

1807-2007:

**Over 200 years of campaigning
against slavery**

Mike Kaye

Anti-Slavery International 2005

1807

2007



The evolution of Anti-Slavery International

Anti-Slavery International was formed in 1839 as the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Over the years the organisation's name has changed several times and these are summarised below.

1839 - 1909: The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society

1909 - 1947: The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society

1947 - 1956: The Anti-Slavery Society

1956 - 1990: The Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights

1990 - 1995: Anti-Slavery International for the Protection of Human Rights

1995 - present: Anti-Slavery International



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Cover image a detail from *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* 1840 by Joseph Mallord William Turner, reproduced with permission from Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. See page 10 for full picture.

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“History, despite its wrenching pain,
cannot be unlived, but if faced with
courage, need not be lived again.”

Maya Angelou

below: A detail from the *Brookes*, showing how hundreds
of slaves were packed aboard slave ships to maximise profit.

Introduction

Britain was not the first European power to involve itself in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, but by the end of the 18th century, Britain had taken on a leading role, controlling some 40 per cent of European slave trading on the African coast.¹ Even its own Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, would declare that no nation in Europe had “plunged so deeply into this guilt as Great Britain...”²

25 March 2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British colonies. Such an anniversary provides us with an opportunity to look anew at the Transatlantic Slave Trade which stands apart from both past and present forms of slavery in terms of its scale and brutality; the legal framework that supported it; and the long-term repercussions it would have on three continents.

This publication gives an overview of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and considers the factors that led to its eventual abolition, including the rise of the anti-slavery movement in Britain and the pivotal role which slaves and former slaves played in securing their own liberation.

The book also traces how, after the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, new forms of slavery began to manifest themselves and how these contemporary forms of slavery were challenged through popular campaigns and by the development of international standards to prohibit them. The final chapters outline the main forms of slavery that exist today and what needs to be done to eradicate them.



¹ The Black History Resource Working Group, *Slavery: An Introduction to the African Holocaust*, Grosvenor, Liverpool, 1997, page 36.

² Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2005, page 233.



1. The Transatlantic Slave Trade

1.1 People as property: the human cost

The Transatlantic Slave Trade involved the kidnap and sale of millions of Africans to European traders along the West Coast of Africa and their transport to the 'New World' where they would be forced to work in the production of sugar, cotton and coffee or as servants in the plantation owners' houses.³

Slavery existed in Africa and elsewhere before the intervention of Europeans, albeit in a very different context. People were enslaved as a consequence of being captured in war, as a punishment for committing a crime or as a means of escaping famine. While enslavement in Africa could be extremely brutal, African slaves had a social as well as an economic value and they brought prestige and status to their owner. Slaves held in Africa were still generally considered people and part of society.⁴

By contrast, those sold into the Transatlantic Slave Trade were seen as chattel to be bought and sold. Their only worth was considered in monetary terms. As a consequence, enslaved Africans were routinely tortured (e.g. whipped, branded, beaten, chained, etc.); separated from other family members; and even deprived of their own names. Hardly any of the millions who were transported across the Atlantic ever returned to Africa.

The number of Africans who were killed during this process is difficult to absorb.⁵ Many newly captured slaves died in Africa during their transport to the coast or in captivity before they made the Atlantic crossing. During the voyage, the cramped and filthy environment, combined with brutal treatment and inadequate food, meant that between 10 and 20 per cent of slaves died in transit. During the peak of the slave trade in the late 18th century, some 80,000 Africans were transported by Europeans to the 'New World' every year.⁶



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left: Captured slaves being transported to the coast for sale to Europeans. Millions of Africans died resisting capture in Africa, during their transport to the coast or while being held in slave forts or elsewhere before making the transatlantic crossing.

below: A poster advertising slaves for auction. A total of 16 slaves, whose ages ranged between seven and 40 years old, were to be sold for cash only.

Around 10 million slaves survived the crossing - a number roughly equivalent to the entire population of Britain in 1800.⁷ However, many of these survivors were literally worked to death. Nearly two thirds of all slaves taken to the Americas and the Caribbean ended up cutting cane on sugar plantations. During harvests this typically meant 14 hours of back breaking labour six days a week in extreme heat for women, men and children. The combination of hard labour, exposure to new diseases and inadequate food meant that approximately one in every three Africans died within three years of arriving in the Caribbean.⁸

Plantation owners in the British West Indies were initially unconcerned about this as they could simply buy more slaves and calculated that it was "cheaper to buy than breed".⁹ It is no exaggeration to say that slaves were treated worse than animals in the Caribbean.



³ S.I. Martin rightly notes that "...it is clear that few African slaves were directly captured by the Europeans", but it is also true that up to 90 per cent of all slaves were bought by European traders. See S.I. Martin, *Britain's Slave Trade*, Channel 4 Books, London, 1999, page 23.

⁴ Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, 2003, page 33.

⁵ There are varying estimates for the exact number of Africans killed during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The estimates used in this publication are generally conservative.

⁶ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 2.

⁷ Of the 24 million people who were enslaved in Africa, only between 9.6-10.8 million survived the Atlantic crossing. See James Walvin, *Black Ivory*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1992, pages 37 and 318.

⁸ James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 75.

⁹ This was true in the early stages of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, but slaves became progressively more expensive over the years.



The Transatlantic Slave Trade, with its massive mortality rates and endemic brutality, was all the more shocking for the fact that it was legal for more than three and a half centuries. Not only did the law condone the buying and selling of human beings, but those profiting from slavery used their influence to reinforce the institution of slavery.

For example, laws in Barbados meant that slaves could not give evidence against a white person and could be denied a trial by jury. In Bermuda, one law stated that a slave owner who 'accidentally' killed a slave "shall not be liable to any penalty or forfeiture whatsoever", while another punished the slave owner with a £15 fine for killing a slave regardless of the circumstances.¹⁰

As the whole system of slavery was based on violence, it is not surprising that punishments for slaves were particularly brutal. The legal system provided for flogging, branding, burning and death sentences to be passed, often for minor offences. Slaves who ran away for 30 days or more could be sentenced to death and Africans who raised their hand to strike whites could have it amputated.¹¹

From the moment of their capture, African slaves were looking for ways to free themselves and to take back control of their lives. The draconian and unjust laws reflected slave

owners' fear of this. John Newton, a former slave captain, remarked that he was "continually alarmed by their almost desperate attempts to make insurrection upon us" and noted that "It is always taken for granted, that they will attempt to gain their liberty if possible."¹² Despite the fact that many slaves were chained for the voyage, it is estimated that a rebellion occurred on one out of every eight to 10 slave ships that crossed the Atlantic.¹³

On the plantations, slaves sought to escape from their owners and used other forms of resistance that were available to them including working slowly, sabotaging crops or machinery, running away, armed resistance and even suicide. Major insurrections like Tacky's Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760, in which more than 400 rebels died in combat, were not uncommon. Such acts of resistance inspired other slave uprisings and raised awareness about slavery back in Europe (see box on page four for some selected examples of major slave rebellions).

African slaves fought for their survival and freedom for over 200 years before any concern was shown in Europe regarding their treatment. Even in 1760, the vast majority of people in Britain either ignored or actively endorsed the trade. Trying to change this attitude seemed at the time an impossible task.



left: Slaves being forced below deck. Equiano described the experience as follows: "I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life; so that with the loathsomeness of the stench, and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat..." (from *Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, Penguin Books, New York, 1995, page 56.)

¹⁰ James Walvin, *op. cit.*, pages 245-6.

¹¹ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 64.

¹² James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 233.

¹³ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 80.



Resistance and rebellions in the Caribbean¹⁴

1675: A rebellion in Barbados was brutally suppressed and severe reprisals were taken against slaves. Eleven were beheaded, six burned alive, 25 executed and a further 70 severely flogged and/or deported.

1692: A planned rebellion was discovered in Barbados and those considered responsible suffered a similar fate to those blamed for the 1675 uprising.

1735-36: A planned uprising in Antigua was uncovered and 86 slaves were subsequently executed, most being burned to death.

1760-61: Revolts in Jamaica in 1742 and 1745 were successfully put down, but Tacky's Rebellion in 1760 was only suppressed after months of fighting in which 60 whites and 400 rebels were killed. A further 100 slaves were executed after the fighting was over.

1774: Revolts and plots were common in Tobago from 1763 onward, but a major uprising took place in 1774. Captured slaves were burned alive or had their arms cut off. A larger rebellion planned in 1801 was discovered and the perpetrators violently dealt with.

1791: A rebellion in Dominica in 1791 was followed by an uprising in 1795. The campaign to wipe out bands of rebel slaves continued for years afterwards and by August 1814 the authorities had claimed to have killed or captured 578 rebel slaves.

1791: The successful insurrection on St Domingue eventually saw the establishment of the Republic of Haiti in 1804 and the emancipation of some half a million slaves (see pages 13-15 for more details).

1795: The British fought for several years to put down revolts and keep control of St Lucia, Guadeloupe, Jamaica and Trinidad.

1795: A major uprising took place in Grenada in 1795 and it took the British until the end of 1797 to finally restore order even with the arrival of an extra 5,000 troops.

1816: Bussa's rebellion in Barbados saw £175,000 worth of property destroyed before it was put down. Hundreds of slaves died in the fighting or were subsequently executed.

1823: Thousands of slaves were involved in a rebellion in Guyana (known as Demerara at that time) and 250 slaves were killed in the revolt.

1831: An insurrection in Jamaica, inspired by Samuel Sharpe and sometimes referred to as the Baptist War, saw 15 whites killed and more than a million pounds worth of damage to property. More than 500 slaves were killed in the conflict or executed after it was subdued (see page 17 for more details).

¹⁴ For more detailed information on these and other rebellions see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains*, Ithaca, 1982 and James Walvin, *op.cit.*, pages 253-78.



1.2 The slave trade: “a creditable way of life”

Over the years, slavery had slowly insinuated itself into every level of British society until it was not only accepted as normal, but it was also seen as legitimate, profitable and vital to the interests of the nation (see box below, “A genteel employment”).

“A genteel employment”

Perhaps John Newton best exemplifies the spirit and moral ambiguity of the time. Both he and almost everyone else around him considered slave trading a “creditable way of life”. He remarked that when he was engaged in the slave trade he “never had the least scruple as to its lawfulness.... It is indeed accounted a genteel employment, and is usually very profitable.”¹⁵

This lack of scruple was not initially undermined by his conversion to Christianity in 1747. He perceived his biggest sin at that time was not the rape of African slaves or the profiteering from human misery, but blasphemy and he continued to invest in the slave trade after ending his career.

However, in the late 1780s, Newton began to see the slave trade in a different light and his views changed. From this time on, he spoke out against the trade and condemned his past actions. Newton became a very influential advocate for the abolition of the slave trade.

By the end of the 18th century, some 40 per cent of British exports went to Africa or the Americas and the Caribbean.¹⁶ The slave trade also provided thousands of seamen, merchants, carpenters, shipbuilders, gunsmiths and many others with employment. The custom duties on slave grown imports were an important source of government income. In 1773, the value of British imports from the island of Grenada were worth eight times more than those from Canada.¹⁷

As well as driving demand for exports, the money made from slavery boosted the domestic economy as individuals and institutions funded businesses and other projects with profits from the plantations. For example, banks like Arthur Heywood Sons & Co. and Leyland and Bullin’s Bank were established on the profits of slavery (these were eventually absorbed into Barclays and HSBC banks respectively).¹⁸

Liverpool and Bristol were both estimated to have made net profits of more than £12 million from the slave trade. The slave traders, plantation owners, absentee landowners, speculators and others who were profiting directly from slavery used their wealth to buy political influence.

