, sent material from the Eastern Cape, while Dr Abdullah Abdurahman organized and sent petitions from Cape Town calling for votes for non-white citizens when South Africa became a Union. Maori majors of militia, men from St. Helena having problems in Durban finding schools for their children and mixed-race people being harassed by pass laws in Johannesburg were able to handle their own correspondence, as were some Indians in Mauritius, but the quality of the English in letters signed by petitioners of the humbler sort showed that they were written by English-speaking amanuenses.¹¹

A particularly interesting class of correspondent consisted of colonial civil servants in touch with the APS; some like Sir Henry Barkly, former Governor of the Cape of Good Hope and High Commissioner in South Africa, and Sir Benson Maxwell, former Chief Justice of Malaya, collaborated only after retirement, but most were in touch while in service. Sir Arthur Gordon¹² and Sir John Pope Hennessy,¹³ both sent Chesson copies of their confidential dispatches to Whitehall so that questions inconvenient to the Colonial Secretary could be asked in Parliament.

Despite the spirit of reform affecting the Home Civil Service, patronage still ruled colonial appointments, and most of their colonial service correspondents at some time sought the secretary's help when seeking an advantage in their careers. Some had roots in Scotland and Ireland and may have felt disadvantaged when it came to postings and promotion. There are indications that Chesson could sometimes help.

The Aborigines Protection Society was born out of concern for the welfare of indigenous peoples under pressure from growing emigration from western Europe, carried by power of steam and possessing increasingly powerful weapons. Reaching foreign shores in large numbers, the immigrants were equipped to despoil the inhabitants of land and compel their labour. The Society never resolved the tension between a Darwinian belief in the inevitability of emigration to distant and seemingly more spacious lands¹⁴ and the manifest detriment to the interests and welfare of the indigenous inhabitants. Thus, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, grandson of the first president, speaking in 1889, said:

There is one tendency which we cannot forget and that is, those vast spaces of unoccupied and unused territory in South Africa and other parts of the world cannot remain as they are with the human race

increasing ... the space will be filled up ... [and all that government can do] is to control and direct it, and see that the progress goes on with as little mischief as possible to all concerned.¹⁵

The following year Fox Bourne, in a paper delivered at the Universal Peace Congress in Westminster Town Hall, went even further:

We are confronted at starting by the great natural law of the 'survival of the fittest' which applies to human beings no less than to the rest of animal creation. ... All we dare hope for and strive after is that the encroachments shall be effected under conditions most equitable, or least inequitable, to the natives....¹⁶

The Indian Coolies

Because of their involvement in commerce and industry as well as religious persuasion, most members associated personal and social virtue with honest toil backed by responsible capital. When the latter had an overtly humanitarian motive, such as the African Civilisation Society's Niger venture of 1841, the appeal was strong indeed. Belief was never lost in commerce, first as the supplanter of the slave trade and then as a vehicle of civilization, though the activities of chartered companies were to test it.

A small, idealistic settlement up the Niger, a suggestion that American humanitarians should establish a similar settlement to Liberia on the East African coast,¹⁷ and a proposal for a joint Anglo-Irish-Maltese colony in Cyrenaica¹⁸ were not seen at the time as a threat to Africa. What made the idea acceptable was the assumption that the settlers would be using their own muscle power, as had been the case in New England and on the Cape Frontier in 1820. But in tropical countries immigrants soon sought to become landlords needing labour. Former slaves in Mauritius and the West Indian colonies were reluctant to carry on working in conditions differing little from their former state, so a regular and biddable replacement had to be found. Only rarely could local people supply what was wanted, either because they were few in number or had a social organization that did not fit in with regular employment. The answer was indentured labour mainly recruited from India, China and the South Sea Islands.¹⁹ The way in which it was recruited, transported and employed occasioned much abuse.²⁰ If settlement was not a clear-cut issue for the Society, abuses stemming from it were and the most extensive of these related to harsh conditions of employment. The successors of the abolitionists were back at a business they understood well.

The APS took an interest in the conditions in the West Indies of Indian labour and the Carib remnant, and the welfare of Chinese labourers in Latin

America, whether on Cuban plantations or in Peru, where it was said a thousand had been killed near Santa Rosa by 'a body of Negroes'.²¹ Questions were asked about Dutch plantations in Surinam and even more pointed ones about Indian labour conditions in Cayenne, Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1897,²² as well as about the five-year indenturing to farmers offered by the Cape Government in 1897 to alleged Bechuana rebels as an alternative to their being tried for treason. All these inspired a vigorous but unsuccessful campaign for imperial intervention. Their main labour concerns, however, were Indians in Réunion and Mauritius, traffic in Pacific Islands labour to Queensland, the importation of Chinese on to the Rand and the appalling conditions discovered in the Congo Free State.