All of Liverpool’s Lord Mayors between 1787 and 1807 were involved in the slave trade, as were 37 of the 41 members of Liverpool’s governing body in 1787.¹⁹ Eleven of Bristol’s mayors owned shares in slave ships²⁰ while 15 Lord Mayors of London were shareholders in the Royal Africa Company when it had a monopoly on the slave trade courtesy of King Charles II.²¹

One Lord Mayor of London, William Beckford, was England’s first millionaire and the richest absentee plantation owner of his time, using more than 2,000 slaves on his properties in Jamaica.²² According to *Gentleman’s Magazine*, in 1766 there were over 40 MPs who had interests in plantations in the West Indies.²³

Slavery required that Africans were treated as property not people, so African cultures and societies were systematically attacked by those who profited from the slave trade. They claimed that Africans had no society, lived like savages and were grateful for the opportunity to escape Africa.

Racist lies and images underpinned the slave trade by presenting Africans as sub-human and this in turn allowed Europeans to justify enslaving and torturing their fellow human beings (see box “They are only black people” page six).

¹⁵ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 71.

¹⁶ James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 314.

¹⁷ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 55.

¹⁸ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, pages 55-6.

¹⁹ The Black History Resource Working Group, *op. cit.*, page 36.

²⁰ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 117.

²¹ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 57.

²² Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 139.

²³ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 57.



“They are only black people”

During a public meeting in Britain, John Henry Naimbanna, son of King Naimbanna of Sierra Leone, spoke out against individuals who tried to dehumanise Africans as he saw this as a way to justify violating their rights:

“That man will make slaves of black people; for when he has taken away their character, he will say, ‘O, they are only black people, why should I not make them slaves?’ That man will take away all the people of Africa, if he can catch them, and if you ask him ‘Why do you take away all those people,’ he will say ‘O, they are only black people, they are not like white people, why should not I take them?’ That is the reason I cannot forgive the man who takes away the character of the people of my country.”²⁴

By 1760, slavery had become a cornerstone of the political economy of Britain and was considered both socially and culturally acceptable. It was so much accepted as part of the status quo that even those who had reservations about the trade felt there was nothing they could do about it. For example, in 1760 the Archbishop of Canterbury, concerned by the high death rates of Africans on plantations owned by the Church of England, noted:

“the Negroes in our plantations decrease and new Supplies become necessary continually. Surely this proceeds from some Defect, both of Humanity, & even of good policy. But we must take things as they are at present.”²⁵

By the end of the 1760s, there were only a handful of individuals in Britain who actively opposed slavery. Yet in less than 30 years, they would create a mass movement for the abolition of the slave trade. They used a variety of different campaigning tools to challenge the assumptions behind the slave trade and to build public support for its abolition.



National Maritime Museum

above: *Her Mistress's Clothes*: A portrait from the National Maritime Museum's slavery collection illustrating how Africans were represented as being sub-human. The slave trade was often justified on the grounds that Africans were savages who did not deserve to be treated any better.

1.3 Turning the tide: making the slave trade an issue of public concern

The judicial avenue

The first real challenge to slavery in Britain was made through the courts as Africans sought judicial protection in their struggle to escape slavery. Granville Sharp, had won cases in 1767 and 1771 which prevented former slaves Jonathan Strong and Thomas Lewis from being sold back into slavery by demonstrating that they had been freed or abandoned.

However, in 1772, Sharp defended James Somerset, a slave who had escaped and been recaptured. This proved to be a crucial test case as Sharp argued that slavery itself was unlawful in Britain. Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice and presiding judge, was reluctant to reach a conclusion on whether the right to property outweighed the right to freedom and tried to persuade the parties to settle out of court. When this failed, he attempted to word his decision so that he freed Somerset without setting a precedent.

Despite Mansfield's efforts, most observers, including other judges, thought that the effect of the judgment was to free slaves that were brought to Britain and this provided a legal avenue for many slaves to obtain their freedom. While this was an important legal victory, the limited nature of its impact on the slave trade was dramatically illustrated some years later.

²⁴ Zerbano Gifford, *Thomas Clarkson and the Campaign Against Slavery*, Anti-Slavery International, London, 1996, page 26.

²⁵ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 68.



The *Zong* case of 1783 involved the murder of 132 slaves who were thrown overboard so that the captain could claim the insurance money for the slaves as lost property. The captain argued that he had to jettison “cargo” because unfavourable winds meant that their water supply was running out, but the chief mate testified that this was not the case.

Despite this evidence, Sharp was prevented from bringing a prosecution for murder. The slave owners’ lawyer described the idea as “madness” because “the Blacks were property.” Judge Mansfield agreed, noting: “they had no doubt (though it shocks one very much) that the case of the slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard.”²⁶ It was therefore considered as an insurance claim, not murder. The case highlighted the injustice and inhumanity which was so intrinsic to the slave trade and convinced some prominent individuals that the law itself needed to be changed.

Organising against the trade

On 22 May 1787, 12 men met to form a committee with the express purpose of ending the slave trade. Nine of the 12 were Quakers, but it was two Anglicans, Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson, who were chosen as president and secretary of the committee respectively.

Granville Sharp was already famous amongst abolitionists for his efforts to counter slavery through the courts. Thomas Clarkson was also well known because of an essay he wrote in 1785 entitled “Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?” This essay won a prestigious competition at Cambridge University.

The pairing of Quakers with respected Anglicans allowed the matching of different resources and skills which were vital to the success of the campaign. The Quakers had years of experience campaigning to defend their beliefs and had established national and international networks which could be mobilised to distribute information, organise meetings and provide financial contributions to the committee.

Yet the Quakers’ unconventional religious beliefs (they refused to pay taxes, support the Church of England, do military service, swear oaths, etc.) meant many individuals considered them with disdain and would not want to be closely associated with a “Quaker organisation”.

In this context, Clarkson and Sharp brought more than their individual skills to the committee. They were important figureheads who could forge alliances with people the Quakers could not reach. They were instrumental in bringing the movement into the mainstream by forming partnerships with people like William Wilberforce MP who

later became the movement’s parliamentary spokesperson.

The committee agreed to focus on the slave trade as a first step towards total emancipation and called themselves the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. This Society had a clear objective, access to a printing press (through one of their members, James Phillips), a distribution network and a growing number of influential allies. What they needed was evidence to prove that what they said about the slave trade was true.

Testimony and documentation

The personal testimonies which were published between 1787 and 1789 brought the slave trade into the public consciousness as never before. These eyewitness accounts were written by people who had either been slaves themselves or who were directly involved in the slave trade.

In 1787, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano published a book called *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. Cugoano was kidnapped in Africa when he was 13 and enslaved for two years before being brought to England in 1772 where he found a job as a house servant. His book was so popular that it was printed three times in 1787 and was translated into French.²⁷

Two years later, Cugoano’s friend, Olaudah Equiano, published his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African*. The first edition of over 700 copies rapidly sold out. Eight British editions of his book appeared in Equiano’s lifetime and a further six followed in the 22 years after his death.²⁸ By 1794, it had been translated into German, Dutch and Russian and, in the three years following publication, it was the only new literary work from England to be reprinted in the United States.

The book itself documented how Equiano was kidnapped from his home in what is now Nigeria when he was around 11 years old and taken to the West Indies. He was then sold to an officer in the Royal Navy and he served under him in the Seven Years War. In 1762, he was sold on to Robert King and while carrying out trading trips for his new master he bought and sold goods in his own right. By 1766, he had earned enough money to buy his freedom and from then on he based himself in London, although he continued to work abroad and even participated in an expedition to the Arctic in 1773.

Equiano’s book fundamentally challenged the lies promoted by the pro-slavery lobby about Africans. It was difficult for those who read the book not to associate themselves with the African hero who was courageous, resourceful, literate, cultured and Christian - all qualities

²⁶ James Walvin, *op. cit.*, pages 19-20.

²⁷ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 136.

²⁸ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 89.



Anti-Slavery International

above: Portrait of Olaudah Equiano, c1745-1797. Equiano was a former slave who bought his own freedom. He wrote one of the best selling books of his time and became one of the most influential abolitionists in Britain.

Equiano's impact

The pivotal role that black abolitionists like Cugoano and Equiano played in the anti-slavery movement is often overlooked. In Equiano's case, there is little excuse for not considering him alongside Clarkson and other key abolitionists as there is a wealth of material to demonstrate how influential his contribution was.

Equiano was a friend of Clarkson, Sharp and other abolitionists, but he did not depend on them to make his voice heard. He published his autobiography himself and thereby retained control over its content. This allowed him to use it as a campaigning tool and consequently the book began with a petition to Parliament and ended with an anti-slavery letter to the Queen (Equiano targeted the Queen because he knew that King George III was against abolition). He spent some five years travelling the country promoting the book and his anti-slavery message.

As the above indicates, Equiano was an astute campaigner who knew how to win support from both the general public and decision-makers alike. It was Equiano who brought the *Zong* case to Sharp's attention. He was adept at using

both public platforms and the media to draw attention to the injustices of slavery and to challenge the position of the pro-slavery lobby. He also organised other black men to write joint letters against slavery, sometimes referring to themselves as the "Sons of Africa".

No ex-slaves were called to testify before the Privy Council, but Equiano made sure his voice was heard by writing to the Chair, Lord Hawkesbury, and publishing a copy of his letter in a London newspaper. He also regularly lobbied MPs and led a black delegation to the Commons to support Sir William Dolben's 1788 Bill, where they met the Prime Minister, Dolben and other MPs.²⁹

These actions were not without risk. Clarkson received death threats for his opposition to slavery and was attacked once in Liverpool. As a former slave the risks for Equiano were obviously much greater, but this did not stop him from publicly supporting radical causes like universal male suffrage and inter-racial marriage. All this at a time when his friend and fellow abolitionist, Cugoano, noted that "Complexion is a Predominant Prejudice". Yet Equiano was not afraid of controversy and he repeatedly defended fellow abolitionists who were attacked, such as the Rev. James Ramsey, even though this made him a target.

Equiano's impact was recognised by his contemporaries. One friend described him as "a principal instrument in bringing about the motion for the repeal of the Slave-Act." A newspaper also reported that Equiano was "well known in England as the champion and advocate for procuring a suppression of the Slave Trade."³⁰

²⁹ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, pages 140 and 155.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pages 172 and 169.



above: Portrait of Granville Sharp, 1735-1813. Sharp helped to free slaves through the courts and was one of the founding members of the 1787 committee that formed to campaign against the slave trade.



above: Portrait of Thomas Clarkson, 1760-1846. Clarkson was another of the founding members of the 1787 committee and dedicated almost all his adult life to campaigning against slavery and the slave trade.



above: Portrait of William Wilberforce, 1759-1833. Wilberforce was the parliamentary spokesperson for the anti-slavery movement and repeatedly tabled a Bill to abolish the slave trade until it was finally passed in 1807.

that British people of that time admired and aspired to.

Equiano was a leading abolitionist in his own right and dedicated an increasing amount of his time to the cause from 1787 onwards (see box "Equiano's impact" on page eight). Both Cugoano and Equiano toured the country promoting their books and speaking out against slavery. Cugoano visited some 50 different places in 1791 and Equiano travelled all over Britain between 1789 and 1794.

Their narratives and public speaking engagements were incredibly powerful weapons against slavery because they exposed the barbarity of the trade and dispelled many of the prejudices and assumptions that had been fostered in British people about Africans and which were used to justify the slave trade. These black abolitionists played a pivotal role in getting British people to see Africans as people and inspired them to join the campaign against the slave trade.

The testimonies from former slaves were supported by other publications by respected members of British society. The Rev. John Newton's pamphlet *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* detailed his personal involvement in the trade as a former captain. It sold out immediately and was extremely influential as Newton had become a prominent Anglican since his retirement from the trade. Dr Alexander Falconbridge's account of his participation in four slaving voyages was also widely read when it was published in 1788. These were only some of the many anti-slavery pamphlets, reports and publications which were circulated to the public at this time.

Clarkson himself had carried out interviews with sailors in London, Bristol and Liverpool to document the conditions and treatment African slaves were forced to endure. In Liverpool, Clarkson bought shackles, thumbscrews and a device for force-feeding slaves who went on hunger strike, to provide physical evidence which confirmed the testimonies he collected.

Clarkson and a friend, Richard Phillips, also went through official records which allowed them to document exactly what happened to British sailors on slave ships. On average, 20 per cent of each ship's crew died from disease

or ill treatment before the ship returned. Of the 5,000 sailors engaged in the British slave trade in 1786, 2320 came home, 1130 died, 80 were discharged in Africa or unaccounted for and 1470 were discharged or deserted in the West Indies.³¹

The high number of sailors who died or were discharged is partly explained by the fact that slave ship captains did not have much incentive to look after their crew beyond ensuring that they had enough hands to sail it. Many sailors were press-ganged onto the ships in the first place and only those who returned to Britain had to be paid. Clarkson's evidence demolished the popular belief that the slave trade provided useful training for these seamen and showed that the slave trade was bad for British sailors as well as Africans.

A popular cause

Josiah Wedgwood made a key contribution to the anti-slavery movement when he asked one of his craftsmen, William Hackwood, to design a seal for the campaign in 1787. The image Hackwood produced showed an African man kneeling and raising his chained hands in supplication under the slogan *Am I not a man and a brother?* This image was adopted as the movement's logo and used to brand publications, china, snuffboxes, cufflinks, bracelets, hairpins, medallions and banners. Wearing items which reproduced the image became both a political and a fashion statement and helped to make opposition to slavery a popular cause.

The other image that reached a mass audience came from an abolitionist group in Plymouth. They sent Clarkson a "plate" or diagram of a slave ship, the *Brookes*, which showed sections of the ship from different angles and graphically illustrated how inhumane the conditions were for the slaves (see page 12). Clarkson and other abolitionists reworked the diagram to show the *Brookes* loaded with 482 slaves (the ship had carried over 600 slaves in the past, but they did not want to be accused of exaggeration). In 1789, they printed 7,000 posters of the slave ship and soon the shocking and iconic image was appearing everywhere.

A year later, William Cowper's anti-slavery poem, *The Negro's Complaint*, was published. Its popularity quickly spread

³¹ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *Thomas Clarkson: A Biography*, Macmillan, Bristol, 1989, page 40.





across the country and the words were even set to music. The anti-slavery committee took advantage of the poem's impact to re-publish it with the subtitle *A Subject for Conversation at the Tea-table* and distributed thousands of copies.³²

Forc'd from home, and all its pleasures,
Afric's coast I left forlorn;
To increase a stranger's treasures,
O'er the raging billows borne,
Men from England bought and sold me,
Paid my price in paltry gold;
But, though theirs they have enroll'd me,
Minds are never to be sold.³³

The clearest evidence that the abolition of the slave trade had become a popular cause is seen in the number of people who signed petitions. By the end of 1788, 183 petitions had been sent to Parliament, signed by tens of thousands of people. A single petition from Manchester had been signed by 10,639 people, which was just under 20 per cent of the city's total population.³⁴ This showed that the abolitionist movement was not restricted to one class or group in society, but that it had mass support from a cross-section of the general public. However, the abolitionists still had to translate this popular support into political change.



Anti-Slavery International

top right: A section of a petition sent to Parliament in 1806 opposing the slave trade. This petition was signed by approximately 2,300 people from Manchester. A pro-slavery petition sent to Parliament at the same time only had 112 signatures.

right: *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the dead and dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, 1840 by J.M.W. Turner. Possibly inspired by the *Zong* case of 1783. The fact that artists like Turner and the poet William Cowper chose to focus on the slave trade helped to bring the issue to a wider audience.

facing page bottom left: A medallion issued by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The image and slogan *Am I not a man and a brother* had mass appeal and was used to brand campaigning materials from 1787 onwards.



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

³² Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 61.

³³ William Cowper, *The Negro's Complaint*. Quoted in Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 159.

³⁴ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 137.



The parliamentary lobby

In 1788, Parliament debated Sir William Dolben's Bill which set limits on the number of slaves a ship could carry and required slave ships to have a doctor on board and to register deaths. Despite the fact that the Bill only aimed to regulate standards in which slaves were transported and did nothing to end the trade itself, the proposed legislation was vigorously attacked by the pro-slavery lobby, which argued that it would give commercial advantage to the French.

The Bill was eventually passed after the Prime Minister, William Pitt, threatened to resign, but the Act had little practical impact because of its limited scope and its lack of implementation.

Despite this, it did seem that the tide was at last beginning to turn against slavery. A London lobbyist for the planters, Stephen Fuller, reported back to Jamaica that "The Press teems with pamphlets upon the subject... The stream of popularity runs against us".³⁵ However, the abolitionists could not capitalise on this popularity. The temporary madness of King George III caused a constitutional crisis and prevented new legislation from being tabled.

When William Wilberforce MP tabled his Bill to abolish the trade in 1789, the pro-slavery lobby demanded that the House of Commons carry out its own hearings on slavery, despite the fact that the Privy Council Committee on Trade and Plantations had just done this and produced a comprehensive 850-page report on the issue. This tactic put Wilberforce's Bill on hold as the hearings dragged on into 1791.

The pro-slavery lobby of merchants, shipmakers and plantation owners, known as the West Indies Committee, used this time to organise. They put a huge amount of money into their campaign. Liverpool alone spent some £10,000 on lobbying for the slave trade.³⁶ The lobby's public relations advisers even proposed dropping the term 'slaves' in favour of 'Assistant Planters'.

However, their main parliamentary spokesmen, Col. Banastre Tarleton, MP in the House of Commons and the Duke of Clarence (son of George III) in the House of Lords, employed less subtle tactics, arguing that the Bill would result in planters being ruined or massacred if it was passed.

Clarkson organised witnesses for the Commons hearing (as he had for the Privy Council Committee) to rebut the arguments of the pro-slavery lobby (see box on right, "The power of testimony"). The abolitionists also produced summaries of the 1,700-page House of Commons Select Committee report to be used as briefing papers for MPs. The debate began on 18 April 1791. While the abolitionists' evidence was well presented and argued, they still lost the vote decisively, by 88 to 163.

The fact was that the abolition of the slave trade had insufficient support in the Commons and even less in the Lords. The campaign had turned many people against the slave trade, but popular support counted for little when less than 10 per cent of the population could vote. However, in 1791, direct action by slaves and citizens alike would force the political elite to reappraise the situation.

The power of testimony

Robert Norris, a retired slave captain from Liverpool, provided evidence to the Privy Council regarding the conditions on slave ships. He claimed that slaves "had sufficient room, sufficient air, and sufficient provisions. When upon deck, they made merry and amused themselves with dancing. As to mortality... it was trifling. In short, the voyage from Africa to the West Indies was one of the happiest periods of a Negro's life."³⁷

Equiano's first-hand testimony exposed Norris' account as pure lies. Equiano described the situation on the ships quite differently: "the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victim to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers." When he looked round the ship, Equiano saw "a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenance expressing dejection and sorrow."³⁸

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service



above: "East Indian sugar not made by slaves", circa. 1820 - 1849. In the early 1790s, hundreds of thousands of people boycotted sugar which had been produced by slaves.

³⁵ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 141.

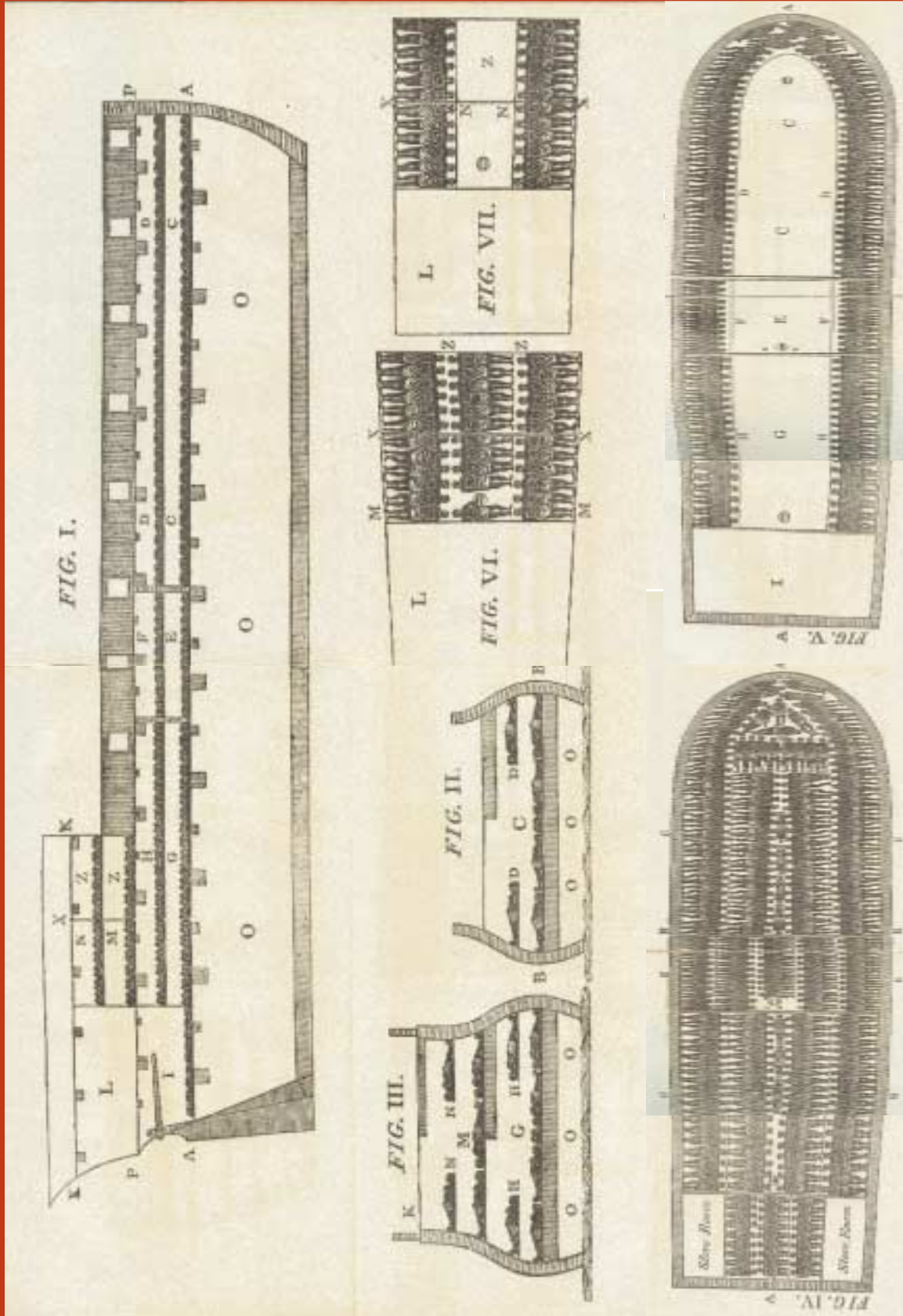
³⁶ *Ibid.*, page 160.

³⁷ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 46.

³⁸ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, Penguin Books, New York, 1995, pages 58 and 55.



below: The cross-section of the slave ship the *Brookes*. In 1789, 7,000 posters were printed showing 482 slaves crammed on board. This picture shocked people at the time and remains one of the most enduring images associated with the Transatlantic Slave Trade.





1.4. A sea change: the St Domingue Rebellion³⁹



Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

above: Toussaint L'Ouverture. L'Ouverture led a slave rebellion in St Domingue, defeated both the French and British armies and helped to establish the Republic of Haiti.

The successful slave rebellion on the French colony of St Domingue began on 22 August 1791. Within two months, the rebels had taken control of a large part of the country; killed thousands of whites; and burned and looted over 1,000 plantations. Many of those who had profited from slavery lost their property and even their lives. Prior to 1791, St Domingue produced 30 per cent of the world's sugar and more than half its coffee.⁴⁰ Slavery had made the island the most profitable European colony, but now much of the island's resources were in the hands of former slaves. Unless the situation was reversed, the rebellion would create a precedent which could be replicated on other Caribbean islands and threaten the very foundations of the slavery system.