There was little the APS could do about the recruitment in India, although one or two representations were made about reducing the length of contract from five to three years for labourers working within India.²³ They were also concerned about conditions in the Assam tea gardens.²⁴ When Sir Arthur Gordon, in his last governorship, was able to pay to Tamil labourers from public funds wages owed by a bankrupt tea estate in Ceylon, they warmly approved.²⁵

The Indian Ocean traffic was on a large scale, with most of the labourers coming from Madras. When Chesson and Sir Charles Wingfield interviewed William Adam, Governor of the province, in London he claimed that 138,535 had left Madras between 1842 and 1870, 110,825 bound for Mauritius. Arrivals on the island in 1879 numbered 1,500 and a like total was expected in 1880.²⁶

There were 40,000 Indians in Réunion in 1881,²⁷ a particularly large number having been recruited the year before because of a threatened suspension of recruitment. That threat, made from time to time and occasionally carried out because of bad conditions on the plantations, had unfortunate consequences.²⁸ Pre-emptive over-recruitment brought down wages and placed extra strains on medical and other facilities. Entry was denied to one shipload reaching Réunion because there was no market for their labour and the *Marguerite* sailed into Port Louis in the hope of disposing of the men to Mauritian estates. According to the *Mauritian Mercantile Record and Commercial Gazette*, the 400 people aboard had been 'kidnapped' from all over British India and shipped from Pondicherry contrary to the terms of the Anglo-French convention of 1861.²⁹

The convention allowing French recruitment from British India was said to be the price paid for the abolition of a revived slave trade from east Africa, principally Mozambique.³⁰ It required that, before a labourer left India, there had to exist a contract either with a receiving government or a designated owner of the soil to be worked, and there were conditions applying to the accommodation aboard ship. An anomaly in the latter was

discovered when Chesson took up with the India Office the plight of some time-expired labourers on their way home from Réunion. They were landed in the Seychelles from the leaking 380-ton barque *Francis*, a ship with a capacity of 200 passengers but with 400 aboard on arrival. When the 400-ton *Jacques* arrived to collect them, even she was not big enough and 67 were left behind when the voyage to Pondicherry was resumed.³¹ The convention prescribed conditions on the outward journey, but said nothing about them on the way home.³²

The Society was handicapped in dealing with the situation in Réunion for want of reliable information. What they had, suggested that conditions were bad, but there was no intention on the part of the French of making it easy for foreigners to investigate. Even Victor Schoelcher, an ardent, French, anti-slavery campaigner with whom the Society enjoyed a co-operative relationship, told Chesson that not only would French planters in Réunion and the West Indies as well as the French government refuse inspection of the plantations by a British consul, but, 'despite my hatred of immigration, I would be the first to oppose our Government if it agreed to it'.³³ Consequently, reliable reports from Réunion were scarce, the India Office being unable to furnish official consular reports for the years 1872-74. In 1871 Colonel Seagrave, the British Consul, had received 771 complaints from or about Indians, of whom a third, he said, were in prison at any one time.

Conditions in Mauritius were not much better, as letters from many correspondents made clear, though the report of the Royal Commission, received in April 1875, surprisingly said that they were rather better on the estates than was commonly supposed.³⁴ All was far from well, however. There were arrangements for a quarter of every shipload to be made up of women which, even if the requirement were fully met, meant a serious imbalance of population. As Colonel O'Brien, Inspector of Police, remarked, it made polyandry almost an acknowledged system.³⁵ Medical cover was also inadequate, hospital accommodation on the two d'Arifat estates at Flacq being cited because the mortality rate there had been higher than average.³⁶ J.J. Daly, a Canadian barrister and magistrate as well as an APS correspondent, conducted three inquiries between 1877 and 1879 into hospital and labour regulations and found that conditions had improved since the report appeared and a new labour ordinance had come into operation.³⁷

In Mauritius it was those known as 'Old Immigrants' who were the most disadvantaged. Having completed their indentured time and lacking in many cases the money to get home, they were stranded, for Mauritian planters had managed to get contracts lacking provision for return passages.³⁸ To survive, many were forced into a further period of indentured

labour. Their plight was brought to government and APS notice in 1871 by a pamphlet written by Adolph de Plevitz, a former Prussian Army officer and then a planter in Mauritius, who had helped 9,401 Indians to address a petition to Sir Arthur Gordon.³⁹ It was a catalogue of their complaints, starting with criticism of the recruiting system in India, of wages paid sometimes six months in arrears and, when their time was done, liability to arrest as vagrants if they were found without a costly ticket bearing a photograph and a pass valid only for one district unless it had been endorsed by a police inspector for wider use. If the fine could not be paid, imprisonment followed.