These issues spurred the French to try and put down the rebellion, despite the evident contradiction between the principles of the French Revolution (1789) and slavery. One French ship was even ready to sail under the banner "live free or die" before an officer realised that these

sentiments might be seen as inspirational to the people they were trying to force back into slavery.⁴¹

However, within two years the French forces had been ground down by the rebel army, under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and by tropical disease. A peace agreement seemed like the only way that France could retain its valuable colony. In August 1793, the local commander in St Domingue decreed the emancipation of slaves and on 4 February 1794, the National Convention in France endorsed this and formally freed all slaves in its empire.

The success of this rebellion shook the institution of slavery to its core, but Toussaint L'Ouverture's army would still have to fight the British and the French a second time in order to retain their freedom and establish the independent Republic of Haiti.

Gaining political momentum: the sugar boycott and the 1792 Bill

Far from undermining the anti-slavery movement, Parliament's refusal to act to abolish the trade and events in St Domingue seemed to strengthen popular feeling for abolition. Encouraged by pamphlets produced in 1791, one of which sold around 70,000 copies in four months,⁴² people began to demonstrate their opposition to slavery by boycotting sugar produced by slaves.

Research shows that some 300,000 people abandoned sugar, with grocers reporting sales dropping by a third to a half.⁴³ One grocer from Birmingham reported that his sugar sales halved in just four months.⁴⁴ This boycott was aimed at the institution of slavery and not just the slave trade. In this way, it had the potential to undermine the profitability of the sugar industry and reduce government tax revenue. In practice, the boycott did not have the economic impact intended as the St Domingue rebellion and the French Revolution reduced sugar production resulting in increased sugar prices and profits for those involved in the slave trade.

In 1792, Wilberforce introduced a new Bill to abolish the slave trade and this received an unprecedented amount of public support. Within weeks, 519 petitions had arrived in Parliament signed by at least 350,000 people, including 9,000 from Edinburgh, 13,000 from Glasgow and 20,000 from Manchester - nearly a third of the city's population. No other issue, including the American Revolution, had come even remotely close to mobilising this kind of response and MPs began to weigh up the consequences of not responding to public opinion.⁴⁵

³⁹ For a full account of the St Domingue revolution and the role of Toussaint L'Ouverture, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, Allison and Busby, London, 1989.

⁴⁰ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 261.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, page 259.

⁴² *Ibid.*, page 193.

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 73.



When the debate began in Parliament on 2 April 1792, the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, undermined the Bill by successfully introducing an amendment to “gradually” end the slave trade. The House of Commons passed the Bill with this amendment by 230 votes to 85 and set 1796 as the date the slave trade would finally end. However, the Bill was delayed and blocked by the House of Lords and it never came into force.

Even though the Bill never became law, the fact that the House of Commons had agreed to end the slave trade was a real step forward. However, just as it seemed that the abolitionist cause in Britain was really picking up momentum, it was stopped dead in its tracks.

The pendulum swings against abolition - war eclipses the movement

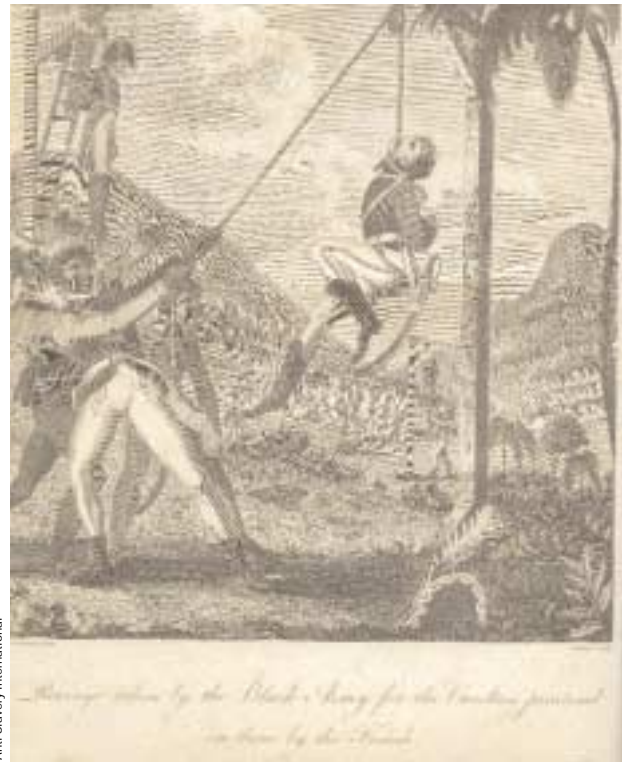
In 1793 France declared war on Britain. The following year, France, unable to put down the slave rebellion in St Domingue, officially abolished slavery. This allowed the pro-slavery lobby to equate abolitionists with the French. The Earl of Abingdon declared in Parliament in 1794 that proposals to end the slave trade were “grounded in and founded upon French principles...”⁴⁶

Britain’s famous military hero, Lord Nelson, went even further when he declared that he would oppose any threat to “our West Indian possessions... while I have an arm to fight in their defence, or a tongue to launch my voice against the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies”.⁴⁷

Such accusations made it difficult to oppose slavery without being accused of being unpatriotic or even traitorous. The French Government’s decision to make Clarkson and Wilberforce honorary citizens did little to help the abolitionist cause.

Then the British Government passed the Seditious Meetings Act and the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act. Under this legislation, a magistrate could declare a meeting illegal and if after an hour there were still more than 12 people present, they could be sentenced to death.

Radical organisations like the London Corresponding Society, which supported abolition, universal male suffrage and other reforms which promoted the rights of man, fell foul of this draconian legislation. Several members of the society were convicted of sedition and sentenced to 14 years in the new penal colony in Australia. The London Corresponding Society was eventually outlawed



Anti-Slavery International

above: Depiction of the successful slave rebellion in St Domingue. Around 50,000 French soldiers died during the fighting on the island - more than the number that were killed at the Battle of Waterloo.

and the debating societies and anti-slavery committees gradually closed. Even the London Committee did not meet between April 1797 and May 1804.⁴⁸ Clarkson was emotionally and physically exhausted and became seriously ill, contributing to the decline in campaigning activity. Wilberforce continued to table the abolition Bill, but it was repeatedly defeated in the Commons. The war with France undermined the campaign for abolition, but in the long-term it actually did more damage to the pro-slavery lobby.

The pendulum swings back - Britain counts the costs of trying to maintain the slave trade

After war broke out with France, Britain made plans for the capture of St Domingue, thinking that this would give them control of the colony’s substantial resources and prevent the spread of slave rebellions to its own colonies. In actual fact, the British soon found themselves in a protracted guerrilla war in St Domingue and confronting slave rebellions in their own colonies.

Slaves seized most of Grenada in 1795 and held it for several months, destroying plantations and killing their owners. In the same year, conflict broke out between the Maroon community (former slaves who had fought and won their freedom some 60 years earlier) and the British in Jamaica. The British spent half a million pounds and more than six months putting down the revolt.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 230.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, page 243.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, page 255.

⁴⁸ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 87.

⁴⁹ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 284.



Some 20,000 reinforcements were sent from Britain in 1795 to help put down these rebellions and others in Guadeloupe and St Lucia. An additional 13,000 slaves were used to fight alongside the British Army, having been promised their freedom after five years. However, all of this was not sufficient to save the British from defeat in St Domingue. By 1798, British forces had been decimated by disease and attacks by Toussaint's guerrilla army and they agreed to withdraw.

Britain sent more troops to the West Indies than it had to suppress the rebels in North America and at huge cost: of the 89,000 white soldiers who served in the army in West Indies between 1793 and 1801, 45,000 died; 14,000 were discharged (primarily from illness or wounds); and more than 3,000 deserted. A further 19,000 died on navy or transport ships.⁵⁰

Astonishingly, France refused to learn any of the lessons of the previous 10 years. In 1802, slavery was reinstated and 35,000 French troops were sent to overthrow Toussaint. Toussaint was tricked, captured and imprisoned in France where he died in April 1803, but his well organised and battle-hardened army defeated France and declared the Republic of Haiti on 1 January 1804. Some 50,000 French soldiers died in St Domingue, more than at Waterloo.⁵¹

The St Domingue rebellion and its aftermath was pivotal to the eventual abolition of slavery because it showed that neither the French nor the British could maintain the institution of slavery in Haiti. Their economic and military power could not prevent them being defeated by an army of former slaves.

The rebellions in the Caribbean also exposed the financial and human costs of shoring up the system of slavery. Many in Britain began to question whether more lives and resources (substantial public funds were being used to pay for soldiers, forts and naval bases) should be spent sustaining the trade.

The implications for Britain's other colonies were clear: plantations and their owners were not safe and maintaining the slave trade was going to require significant material and human sacrifice, without any guarantee of success.



Anti-Slavery International

left: Slaver chased by a Man of War. Some Africans who were rescued from slavery found themselves press-ganged into the British Navy.

1.5 The demise of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Parliamentary breakthrough, 1806-07

James Stephens, a committed abolitionist and adviser to MPs, took advantage of these events to suggest a different parliamentary approach to Wilberforce. Stephens proposed banning British subjects from participating in the slave trade with France and its allies. The Foreign Slave Trade Bill would cut off two thirds of the British slave trade, but it was difficult for the pro-slavery lobby to argue against as it was presented as a measure which would help defeat France. The Bill passed the Commons and the Lords and became an Act in 1806.

One pro-slavery MP for Liverpool complained that "The church, the theatre, and the press... laboured to create a prejudice against the Slave Trade." However, the truth was that popular opposition to the slave trade had never disappeared and when Lord Grenville became Prime Minister it meant there was also substantial political support for abolition.

Lord Grenville was an experienced political strategist and had considerable influence in the House of Lords. In the Commons, the abolitionists could rely on the support of George Walpole, Richard Vyse and Sir John Doyle who had all served as officers in the Army and seen the horrors of slavery first-hand. Furthermore, the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800 had brought 100 Irish MPs into the Commons and most of them were sympathetic to abolition.⁵²

The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed on 25 March 1807, having been approved in the Lords (by 100 votes to 34) and the Commons (283 votes to 16). The British Navy was then used to enforce the ban by patrolling the sea and searching ships to ensure that others could not profit from the slave trade and gain commercial advantage.

However, the 1807 legislation only ended the slave trade, not slavery. Slavery continued in the British colonies and elsewhere, and the number of slaves grew as slave owners improved conditions sufficiently to ensure that their slave population increased. On the Codrington Estate, for example, the number of slaves grew from 303 in 1807 to 355 in 1823. Even Africans who were "rescued" from slave ships by the British often found themselves forcibly recruited into the Navy for periods of up to 14 years.⁵³

⁵⁰ Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, *op. cit.*, page 281.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, page 294.

⁵² Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 105.

⁵³ Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, *op. cit.*, pages 323 and 310.



Atrophy and revival

After the passage of the 1807 Act, the abolitionists needed to confront slavery head on, but instead the anti-slavery movement lost its way. Many considered that the work was now done and argued that slavery would die a natural death now that the trade had been stopped. Some wanted to ameliorate the conditions in which slaves were held, but did not favour total abolition. Others were reluctant to do anything which might undermine the British economy or involve attacking the vested interests of absentee landowners who were often members of their own class, if not colleagues and friends.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that all campaigning ceased after 1807. Abolitionists managed to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people to sign petitions calling for an end to the international slave trade. The British Government pressed rival European powers to sign treaties which prohibited the slave trade at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, but France, Spain and Portugal distrusted Britain's motives and wanted time to restock their colonies with slaves. In the end, all they achieved was a declaration stating that the slave trade was "repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality." The slave trade was not made illegal and no time frame was set for its abolition.⁵⁴

It was not until 1823 that new and old abolitionists came together to form the London Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. The name reflected the cautious and conservative line the new group was taking.

Enslaved Africans were not interested in a gradualist approach. In 1816, a slave rebellion in Barbados led to the destruction of a quarter of the country's sugar crops. Some 120 slaves died in the fighting or after being captured and a further 144 were tried and executed.⁵⁵ Another large rebellion took place in Guyana in 1823 involving some 9,000 slaves. Around 250 slaves were killed as the revolt was put down and a young white missionary, John Smith, was made a scapegoat for the rebellion. Smith was sentenced to be hanged and died in

prison before King George IV pardoned him.

Once again the actions taken by slaves to free themselves would prove crucial to the direction of the abolitionist movement in Britain. Smith was seen as a persecuted martyr by many in Britain and this had the effect of bringing the Church of England deeper into the anti-slavery movement. When Clarkson took to the road again in 1823 to mobilise support for the cause he received support not only from Quakers, but also from the Church of England, the Scottish Clergy and the Bible and Church Missionary Societies. Clarkson travelled over 10,000 miles during two trips which lasted a total of 13 months.

By 1824, the new Society had 230 branches,⁵⁶ but, as Clarkson recognised, the Society's gradualist approach was at odds with its grass roots support base which wanted immediate abolition and a renewal of the sugar boycott.

Elizabeth Heyrick was one of the more radical voices who did much to maintain and revitalise the anti-slavery movement. She criticised the mainstream anti-slavery figures for their "slow, cautious, accommodating measures". She openly sympathised with slave insurrections; campaigned for a sugar boycott which included the shops that sold slave produced goods and not just the products; and inspired the setting up of 70 women's anti-slavery societies. These women's committees were almost always more radical than their male equivalents. They called for slaves to be freed immediately and reworked the Wedgwood design with the slogan *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister*.⁵⁷



above: The Wedgwood image reworked with the slogan *Am I not a woman and a sister*. The formation of women's anti-slavery committees in the 1820s helped to revitalise the anti-slavery movement after the slave trade was abolished in 1807.

⁵⁴ Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 14.

⁵⁵ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 85 and Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 319.

⁵⁶ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 161.

⁵⁷ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, pages 324-5.



In the 1830s, the abolitionist movement was revived, revitalised by the rejection of gradualism, the growth of the reformist movement and by the rebellion in Jamaica (see below). New publications like the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* and Mary Prince's account of her experiences as a West Indian slave helped to raise awareness.⁵⁸ The decision by radical abolitionists to form the Agency Anti-Slavery Committee and pay lecturers to tour the country was also very effective in mobilising public support. The number of local branches increased dramatically to 1,300 and calls for the "entire Abolition of Colonial Slavery" from the Anti-Slavery Society resulted in 5,484 petitions being sent to Parliament between October 1830 and April 1831.⁵⁹

The passage of the Reform Act, which expanded the electorate, allowed abolitionists to make their votes count during the December 1832 elections. As a result, half of the plantation owning MPs lost their seats. However, it was events in the Caribbean which again proved decisive.

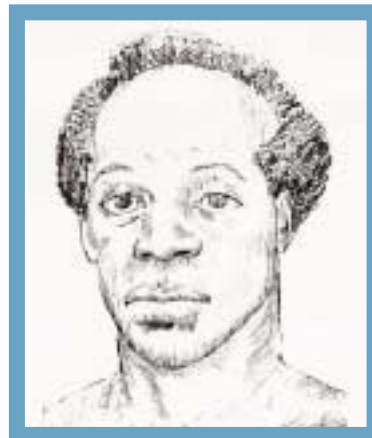
Rebellion in Jamaica and the abolition of slavery

In 1831, Samuel Sharpe, a respected Baptist Deacon, triggered a rebellion of thousands of slaves by reportedly telling them that they had been freed and that they should stop work and claim their freedom. This quickly escalated into a violent revolt in which 200 blacks and 15 whites were killed and property worth £1,132,440 was destroyed.

It took British troops more than two weeks to regain control, after which they executed a further 312 rebels.⁶⁰ Before his own execution, Sharpe said, "I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery". His owners were paid £16 and 10 shillings in compensation for the loss of their property.⁶¹

This was a pyrrhic victory for slave owners. The Jamaican insurrection warned the British Government that it might soon be fighting a full-scale war to try and prevent the loss of one of its colonies, as had befallen the French in Haiti. Lord Howick, Parliamentary Under Secretary of the Colonial Office, wrote in 1832 that "Emancipation alone will effectively avert the danger."⁶²

With this in mind, an Act was passed in 1833 which abolished slavery throughout the British colonies on 1



left: Portrait of Sam Sharpe. Sharpe inspired the 1831 rebellion in Jamaica which convinced the British Government that if they did not give slaves their freedom they would take it by force.

August 1834.⁶³ This Act ensured that people could no longer be bought, sold or owned in British colonies and this was a huge step forward. However, the Act had two clauses which made it a bitter pill to swallow. First, the West India lobby, realising that abolition was inevitable, had successfully lobbied for plantation owners to be compensated for their "lost property". Slave owners received £20 million, approximately 40 per cent of the national budget at that time (some US\$2.2 billion today) while the slaves themselves got nothing.⁶⁴

Second, slaves would become 'apprentices' in 1834 and the majority would be forced to work until 1840 before they would be free. This system was essentially slavery by another name. Only widespread strikes and demonstrations in the Caribbean and protests in the UK (over half a million people signed petitions on this issue)⁶⁵ pressured Parliament to end all apprenticeships on 1 August 1838.

Although free, former slaves were still left in an unenviable situation. Unlike slave owners, former slaves received no financial compensation for their exploitation, nor were they given access to land. As a result, some were left without jobs and had no option but to work for their former masters for a pittance, but now they had new expenses including having to rent huts to sleep in and pay taxes.

It should also be stressed that 1838 did not mark the end of slavery internationally. Millions remained enslaved in the other European colonies and even in 1860 there were over six million slaves in the United States, Brazil and Cuba alone.⁶⁶

The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, now known as Anti-Slavery International, (see inside front cover for more on the organisation's evolution) was established in 1839 in order to campaign for the abolition of slavery around the world. However, it soon discovered that even the formal abolition of slavery did not prevent people from being forced to work against their will in conditions which were not dissimilar to those faced by slaves on the plantations of the Caribbean.

⁵⁸ The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* was first published by the Anti-Slavery Society in 1825. *The History of Mary Prince - A West Indian Slave* was also first published by the Anti-Slavery Society in 1831.

⁵⁹ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 164.

⁶⁰ S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, page 83.

⁶¹ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 343.

⁶² *Ibid.*, page 344.

⁶³ The Act abolished slavery in the British Caribbean colonies, Bermuda, Canada, Mauritius and Cape Colony, but not in India or other Eastern possessions or the British trading posts on the West African coast, which were not Crown colonies. See Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 5.

⁶⁴ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 347.

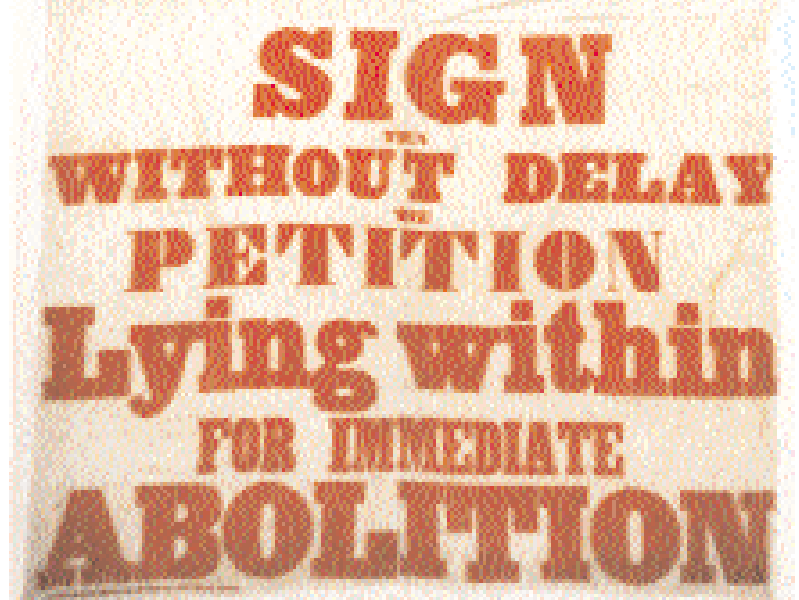
⁶⁵ Ellen Gibson Wilson, *op. cit.*, page 161.

⁶⁶ James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 322.



Various pictures showing campaigning against the slave trade in Britain. From the top down: An anti-slavery meeting in Hull around 1928; a banner advertising a meeting to protest against slavery; a play to raise awareness about the slavery and below: an anti-slavery fundraising event.

right: A campaigning banner calling for the end to the apprenticeship system, which operated between 1834 and 1838.





2. Out of the ashes: new manifestations of slavery in the 19th and 20th centuries

As the second half of the 19th century progressed, more countries took steps to outlaw slavery. Laws to abolish slavery in the French colonies were passed in 1848, and then in the United States of America in 1865, Cuba in 1886 and Brazil in 1888. Yet even as the slow process of freeing slaves took place around the world, slave owners were making provisions to ensure that they would continue to have a ready supply of labour that they could exploit for little or no pay.

Draconian labour legislation left former slaves with no room for collective bargaining. For example, in British Honduras, being insolent, disobedient or absent without leave could be punished with three months hard labour.⁶⁷ Many former slaves were reduced to little more than serfs and were forced to provide free labour to the landlords in exchange for land to live on. Others became indebted to plantation shops that sold goods at inflated prices and then had to work as bonded labourers for the landlord until the debt was paid off. These types of labour exploitation were so severe that years later they would be categorised by the United Nations as practices similar to slavery (see page 26).

These mechanisms allowed for the continuing exploitation of former slaves, but some plantation owners were not prepared to rely on freed slaves for their labour and they started looking abroad for a source of labour which could replace slaves.

2.1 Coolie labour in the British colonies

In 1836, John Gladstone, a plantation owner in Guyana and the father of the future British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, wrote that he had doubts as to:

“how far our Negro apprentices in the West Indies may be induced to continue their services in the plantations after the apprenticeship expires in 1840. We are therefore most desirous to obtain and introduce labourers from other quarters.”⁶⁸

In 1837, Gladstone's desires were satisfied when he was given official clearance to import “coolie” labour from India on five year fixed contracts.⁶⁹ The Indian workers were deceived or coerced by agents into signing these contracts and often ended up working for little more than food and shelter.

The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society investigated the situation in Guyana and found that labourers were forced to work against their will and subjected to floggings. Mortality rates on the plantations were very high due to the harshness of the work and the poor living conditions.

The use of coolie labour was not confined to Guyana and took place in Mauritius, Jamaica, Trinidad and St Lucia. Furthermore, the British also recruited around 47,000 indentured Chinese labourers to work in gold mines in

South Africa where they suffered long hours, bad working conditions and virtual imprisonment in compounds.⁷⁰

Over the years, the Anti-Slavery Society's campaigning built up pressure on the British Government to address the use of coolie labour. When the exploitation of the Chinese became known in Britain, the public reacted strongly against what they considered a slave labour system. The issue became a significant factor in the Liberal election victory of 1906 and the recruitment of Chinese coolies was stopped in 1907.⁷¹

In 1909, the Government undertook a full investigation into the use of Indian labourers and found that abuses and exploitation were endemic in the system. The use of coolie labour did not end until after the First World War and by then over half a million Indians had become indentured labourers in British colonies like Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica.⁷²

While anti-slavery sentiment was effectively harnessed to help end the coolie system, it was also manipulated and used as a justification for colonial expansion. Nowhere was this done with greater effect than in the Congo, which was annexed by King Leopold of Belgium under the guise of opposing slavery and promoting development.

⁶⁷ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 359.

⁶⁸ Tom Stevens, *Trafficking coolie labour*, Reporter, Anti-Slavery International, London, January 2002, page 13.