The punishment of offenders could be harsh. Heavy fines and costs sent many a person to gaol, where punishment for an offence against prison discipline could be caning. Corporal punishment was all too common. W. Kennedy, Superintendent of Prisons, claimed that over a ten-year period there had been more than 500 floggings in what he thought were inappropriate cases. A commission set up to inquire into practice found that caning was administered to unfit persons and that the punishment in Port Louis prison was sanctioned by a disciplinary committee without its hearing the evidence.⁴⁰

Planters may have welcomed a stranded pool of experienced labour harried back into employment by a draconian vagrancy law, but a few perceptive observers saw beyond the present scene. One such was Owen O'Connor of the Immigration Department. Of the estimated Mauritian population of 325,000 in 1872, 225,000 were Indian. O'Connor noted that many of the latter had become small proprietors and within 10 to 15 years they would become influential. Even he could not have imagined that they would one day supplant the plantocracy as the island's rulers.⁴¹

Boer 'Slavery'

The Great Trek convinced the APS that Boers leaving the Cape Colony were seeking freedom to practise the slavery they had recently been required by the 1833 Emancipation Act to give up. It was a view of the Boers they were to hold tenaciously almost to the end. Writing to Lord Glenelg, the Secretary of State, Thomas Hodgkin was astonished that the colonial government had allowed so large an armed force to trek, even though he agreed that they had suffered grievous provocation at the hands of that government and from the unjust arrangement for paying slave compensation only in London.⁴² The Society, having warmly applauded the abandonment, on instructions from London, of the ceded Queen Adelaide territory in 1836, pressed Glenelg to annexe Port Natal temporarily to bar further Boer expansion.⁴³ Sir Harry Smith's proclamation of the Orange

River State in 1848 passed without comment in *The Aborigines Friend*, but on the abandonment of the territory six years later it was noted that 'this territory ... having been unjustly acquired has been recklessly thrown away'.⁴⁴ 'A piece of egregious folly', the editor called it. The annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 was welcomed and the retrocession in 1881 deplored, lest it lead to a resurgence of slavery or, as Lord Shaftesbury put it at the Society's Annual General Meeting in May 1881, the Boers planting 'their tyrannous foot on the necks of the native races'.⁴⁵

Not only did the APS petition the British government but, from time to time, Boer leaders were also addressed. There is no evidence of how Andries Pretorius took it when the Society observed, 'with deep regret, that the inhabitants of the Transvaal Republic have been seriously deficient in their duty to their weaker fellow men...'.⁴⁶ The father's generation seemingly persisting in the hardness of their hearts, the Secretary next tried with the son, Marthinus Wessel Pretorius, successively President of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.⁴⁷ He too ignored them. But the Transvaalers bided their time and the chance came. On 26 June 1880 Kruger and Joubert wrote to Leonard Courtney, MP, who had opposed Transvaal annexation in 1877, circulating copies of their letter to newspapers in South Africa: 'Even now calumny gains the ear of the Colonial Secretary who the other day was told by a deputation of the Aborigines Protection Society that slavery still exists in the Transvaal.'⁴⁸

It was a British official who gave the Boer leaders their opening. Melmoth Osborn, Sir Theophilus Shepstone's successor as Administrator of the annexed Transvaal, had apprenticed 800 children orphaned in the renewed attack on Sekhukhuni. A Volksraad Select Committee, in recording the fact, said that this was 'slavery according to Mr Chesson ... carried on by the English Government ... Never under the Republic was a child apprenticed without the consent of the parents...'.⁴⁹ As G.W. Steyn, a former landdrost of Potchefstroom, in a letter to *The Friend of the Free State* asked, how many of the 4,000 or more sold in the Transvaal since 1850 had been orphans unless they had been made so 'by the bullet of some ruffian of a Boer'.⁵⁰

In *The Times* of 13 November 1883 the Transvaal delegates then in London to negotiate the London Convention launched another attack in an open letter addressed to the members of both the Anti-Slavery and the Aborigines Protection Society. It was a curious document, quaintly constructed and revealing that, if the APS had failed to understand the outlook of the Boers, the misunderstanding was mutual. The authors claimed to be 'most deeply hurt ... there still prevails the opinion that the Transvaal Christians understand less thoroughly than Christians in this country the duty which they owe to Kaffirs ...' They wrote that they heartily

approved of the Society's principles and most desirable objectives and it was not for them to judge whether its influence had always prevented colonial officials in South Africa from interfering with native lives.

The painful accusation is brought against us that we not only keep the natives in a degraded position but also encroach on their person liberty, ... We cannot refrain from demanding of you, on behalf of the Transvaal, a share of the same human compassion which you devote so largely to our aboriginal neighbours in Africa.⁵¹

It was nauseating and it was inept. The readership of *The Times* included many critics of the APS and the editor had long deplored the Society's attitude towards settlers, but that tissue of lachrymose self-pity was going to recruit few of them to the Boer cause. It is no wonder that R.N. Fowler, then Lord Mayor of London and treasurer of the Society, four days later administered the almost unprecedented snub to foreign leaders of refusing to receive them at the Mansion House.

Later in the century the Society's correspondence and the pages of *The Aborigines Friend* mellowed. Sir Richard Southey, an occasional correspondent of the Society,⁵² when both in and out of office, Saul Solomon, Cape politician and J.H. Froude, Carnarvon's informal emissary on South African federation, all thought Boer attitudes improving as British behaviour in South Africa deteriorated. Even disillusioned African opinion was shifting. Tengo Jabavu, a Mfengu journalist, as early as 1881 told Chesson that the natives were beginning to have confidence in the 'Dutch' section of the community.⁵³

Such moderating views received sceptical acceptance in APS circles, but by 1899 Fox Bourne went so far as to admit the APS's failure to be fair to the two republics.⁵⁴ It was the performance of foreign capital which forced the grudging admission. The Boers, it was said, were not as harsh as the Uitlanders on the Rand. Two years later he wrote to *The Times*:

The Boer policy towards natives ... is notoriously degraded in theory and often cruel in practice ... [but they have] dealt more leniently than Cape colonists and newcomers from Europe with the great majority of natives outside their actual purview ... All the special and oppressive legislation introduced into Transvaal since 1884 has been at the behest of Uitlanders.⁵⁵

Chinese Labour in the Transvaal

The employment of Chinese labour was a matter of great controversy in South Africa, with reverberations in the British general election of 1906. It

might have been expected that the Boers would have had much to say about it but they were tactically silent, for General Botha hoped that the reaction of others would hasten the return to self-government in the province.

The Aborigines Protection Society was far from silent. When the proposal was first made to meet the labour demands of the 300 mining companies on the Rand after the war, they manned the ramparts. As early as 1872 they had condemned the traffic in Chinese coolie labour as 'an insidious form of slavery'.⁵⁶ The campaign they waged showed traces of unusual racial prejudice. Fox Bourne wrote, 'Whatever his merits the Chinaman has habits and methods which render his influence on the "inferior" races of other lands altogether pernicious'.⁵⁷

Later that year, in a letter to Alfred Lyttleton, the Colonial Secretary, he wrote *Grievous and incurable injuries will be inflicted on the natives of South Africa, in addition to the inconveniences and wrongs to which some of the whites in contact with them will be liable, unless they are safeguarded against the bodily disease and social corruption from which the Chinese immigrants for short terms are being brought.*⁵⁸

The social and moral aspects of importation concerned the Archbishop of Canterbury and other churchmen, as well as the APS. Sir Frank Swettenham, Governor of Malaya, had been consulted by the Colonial Office and had warned that a labourer could not be held a virtual prisoner in the mining compound during the whole period of his indenture without problems arising. Fox Bourne was more explicit; 50,000 or more Chinese could not be kept in enforced celibacy 'without monstrous abuses growing'.⁵⁹ Swettenham had referred to the men's need to find occasional solace in brothels in the compounds,⁶⁰ but no Colonial Secretary was able politically to give countenance to licensed prostitution. The problem was never satisfactorily solved. Men did get out of the compounds, some in the hope of making their way back to China. Inevitably there were violent incidents when Chinese associated with African women in kraals.