⁶⁹ The term “coolie” comes from Kuli, an indigenous tribe in Gujarat, who were used for cheap labour. The word was subsequently applied to both Indian and Chinese indentured labourers. Tom Stevens, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Gandhi spent years campaigning for the rights of indentured Indian labourers in South Africa, who first arrived in Natal in 1860. For more on his campaign see Mahatma Gandhi, *The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume III, Satyagraha in South Africa*, Navajivan Trust, India, 1968.

⁷¹ Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 50.

⁷² James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 327.



2.2 Forced labour in the Congo

In 1876, King Leopold II sponsored a conference of explorers and geographers in Brussels. Leopold said that he hoped the conference would open up routes into the Congo basin and set up bases in the interior which would be used as a means of abolishing the “Arab” slave trade, which primarily affected East and Central Africans who were transported across the Indian Ocean and to the Persian Gulf.⁷³

Leopold successfully masked his colonial ambitions behind this humanitarian facade and promoted the establishment of an independently administered territory in the Congo. He won the support of the United States and other European powers for different variations of this proposal and, in May 1885, he established the Congo Free State (equivalent to today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo) and made himself the absolute ruler of one thirteenth of Africa.⁷⁴ He then declared all “vacant land” property of the state and began to set up a slave labour system to exploit the Congo’s resources.

This system was enforced by the *Force Publique*, which grew to an army of 19,000 men. The bulk of the army were Africans who were either forcibly conscripted or bought from local chiefs, including the notorious Zanzibar-based slave trader, Tippu Tipp.⁷⁵

The Congolese were also forced to work as porters and to collect ivory and rubber. Wives, elders or village chiefs were kidnapped to ensure that men carried out the required work. Those abducted would sometimes be released if quotas of rubber were delivered, but many died in the stockades, were prostituted or used as forced labourers themselves.

Brutal punishments such as floggings with the *chicotte* whip or hangings were carried out for the slightest “offence”. As the rubber boom gained momentum in the 1890s, so too did the brutality of the slave labour system. Local rebellions, of which there were many, were violently suppressed by the *Force Publique* which pillaged whole villages, forced their inhabitants into slavery and used scorched earth tactics. Those who refused to collect rubber, did not provide soldiers with food or were suspected of supporting the rebels were killed outright.

The severing of limbs was a systematic policy in the Congo with soldiers rewarded for the number of hands they collected. One *Force Publique* officer recorded how he cut off the heads of 100 villagers when they refused to provide supplies to his troops.⁷⁶ William Sheppard, a black missionary, documented how a chief had shown him 81 severed hands which he was taking to a state official to prove that they had punished villagers who had not complied with demands that they collect rubber.

In July 1890, George Washington Williams, a black pastor who was working in the Congo, began to investigate and document cases

⁷³ This trade, in which Africans were transported across the Sahara to East Africa and sold on to destinations in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman, pre-dated the Transatlantic Slave Trade and continued late into the 19th century when there was still a demand for some 7,000 slaves a year. See James Walvin, *op. cit.*, page 312.

⁷⁴ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1998, page 87.

⁷⁵ Leopold redeemed thousands of people from their Swahili Arab masters in Eastern Congo only to use them as forced labourers or conscript them into the *Force Publique*. See Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 40 and Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, *op. cit.*, page 130.

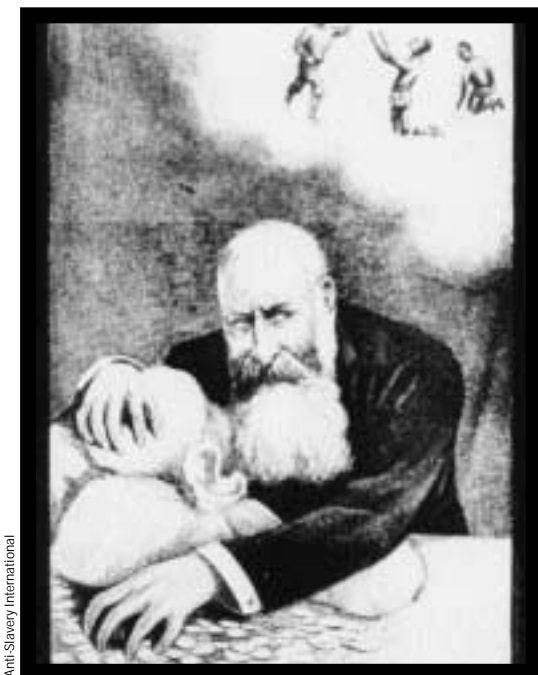
⁷⁶ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, *op. cit.*, page 166.



Jan Breman



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top to bottom: Captured leaders of a revolt by Chinese coolie labourers in the tin mines of the island of Banka, east of the Dutch Colony of Sumatra, 1899.

A Congolese man being flogged using the *chicotte* whip.

Cartoon depicting King Leopold II who amassed a fortune based on forced labour in the Congo. Under Leopold’s rule the population of the Congo declined by about 10 million people.



top: Congolese youths from the Equator district. Yoka, on the right, has had his hand cut off by soldiers so that they can claim they have killed him. Mola, on the left, has had his hands destroyed by gangrene after soldiers tied them too tightly.

above: Edmund Morel, who helped to expose the atrocities that were taking place in the Congo.

involving slavery. Hundreds of Europeans had seen what Williams saw, but he was the first person to denounce what he called "crimes against humanity" and draw the public's attention to slavery in the Congo through an open letter to King Leopold. This letter was later published as a pamphlet and distributed widely in Europe and the US. Williams stated:

"Your Majesty's Government is engaged in the slave-trade, wholesale and retail. It buys and sells and steals slaves. Your Majesty's Government gives £3 per head for able-bodied slaves for military service...The labour force at the stations of your Majesty's Government in the Upper River is composed of slaves of all ages and both sexes."⁷⁷

Williams died in 1891, but other witnesses to the Congo atrocities started to make their voices heard. John and Alice Harris went to the Congo as missionaries in 1898, but they soon began to document the human rights violations by taking photographs and recording testimonies. Alice Harris' photographs became an irrefutable source of evidence that grave human rights violations were taking place and a powerful tool for mobilising the general public.

At around the same time, a shipping clerk called Edmund Dene Morel began to realise that workers in the Congo had to be forced labourers since they were not being paid and virtually no goods were being sent to Congo for trading purposes. In 1901, having refused to be bought off by his employer, Morel left his job and dedicated himself to exposing slavery in the Congo.

As a journalist working in London, Morel was pivotal in getting the truth about the Congo out to a mass audience and involving MPs and humanitarian groups like the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. He wrote hundreds of articles for newspapers, reporting how porters were chained by the neck and how prisoners were worked to death and executed. Leopold banned him from the Congo, but insiders leaked information to Morel, including official documents, which showed that hostage-taking and payments for forced conscription were official policies.

In 1903, this campaigning bore fruit when the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution calling for the Congolese to be "governed with humanity". The Foreign Office then ordered their consul, Roger Casement, to go into the interior and report back on the situation. Casement had been sending reports about human rights violations in the Congo to London for the previous two years and immediately undertook a three and a half month investigative trip, in which he documented abductions, amputations, floggings and the destruction of villages. Alice Harris' photos were submitted along with his report to the British Government. The official report was published in 1904 and caused great public concern as it portrayed a country run on slavery.

Morel and Casement then formed the Congo Reform Association (CRA) to take the campaign forward. On 23 March 1904, the CRA met for the first time in Liverpool and attracted over 1,000 people. By 1905, more than 60 mass meetings had adopted resolutions condemning Leopold's rule as a revival of the African slave trade and calling on the British Government to take action.⁷⁸

Morel then began organising local groups in Britain and supported the establishment of the American Congo Reform Association in 1904. In this he was greatly assisted by Alice and

⁷⁷ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 110.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, page 214.



John Harris who spoke at more than 800 events in Europe and the US, using their photographs, and displaying *chicottes* and shackles to drive home the realities of slavery in the Congo. CRA groups also formed in other countries like Germany, France, Norway and Switzerland.

Leopold paid lobbyists to counter the negative publicity and set up a Commission of Inquiry. This was modelled on the 1896 Commission for the Protection of the Natives, which had proved effective in diffusing concern about reports of slavery in the Congo at that time. However, when the new Commission published its report in November 1905, it included detailed personal testimonies that supported the evidence of slavery and atrocities made by Williams, Morel and Casement. The fact that Leopold's handpicked judges had issued a damning indictment of his regime left the King internationally isolated.

Realising that he would not be able to resist this pressure, Leopold began to negotiate with the Belgian Government. In March 1908, the Government agreed to buy the Congo for some 205 million francs. Of this money, 50 million were earmarked to compensate the King for "his great sacrifices made for the Congo" and was to be paid for out of the profits extracted from the Congo.⁷⁹

The purchase of the Congo had to be paid for and the fact that the Congo was still a hugely profitable colony meant that the 'Belgian solution' did not automatically end the slave labour system. The CRA continued its campaign and in 1909 crowds of 3,000 and 5,000 attended meetings in Plymouth and Liverpool respectively. Morel's book sold 25,000 copies a week when it first appeared, demonstrating the strength of public feeling.⁸⁰ Responding to international pressure, the Belgian Government announced reforms for the Congo which were to be completed by 1912.

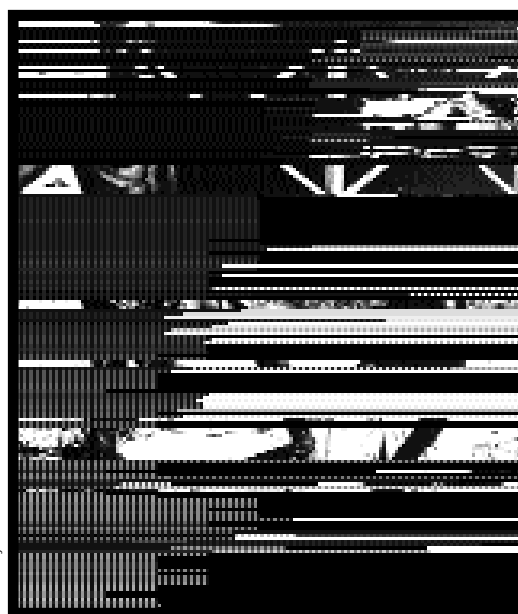
In 1912, Alice and John Harris, now joint secretaries of the merged Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, visited the Congo to investigate the situation and reported an "immense improvement."

On 16 June 1913, the CRA held its final meeting and Morel declared the campaign over. He noted: "The wounds of the Congo will take generations to heal. But... the atrocities have disappeared ... The revenues are no longer supplied by forced or slave labour."⁸¹

While forced labour did resurface in the Belgian Congo (see page 25), the campaign did contribute to ending the Congo Free State (1885-1908) and the systematic enslavement of the Congolese people. King Leopold is thought to have made the equivalent of US\$1.1 billion from the exploitation of the Congo and its people.⁸² The human cost is difficult to calculate as deaths were generally not recorded, but a recent study concludes that between 1880 and 1920 the population of Congo was reduced "by at least a half". As the 1924 census puts the population of the Congo at 10 million, this means that roughly 10 million Congolese were worked to death, killed, starved or died from disease in this period.⁸³ Unlike Leopold, the Congolese were not compensated for their "sacrifices".



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above: Nsala, of the Wala district, contemplates the severed foot and hand of his five-year-old daughter, Boali. May 1904.

left: A Congolese man being set free.



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above: Two Congolese men who were forced to work on a chain gang at Bauliri.

⁷⁹ Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 259.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, page 271.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, page 273.

⁸² As estimated by the Belgian academic, Jules Marchal. Quoted in Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 277.

⁸³ This estimate by the academic Jan Vansina reaches the same conclusion as estimates made by Congo officials in 1919 and 1920.

Adam Hochschild, *op. cit.*, page 233.