For once the Society was on the side of the big battalions. Trade unions, churchmen and a host of voluntary societies in the United Kingdom and South Africa and, eventually, the Liberal Party in Britain, united in opposition to the system. Once South African public opinion in general had been mobilized it was brought down. Even though siding with powerful interests, the Society's still managed to be a dissenting voice. Their fear was that if the battle cry of 'Chinese slavery' rang out too clearly, the system might survive if mine owners found the labour so profitable that they purged it of the grossest abuses. That would deny Africans the chance of selling their labour. After all, time-expired, indentured Indians leaving the Natal

sugar-cane fields had elbowed Zulus out of many aspects of the local economy. Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and a few others who favoured importation also saw the danger, and at the 1903 Bloemfontein Customs Conference succeeded in obtaining a resolution that there should be terminal repatriation after an indenture period limited to three years.⁶¹ Importation ceased at the end of 1905, but the last labourers sailed homeward past Durban Head only in March 1910.

King Leopold's Estate

If the part played by the Society over the importation of Chinese labour on to the Rand was of limited effect, the same cannot be said of their opposition to King Leopold's Congo fiefdom.

Before they clashed there was more than a decade of harmonious relationship. Early in 1878 the Society wished to acknowledge Leopold's avowed scientific interest in central Africa and invited him to become their patron. The canny monarch was pleased, but declined.⁶² As late as January 1890 in the wake of the Brussels Conference on the Slave Trade they congratulated him on his efforts on behalf of the Congo natives. But H.M. Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*⁶³ appeared in June and on 12 December Dr Grattan Guinness of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union spoke at a meeting the APS had convened at the Westminster Palace Hotel. It was clear that much was amiss in the Congo basin.⁶⁴ From then on the Society maintained pressure on the Foreign Office in the hope of stirring the government to exercise their treaty rights under the Berlin General Act of 1885, and eventually to press a reluctant Belgian government to take over the Congo Free State.

Credit is usually given to Edmund Dene Morel, editor of the *West African Mail*, for the success of the campaign. Rightly so, because it was his knowledge of West African trade and ability to marshal the facts, as well as the founding and directing of the Congo Reform Association, which built up the relentless pressure which achieved the objective. But the APS were active forerunners and Fox Bourne's *Civilisation in Congoland*,⁶⁵ a seminal work, preceded Morel's *King Leopold's Rule in Africa*⁶⁶ by almost two years. Both men wielded powerful pens, though Morel's style, when compared with Fox Bourne's sonorous rotundity of phrase, was a precursor of tabloid journalism. It was no surprise when Roger Casement, whose idea the Congo Reform Association was, invited the two men to join in organizing it, that Fox Bourne refused or rather argued that, if he were to do so, it would have to be on his own terms. He thought Liverpool not close enough to the centre of government and that Morel had too many irons in the fire – as though he himself had not! Why, he asked, was a separate body

needed? Why not a co-ordinating committee like the many Chesson had set up in his day, working from the APS office with himself as secretary? Eventually Sir Charles Dilke and Casement overcame his opposition and the Congo Reform Association (CRA) was set up in Liverpool with Morel as its executive and Fox Bourne a respected member of the committee. In the APS annual report for 1908 he told members that CRA activity made it unnecessary for the Society to keep up the pressure on His Majesty's Government, especially as he and many of his readers were members of both bodies.⁶⁷

Conclusions

'It surely behoves the British public that the colonial rule of Britain be no longer such as to stain her name with the reproach of cruelty and injustice.'⁶⁸

That was written in 1839 in the report to the Society's second annual general meeting. It was the introduction to what would now be called the 'mission statement' of a pressure group. For 72 years they remonstrated with, cajoled and, when allowed, cooperated with governments, chartered companies and settlers in measures to achieve that goal. How effective were their efforts? They asked themselves that in 1874 and were forced to conclude that:

Our predecessors vainly hoped that, in successfully fighting against slavery and the slave trade in the British dominions, they had forever put an end to the two greatest evils that had cursed their day and generation. It has been our fate to realise that ... institutions may change their form, and yet be animated by the same principles of oppression.⁶⁹

It is a fair judgement that by the time the Society amalgamated with the Anti-Slavery Society they had achieved far less than they had dared to hope in 1837, but more than in 1909 they dared to believe. There were no great achievements, no landmarks such as the Emancipation Act to point to; just a few cases of individual hardship alleviated and petty wrongs righted. Their work may have seemed successful on those occasions when they were moving with the political current and, at other times, things might have gone harder with their clients if the vigil had not been kept. They never turned the Colonial Office from the pursuit of a British interest and rarely goaded them into action if the Secretary of State and his officials saw *no national interest* to be served by it. But such a summary does not supply a full answer to the question.

The single-minded pursuit of an objective held to be as valid at the end as at the beginning does not imply that the Society's thinking was static and

their outlook unchanged. From a base in evangelical Christianity and a belief in Western civilization as the vehicle to carry its supreme values to the unenlightened of other lands and faiths, they moved towards a more secular view. In earlier years British citizenship with all its rights was seen as a blessing to which everyone in the Empire was entitled. By 1909, while still holding to the right of everyone wanting it to have it, Fox Bourne also believed in the right of others to reject it.⁷⁰

There were shifts in political thinking, too, from Little Englanderism, through two decades of belief in responsible imperialism and then a drift back to the earlier belief. Between 1869 and 1888 Fiji, Basutoland, the Gold Coast and Bechuanaland came under British control with the Society's urging and they campaigned vigorously against the proposed cession of the Gambia to France. Indeed, there were so many calls for intervention and control in those years that it seemed to the Colonial Office and many humanitarians that the Society was a leading exponent of imperial expansion. They certainly made it more acceptable in Nonconformist circles and, to some extent, in constituency Liberal parties. In the last decade of the century, when the settler dominions were self-governing and beyond Colonial Office control and while France and Britain were pressing their interests in West Africa, the APS once again took up a stance against imperial expansion.

The most valuable service rendered by the Society was not its political advocacy, for much of that inevitably consisted of generalities with which many of their critics could agree, but the provision of a second channel of communication from the colonies to the Colonial Office and, if need be, beyond to Parliament. Lord Carnarvon once remarked that the APS called the Department's attention to many points which they might have overlooked if left entirely to themselves.⁷¹ The rules of petition to the Secretary of State were well established, the matter being submitted through every step in the bureaucratic hierarchy, with each official having the right to comment. The petitioner had neither the opportunity nor the right to see comments, and so had no redress against error, or even malice. When it reached Whitehall it faced another hazard. As Mr Justice Gorrie in Mauritius pointed out, the Colonial Office usually backed their men in the field.⁷² A problem for the Society was tainted sources of information. So often a complainant had a sense of grievance without it having substance, or it was a matter which had been properly dealt with in the colony, but not to his or her liking. Such cases given forceful support – particularly by Fox Bourne – did the Society's standing no good.

The Colonial Office accepted the APS as a fact of political life, a regrettable one by and large, but certainly one never to be ignored. Dealing with their submissions was an exercise in fine judgement. Say too much in

reply and the Secretary came back with further argument; say too little and there could be an awkward question in Parliament.⁷³

In his classic work on the Indian Civil Service, Philip Woodruff observed that 'a permanent opposition is bound to display a certain amount of permanent perversity'.⁷⁴ It was so with the Society; like trees bent by the prevailing wind, they were set in a posture of opposition, yet, if the Colonial Office or a Governor sought their help, it was willingly, almost eagerly, given. Although the Colonial Office were wary in dealing with them, judgement on the value of their work was expressed by two other members of the Colonial Office in minutes which, because they were not expected to see the light of day, were perhaps more telling than Lord Carnarvon's pronouncement. R. Antrobus, First Class Clerk, wrote: 'Mr Fox Bourne is continually bringing false and unreasonable accusations against the Government, but he and his Society do a certain amount of good in keeping us all up to the mark.'⁷⁵

It was to be expected and not unfitting that, when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary said much the same thing a few years earlier, there was more of an oratorical flourish to it: 'The APS and kindred societies [though] sometimes, perhaps often, weak as to their facts, help by their criticisms to keep Governors and Captains up to the mark of a high level of humanity.'⁷⁶

NOTES

Abbreviations

AF *The Aborigines Friend*

ASC APS Correspondence in the Rhodes House Library, Oxford G refers to items in boxes. Where there is no letter before the number, the item is to be found in a bound volume in the C series.