Anti-Slavery International

2.3 Forced labour in the Amazon: the Putumayo

A strikingly similar pattern of slavery was taking place at the same time in the Amazon of South America. This time the man behind it, Julio Cesar Arana, was a local rubber baron who made no pretence at having humanitarian motives. Arana used money and hired gunmen to acquire some 12,000 square miles of land along the Putumayo river. The Putumayo was demilitarised as it marked the disputed border between Colombia and Peru. This allowed Arana to use his 1,500 "armed vigilantes" to take complete control of the area.⁸⁴

Arana used methods similar to King Leopold to ensure the highest yields of rubber. The indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon (which included Bora, Huitoto and Andoke Indians) became slave labourers. They were murdered, flogged, chained and starved. Women were raped and held hostage to ensure rubber quotas were delivered.

Local section chiefs often worked for commission instead of a salary which encouraged them to use ever more extreme measures to increase rubber production. One section chief killed 150 men, women and children in order to set an example and promised to "exterminate every Indian who doesn't obey my orders about the rubber that I require them to bring in."⁸⁵

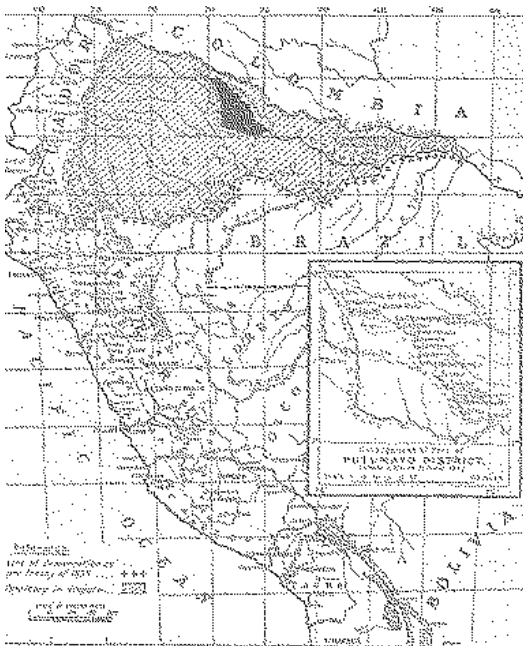
In 1907, a young engineer from the United States, Walter Hardenburg, stumbled upon the rubber slaves in the Putumayo and decided to try and do something about it. Hardenburg's description of the conditions in the Amazon echo those which George Williams used to denounce slavery in the Congo:

"(They) are forced to work day and night at the extraction of rubber, without the slightest remuneration except the food necessary to keep them alive... They are robbed of the crops... they are sold wholesale and retail... (and) are flogged inhumanely until their bones are laid bare, and great raw sores cover them."⁸⁶

By May 1909, Hardenburg had collected 18 sworn testimonies which documented the atrocities that were being committed in the Amazon.⁸⁷ That same year, he travelled to Britain, where Arana's Peruvian Amazon Company was registered, to try and make the facts known.

Even in London Hardenburg found it difficult to publicise what was happening, as newspapers doubted his story and were wary of being sued for libel. However, in August 1909, Hardenburg delivered the dossier to John Harris at the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. Through Harris's contacts, the truth about slave labour in the Putumayo finally came into the public domain and obtained significant press coverage.

This resulted in Foreign Office and public pressure being brought to bear on the Peruvian Amazon Company. It responded by setting up a



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top: Sir Roger Casement, who denounced slavery in both the Congo and the Amazon.

above: A map showing the Putumayo region, on the borders of Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

⁸⁴ Richard Collier, *The River that God Forgot*, Collins, London, 1968, pages 54 and 58.

⁸⁵ Richard Collier, *op. cit.*, page 159.

⁸⁶ W.E. Hardenburg, *The Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise*. Quoted in M. Racela, *The Putumayo Rubber Atrocities*, *Reporter*, Anti-Slavery International, London, July 2000, page 13.

⁸⁷ Richard Collier, *op. cit.*, page 160.



commission to investigate Hardenburg's allegations, but the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, insisted that Roger Casement, the Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro, accompany the commission when it started its work in October 1910.

Casement's appointment, fresh from denouncing slavery in the Congo, ensured that there would be no cover-up. His preliminary report, submitted to London in January 1911, fully supported Hardenburg's charges. The Foreign Office then increased its pressure on the Peruvian Government to address the situation and lobbied Washington to do the same. Grey informed the Washington Embassy in June 1911 that the quantities of rubber being shipped down the Putumayo at that time "can only have been rendered possible by a continuance of the old system of forced labour."⁸⁸

The Peruvian authorities did issue 237 arrest warrants against those involved in abuses in the Putumayo, but when Casement travelled back to the region later that year to assess the progress made, he found that only nine men had actually been arrested and that corrupt officials had assisted many to escape.⁸⁹

Consequently, the Foreign Office decided to publish Casement's report in 1912. The report included an estimate that Arana's company had earned one and half million pounds from rubber shipments in a 12-year period and that 30,000 indigenous people had died during this time.⁹⁰

The report's findings provoked international outrage and demands for action. In response to this, the British Government set up a Select Committee to investigate the activities of the Peruvian Amazon Company and seized its records. Over the following five months, the Committee took evidence from many witnesses including Roger Casement, Walter Hardenburg, John Harris and Arana himself.

In March 1913, the High Court granted a compulsory winding up of the Peruvian Amazon Company in a case brought by the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society along with a shareholder of the company. The Select Committee also issued its report to the House of Commons, in which it concluded that:

"Senor Arana, together with other partners...had knowledge of and was responsible for the atrocities perpetrated by his agents and employees in the Putumayo."

These atrocities reduced the local indigenous population from 50,000 to less than 10,000.⁹¹

Hardenburg's commitment and the support of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society helped bring an end to slavery in the Putumayo region. While Arana and the other company directors were never prosecuted, many of his overseers were caught and tried in South America. Peru subsequently ceded the Putumayo territory, including land claimed by Arana, to Colombia.⁹²

Even as these campaigns were helping to end the use of slavery in the Congo and the Amazon, the use of mandatory public works, deceptive and coercive contract labour, conscription, vagrancy laws and other forced labour mechanisms were continuing in European colonies.

Sir William Rothenstein / Bridgeman Art Library



Anti-Slavery International



top: Portrait of Aredomi and Omarino, who were bought out of slavery in the Upper Amazon basin by Roger Casement.

above: Huititos at Entre Rios with their Babadian overseer.

⁸⁸ Richard Collier, *op. cit.* page 236.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, page 235.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 236.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* pages 299 and 230.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pages 300-1.



2.4 The use of forced labour by the colonial powers

The Brussels Act of 1890, under the prompting of King Leopold, declared that the best way of tackling slavery was to establish colonial administrations and trading companies and to build infrastructure for trade routes (rail, road, communications, etc.).⁹³ This provided a perfect justification for colonial conquest and the exploitation of the local population.

The colonial governments needed cheap labour for their public building programmes and private businesses and argued that these were necessary for the development of the countries concerned. Recourse to forced labour was also justified using racist arguments about “lazy natives” who had to be compelled to work.

The indentured labour system used by the British (see 2.1 above) to ensure access to hundreds of thousands of Indian and Chinese workers was not unique. Between 1876 and 1915, the Portuguese used a similar system to transport some 97,000 Angolans to work on cocoa plantations on the islands of Sao Tome and Principe. In theory, these were contract labourers who chose to undertake this work, but all Africans in Portuguese colonies were obliged by law to work and so, in practice, most Angolans were forced to sign contracts against their will. Some were even abducted and taken to the coast in shackles before being transported to the islands.⁹⁴

Colonial governments passed several laws which gave them the “right” to demand forced labour. The French introduced universal conscription into their colonies in West and Equatorial Africa in 1919. Those conscripted were rarely assigned any military duties and most spent three years in labour brigades working for private contractors. These conscripts received minimal pay and many died due to bad treatment and working conditions. In one project alone, the French



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left: Angolan forced labourers working on cocoa plantations on the islands of Sao Tome and Principe.

conscripted 127,000 Equatorial Africans to work on the construction of a railway between 1921 and 1934. The official death toll during this time was over 14,000, but recent estimates put the figure at over 20,000.⁹⁵

Vagrancy laws were used in the colonies and elsewhere to obtain forced labour under the guise of a judicial process. For example, in the 1920s, Portuguese officials sentenced vagrants, debt-defaulters, and “trouble makers” to work in Sao Tome and Principe.⁹⁶

In the Congo, conscription and forced labour resurfaced under Belgian rule and the forced labour system used in Congolese mines after 1918 was not dissimilar to that which took place under Leopold’s regime. The Belgian Government, along with other colonial administrations, also compelled farmers to grow cash crops which they then had to sell to the Government at set prices. Those who refused or did not take sufficient care of their crops were punished with imprisonment, flogging or fines.⁹⁷

In Mozambique, Portuguese companies ordered local chiefs to conscript men, women and children to work without wages. One company employed 20,000 children, some as young as six, for 120 days a year, primarily to force their parents to take their places while receiving the pay allocated to children.⁹⁸

In Kenya, the British proposed a law which would force all men who had not been paid a salary for three months in the last year to work 60 days on public works (for minimal pay) and an additional 24 days on communal works (unpaid). This plan was only dropped in 1921 following a wave of protests in Britain, but Kenyan men were still obliged to provide 24 days of paid communal service a year.⁹⁹

The colonial governments had proved adept at introducing laws and systems which allowed them to extract forced labour from the local populations without buying or selling the individuals. Leopold’s subjugation of the Congo also showed that millions of people could be effectively reduced to slavery without formally owning them.

When the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) were set up in 1919, chattel slavery still had not been universally abolished and other slavery-like practices were coming to public attention. The challenge for these organisations, and later the United Nations, was to define what constituted slavery in the 20th century and to persuade governments to eradicate slavery in practice.

⁹³ Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 21.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pages 48-9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pages 135-6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 141.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 139.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 137.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,



3. Contemporary forms of slavery

3.1 The development of international standards to prohibit all forms of slavery

In 1924, the League of Nations set up the Temporary Slavery Commission to review the situation of slavery “in all its forms” around the world. This mandate allowed the Commission to look at the vestiges of chattel slavery as well as long established practices that were similar to slavery, including forced labour, debt bondage and servile marriage.

The results of the Commission’s work led to the drafting of the *Slavery Convention, 1926*, which defines slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”. This was the first international standard against slavery and the slave trade and it called on governments to abolish slavery “in all its forms.” The 1926 Convention also set some limits on the use of forced or compulsory labour, but it referred this controversial issue to the ILO to consider in detail.

In 1930, the ILO presented its *Forced Labour Convention* (No.29), which defines forced labour as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”

The Convention tried to tackle the exploitative practices used in the European colonies and elsewhere. It prohibited forced labour for private purposes; limited public work to minor communal services and normal civic duties; and restricted compulsory military service to work of a purely military nature. It also outlawed forced prison labour when the work was done for private companies. This was a problem in many countries at that time, including the United States, South Africa and India.¹⁰⁰

The end of World War II saw freedom from slavery and servitude enshrined in Article 4 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*, but it was clear that more needed to be done to make this ideal a reality. For example, in 1951, the British Government estimated that there were approximately 50,000 slaves in Saudi Arabia and thought the numbers were increasing.¹⁰¹ There was also concern that the other forms of slavery, which had been identified 30 years earlier by the Temporary Slavery Commission, were not being adequately addressed.

The *United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956*, tried to remedy these problems. This Convention specifically states that debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage and the delivery of a child to another person for the exploitation of that child, are all slavery-like practices and requires that they be criminalised and abolished as soon as possible.

Even while the international community took action against these long established slavery-like practices, other forms of slavery were becoming more prevalent. In the early 1950s, the use of slave labour in the Gulags of the Soviet Union reached its height.

Recently compiled research estimates that the total number of people who were used as forced labourers in the Soviet Union between 1929 and 1953 (including those who passed through the Gulags, prisoners of war and those exiled to work in remote villages) was just under 29 million.¹⁰² Millions more people were used in slave labour camps in Nazi Germany, the People’s Republic of China, and many other countries during the second half of the 20th century.