CO Colonial Office files in the Public Record Office

PPC 'Blue Books' (Parliamentary Papers)

1. I.N. Crumpston, *Indians Overseas in British Territories 1834-1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p.169. The author was surprised that the abolitionists could still attract 3,000 people to meetings in the 1840s. The APS never had that sort of support.
2. Six years for field workers, four for domestic servants.
3. Now Anti-Slavery International.
4. One such disagreement spilled over into the letter columns of *The Times*. The Anti-Slavery Society committee thought it would inhibit anti-slavery progress in Africa at the Brussels Conference in 1890 to consider also the arms and liquor trades. As payment for slaves was often made in these commodities it made sense to the APS to deal with them together. C.H. Allen to *The Times*, 20 Jan. 1890, p.10 and subsequent letters.
5. Founded 1839.
6. At one time there were 80 Liberal MPs willing to ask questions in the House of Commons for the APS.
7. 'The Society loves to deal in generality and leave the harder task of getting at and stating the facts'. APS to Chamberlain, 15 February 1901, minute by G. Grindle, C0417/339. That was hardly fair; much detail was sometimes furnished only to have the matter taken less seriously by the Colonial Office for some minor inaccuracy.

8. For a few years *The Aborigines Friend* was called *The Colonial Intelligencer* and occasionally both.
9. In coming to that conclusion they were not alone, William Cadbury, writing on 18 December 1907 to John Harris, Organising Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, was 'pretty satisfied that [Fox Bourne] has run the whole business for the last year or two, and [the Committee] has meekly followed in his wake'. ASC G486.
10. The Colenso family in Natal and Bishop James Johnson were examples. Episcopal status was also thought to give warranty to facts alleged.
11. Cetewayo, the Zulu king, learned to sign his name during imprisonment in Cape Town Castle.
12. Gordon held governerships in New Brunswick, Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, New Zealand and Ceylon.
13. Pope Hennessy held governerships in Labuan, West Africa, West Indies, Hong Kong and Mauritius. On retirement he (a Roman Catholic) became Nationalist MP for Kilkenny and a member of the APS committee.
14. Dr Thomas Hodgkin, virtual founder of the APS, was co-founder in 1843 of the Ethnological Society.
15. AF, June 1889, p.581.
16. AF, April 1891, p.170 *et seq.*
17. E.D. Parkes to T. Hodgkin, undated, ASC 122/50.
18. T. Hodgkin to G.G.S. Lefevre, undated, ASC 122/72.
19. 'Coolie labour obtained either in India or China, is the chief element in the industrial system of several of our most important colonies, notably of Mauritius and Guiana'. F.W. Chesson at a conference on Colonial Questions, 21 July 1871. Report in AF, Dec. 1871, p.344.
20. 'Experience has shown ... in colonies steeped in traditions of slavery [that] immigration under labour contracts, in spite of attempted safeguards, ever led to gross abuse, and tended to reduce the immigrants to a servile condition'. Sir Charles Wingfield speaking when a deputation called on Lord Salisbury at the India Office, 3 Aug. 1875. AF, Nov. 1875, p.233.
21. AF, Aug. 1881, p.379 fn.
22. Chesson and Fox Bourne were both fluent in French, but that did not eliminate an anti-French bias which persisted throughout the Society's history. Except in its anxiety to prevent passage to the north being cut in South Africa by collusion between the Germans and the Boers, there was no obvious feeling against the Germans.
23. Hartington to APS, 19 April 1882, ASC 164/260.
24. Cross to APS, 16 Feb. 1887, ASC 164/262.
25. Gordon - S/S Colonial Office, 3 Oct. 1887, ASC 164/242, enclosed with CO to APS, 11 Nov 1887, ASC 164/241.
26. AF, Jan. 1881, p.315.
27. AF, Aug. 1881.
28. AF, April 1880, p.228.
29. 14 Sept. 1880, APS to Hartington 30 Oct. 1880. Hartington to APS, 23 Nov. 1880, ASC 164/258.
30. Madagascar domestic slaves were angered when their Queen on 30 June 1877 emancipated the Mozambiquan slaves but kept them in slavery. AF, Jan. 1878, p.468. The *Gazety Malagasy* of 12 June 1885 reported that three dhows had landed Mozambiquans at Sakalawa, selling men at £8 and women at £6-12 to Frenchmen, probably to send to Réunion. AF, Nov. 1885, p.228. The AF for Oct.-Dec. 1858 had reported the kidnapping of a number of the islanders from the Kingswill Islands in the Pacific for work in Réunion, p.500.
31. AF, April 1882, p.489.
32. J.F. Kelsey to Chesson, 27 Dec. 1881, ASC 139/138.
33. Schoelcher to Chesson, 17 March 1882, ASC 146/125.
34. The planters were pleased and not least because it was they who had asked for a commission of enquiry to be appointed.
35. Reported in AF, Nov. 1875, p.237.
36. William Seed to Chesson, April 1876, ASC 146/138.
37. The Daly Reports, ASC G35/B2, Items 1-3.

38. In his dispatch No. 26 of 11 March 1875 [C-1188], Carnarvon virtually instructed Sir Arthur Phayre, the Governor of Mauritius, to include in a new labour ordinance contractual provision of return passages. On 19 July, when speaking in the House of Lords, he claimed that every coolie was entitled to a passage back to his country, *Lords Hansard*, XXCCV, col.1639, yet the revised labour law was not introduced for almost another three years.
39. *The Old Immigrants of Mauritius*. On its publication planters demanded that de Plevitz be deported. Gordon refused, but a year later he left Mauritius for good, making his way to Fiji where, after he had failed to make a living, he was eventually helped by Sir Arthur Gordon and William Seed, both of whom had known him in Mauritius, by being made a sergeant of police.
40. Pope-Hennessy to Chesson, 8 June 1884, ASC 137/240 and O'Connor to Chesson, 15 March 1884, ASC 144/7.
41. O'Connor to Chesson, 15 March 1884, ASC 144/7.
42. APS to Glenelg, 7 Aug. 1838, reproduced in *APS Extracts*, Vol.3, p.74. The Emancipation Act 1833 provided £20 million for compensating owners for the loss of their slaves, but it could only be collected in London. Even then only two-fifths of the assessed value would be paid, part in cash and the rest in government stock. Few Boers were in a position to collect in person and so sold their claims at heavy discount to travelling agents.
43. CO 48/197 and *APS Extracts*, Vol.3, p.74.
44. APS address to Sir G. Grey, Colonial Secretary, 8 July 1854, AF, July-Dec. 1854, p.341.
45. AF, Aug. 1881, p.388.
46. AF, April-Sept. 1856, p.128. Undated reference. Andreas Pretorius died 23 July 1853!
47. 6 Dec. 1867, AF, March 1868, p.62. Once again the document was reported as addressed to Andreas Pretorius.
48. Copy in the *Cape Argus*, 3 July 1880.
49. South African newspaper cutting, undated. ASC G12/5, Item 6 and AF, Dec. 1881, p.430 and *De Volksstem*, 10 Dec. 1881.
50. 13 March 1866. AF, Feb. 1871, p.301.
51. 12 Nov. 1883. *The Times*, 13 Nov. 1883, p.8.
52. Colonial Secretary, Cape Colony 1864-1872. Lieutenant Governor, Griqualand West 1873-75.
53. Jabavu to Chesson, 18 May 1881, ASC 139/2.
54. H.R. Fox Bourne, *The Aborigines Protection Society - Chapters in its History*, Jan. 1899.
55. 24 Aug. 1901; *The Times*, 26 Aug. 1901, p.9.
56. Report of the AGM 1872, p.9.
57. AF, Feb. 1904, p.15.
58. Fox Bourne to Lyttleton, 15 Dec. 1904, CO 291/78.
59. AF, Oct. 1905, p.415.
60. Swettenham's opinions are to be found in CO 291/79.
61. 10-23 March 1903; AF, Aug. 1903, p.427.
62. A. Couvrier to APS, 18 Feb. 1878, ASC 129/115.
63. *In Darkest Africa* (London: Sampson Low, 1890).
64. For an eminently readable account see Ruth Slade, *King Leopold's Congo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
65. P.S. King and Son, Jan. 1903.
66. Heineman, 1904.
67. Annual Report 1908, p.11.
68. Report on 2nd AGM, 21 May 1839, p.28.
69. Annual Report 1874, p.121.
70. Report of 3rd AGM, 23 June 1840 and AF, Oct. 1908, p.188.
71. Carnarvon was addressing a deputation which called upon him on 6 March 1874. He added that they should be credible cases supported by accurate facts. AF, May 1874, pp.60-70.
72. Gorrie to Chesson, 12 Nov. 1875, ASC 135/127.
73. Fox Bourne to Chamberlain, 24 Dec. 1897. Minute by Graham, CO 48/536.
74. *The Men Who Ruled India*, Vol. 2, *The Guardians* (London: Cape, 1954) p.167.
75. On Fox Bourne to Chamberlain, 2 March 1896, CO 96/284, R. Antrobus.
76. APS to Ripon, 13 Feb. 1893. Minute by Sydney Buxton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary 1892-95), CO 147/92.