This provided the impetus for framing an international standard which would focus on stopping authoritarian regimes from using forced labour for economic advancement or as a means of punishing dissidents, criminals and any other groups considered enemies of the state by the authorities. The ILO’s *Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1958* (No. 105) aimed to do this by prohibiting forced labour as an institution of political repression, economic advancement or labour discipline.

By the beginning of the 21st century, two new standards had been developed, which identified and prohibited slavery-like practices. The first of these, the ILO *Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999* (No.182) requires governments to take immediate measures to prohibit and eliminate all forms of slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

The second standard, *the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000*, focuses on the transportation of people from one country to another through violence, coercion or deception for the purposes of exploitation. This Protocol requires governments to pass legislation which prohibits

¹⁰⁰ Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 147.

¹⁰¹ Slavery was only finally abolished in Saudi Arabia in 1962, Oman in 1970 and Mauritania in 1980. See Mike Dottridge, *Slavery in Saudi Arabia*, Reporter, Anti-Slavery International, London, April 2001, page 13 and Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.*, page 347.

¹⁰² Anne Applebaum, *Gulag - A history of the Soviet camps*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, page 517.



and punishes trafficking for both sexual and labour exploitation.

Collectively, these standards provide us with internationally agreed definitions of practices which are considered modern forms of slavery.¹⁰³ Their development also reflected a consensus across the international community that states should commit themselves to eradicating these different manifestations of slavery.

Despite this, many governments have failed to take practical steps to implement the international standards described above, and millions of people around the world today continue to be subjected to contemporary forms of slavery.

3.2 Slavery in the 21st century

In 2005, the International Labour Organization (ILO) produced a minimum estimate of the number of forced labourers in the world today and found that at least 12.3 million individuals are forced to work against their will under the threat of some form of punishment.¹⁰⁴

Those subjected to forced labour can be found in Europe and North America as well as in Asia,



top: A family of bonded labourers, India.

above: An ex-bonded child labourer demonstrates the kind of work expected of children, India.

bottom: Bonded labourers at work in a quarry, India.

facing page top: Former bonded labourers demand the right to land and assistance after being made homeless by landlords, Nepal.

facing page bottom: "Nothing angers me because I've learned over time to accept the circumstances of life" - Ajecka (left) 14, with his sister Pipiino, 12 - former child soldiers, Uganda.

the Middle East and Africa. The main contemporary forms of slavery in the world today fall into the following categories and they all include a forced labour component.

Debt bondage (bonded labour) and serfdom

Debt bondage occurs when an individual offers their labour in exchange for a loan, but then loses all control over their conditions of work and the amount they are paid. Their debt is often inflated through excessive interest rate charges and can be passed on to other family members. This practice affects millions of people in South Asia, particularly in India, Pakistan and Nepal (see box on page 28 for an example of how campaigning pressured the Nepalese Government to take action against bonded labour).

Serfdom is also a problem in this region. For example, research carried out in Pakistan by a local non-governmental organisation estimated that millions of people were forced to provide labour for their landlord on their farm or house - a practice known as *begar*.¹⁰⁵ The continued existence of debt bondage and serfdom in the sub-continent partly explains why the Asia and the Pacific region accounts for so many of the world's forced labourers - nearly 9.5 million out of the 12.3 million total estimated by the ILO.

However, these problems are not confined to Asia. In Latin America, debt bondage has been documented in Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Peru. Debt bondage is also a mechanism by which traffickers seek to control migrant workers and force them to work in conditions they did not agree to (see next pages for more on trafficking).



¹⁰³ For a detailed review of standards and mechanisms relating to slavery, see David Weissbrodt and Anti-Slavery International, *Abolishing Slavery and its Contemporary Forms*, Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, Geneva, 2002. For more on how these standards were developed and Anti-Slavery International's involvement in this process, see Suzanne Miers, *op. cit.* or, for a brief outline, see Pins Brown, *Defining Slavery*, Reporter, Anti-Slavery International, London, April 2001, page 13.

¹⁰⁴ International Labour Office, *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*, Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Geneva, 2005. Unless otherwise stated, statistics in this chapter are taken from this ILO report.

¹⁰⁵ The Pakistan Institute for Labour Education and Research (PILER), *Bonded Labour in Pakistan*, October 2000.



Mike Dotridge/Anti-Slavery International

Bonded labourers press the Government to take action in Nepal

In January 2000, Anti-Slavery International and the Nepalese human rights organisation INSEC organised a delegation made up of a member of the British-Nepalese Parliamentary Group, an academic and a bonded labour activist from India to visit Nepal and meet with senior politicians.

After the delegates had met with the Prime Minister, he publicly announced that the Government would take measures to abolish bonded labour. However, it was weeks of demonstrations by bonded labourers themselves which forced the Government to make good on its promise. In July 2000, the Government announced the formal abolition of the bonded labour system in Nepal.

In the immediate aftermath of the Government's declaration, many landlords responded by forcing thousands of bonded labourers off their land, leaving them without shelter, food or work. The Government had not prepared any rehabilitation plans or compensation payments, leaving those involved completely destitute. It was only after many months of continued local demonstrations and international campaigning that assistance and land distribution programmes were initiated for the former bonded labourers.

This example highlights the primary role played by bonded labourers in their own liberation and also shows that abolition does not always lead to an immediate improvement in the living standards of those concerned.

The unconditional worst forms of child labour

The "unconditional" worst forms of child labour are defined in ILO Convention No. 182 as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour; forced recruitment for use in armed conflict; prostitution, pornography and other illicit activities (see box on page 29 for details of how ILO Convention No. 182 was established).

These practices affect millions of children all over the world. For example, the forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts alone takes place in Burma (Myanmar), Burundi, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.¹⁰⁶

The ILO forced labour report estimates that between 40 to 50 per cent of the total number of forced labourers are children. However, the report stresses that this is a minimum estimate. A previous ILO publication, which focused exclusively on child labour, found that there were 8.4 million children in the unconditional worst forms of child labour worldwide.¹⁰⁷



Pieter van der Houwen/COLORS Magazine

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly Security Council on Children in Armed Conflict, 9 February 2005.

¹⁰⁷ ILO, *A Future Without Child Labour*, Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Geneva, 2002.



The Global March Against Child Labour

The establishment of an international standard which specifically focuses on ending the worst forms of child labour was the result of an international campaign involving a broad coalition of individuals and organisations.

In January 1998, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (including Anti-Slavery International), the general public and working children from 92 countries all came together to support the Global March Against Child Labour. Over the next five months, marches, demonstrations and media campaigns were held around the world to call for an end to all illegal forms of child labour. Specifically the Global March called on the ILO to pass a new international law against the worst forms of child labour, which it did at its annual Conference in Geneva in June 1998.

This ILO Convention (No. 182) came into force in 1999 and has rapidly become one of the most widely ratified of all the ILO Conventions (156 States had ratified it by July 2005). Convention No. 182 requires governments to design and implement programmes of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as a priority. This has led many governments to prioritise action to protect and free children from all forms of slavery.

Trafficking in people

The ILO estimates that some 2.5 million people have been trafficked into forced labour. It draws attention to the fact that 32 per cent of those trafficked are used exclusively for labour exploitation, such as domestic work, agricultural work, catering, packing and processing. The ILO stresses that "in all countries and regions migrant workers, particularly irregular migrants, are at particular risk of coercive recruitment and employment practices."¹⁰⁸

Governments, particularly those in developed countries, have failed to properly protect migrant workers from forced labour. They have restricted access to legal migration channels despite a high demand for skilled and unskilled migrant workers which has made smuggling and trafficking more profitable, and they have not taken adequate measures to protect and support trafficked people.¹⁰⁹

For example, the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking provides minimum standards for the protection and support of trafficked people, but less than one third of the 46 of the Council of Europe Member States had signed up to the Convention by July 2005. France, Germany and the UK were among those countries which failed to commit to implementing the Convention at the time of writing.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation almost exclusively affects women and girls (98 per cent), but trafficking for labour exploitation also affects women more than men (56 per cent being women and girls).



Colin Mearns/The Herald Magazine

top left: Global Marchers from the Philippines.

left: White crosses erected at a Catholic mission in the small village of Blinisht in memory of Albania's trafficking victims.



right: Sister Pierette with girls at the Centre d'Accueil - Libreville, Gabon.

These girls were all trafficked to Gabon. In just over a year, the centre repatriated 89 girls to Benin and Togo.

Mike Sheil/Black Star

¹⁰⁸ International Labour Office, *op. cit.*, page 18.

¹⁰⁹ For more details on the links between trafficking, migration and forced labour, see Mike Kaye, *The Migration-Trafficking Nexus*, Anti-Slavery International, London, 2003.



far right: A North Korean family hiding in their underground dwelling in rural China.

middle: North Koreans crossing the Tumen River into China.

right: A North Korean asylum seeker forcibly removed from the Japanese Consulate in Shenyang, China 2002.



Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights



Choi Soonho



Choi Soonho

Forced labour imposed by the state

While it is individuals and not states who are responsible for almost 80 per cent of forced labour cases around the world today, some governments are still directly responsible for the exaction of forced labour. The most well-known international case is that of Burma, where the military compels sections of the civilian population to undertake a variety of work including construction projects and road repairs.

The Government of North Korea routinely exacts forced labour from those held in detention centres and labour camps (see box below for details) and the Chinese Government imposes Re-education through Labour (RETL) on those detained for drug addiction, theft and prostitution. The RETL is an administrative system that lacks judicial process and can lead to up to three years detention. Some 260,000 people were detained in China under this system at the beginning of 2004.

Trafficking and forced labour of North Koreans

The following case study illustrates how North Korean women can be sold into forced marriage in China, but also subjected to forced labour by the state when deported and held in detention facilities back in North Korea.

A 42-year-old woman and her 15-year-old daughter from Pyongyang left North Korea in 1997 during the food crisis to find work in China. After working for a Korean-Chinese family in Hwaryong for a week, the woman returned from the market to find her daughter was gone.

The family said that they did not know anything about it, but she later found out that the daughter had been sold for 4,000 yuan (US\$480) and forced to marry a man in a remote rural village.

The mother had to pay 4,000 yuan to get her daughter back, but both of them were then arrested by the Chinese authorities and repatriated to North Korea in 1999. The woman described what happened after they were deported:

"When we were sent back to North Korea, we were stripped naked, checked for hidden money and sent to a labour camp in Musan. My daughter was beaten and interrogated on whether we met any South Koreans or missionaries in China. All we had for food was porridge made from black, rotten corn flour and watery soup. The guards made us run eight kilometres everyday. We worked in the cabbage patches and carried heavy logs from the mountains. The guards threw stones at us if we weren't quick enough."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Interviewed on 12 February 2005 by Anti-Slavery International.



right: President of Timidria, Ilguilas Weila, assists a recently escaped slave in Niger. Weila and a colleague from Timidria were imprisoned in April 2005 on charges which appeared to be aimed at stopping Timidria's campaigning work against slavery. Both men were released on bail on 17 June 2005 after spending two months in jail.

Concerns over severe food shortages in Niger and other West African countries led development agencies to an appeal for humanitarian assistance in 2005. Agencies need to ensure that development aid reaches those in slavery-like practices who are usually discriminated against, socially marginalised and make up the poorest sections of society (see page 33 for more details).

Sarah Williams/Anti-Slavery International



Descent-based slavery

In some countries, people are compelled to work for others simply because of their caste or ethnic group. For example, in Niger, research carried out by the NGO Timidria found that the majority of the 11,000 people interviewed could identify individuals by name as their masters and were expected to work for them without pay. Over 80 per cent of respondents said their master took key decisions in their lives, such as who they would marry and whether their children went to school.

The allocation of labour on the basis of caste is a significant problem in South Asia. *Dalits* are assigned tasks and occupations which are deemed ritually polluting by other caste communities (such as the removal of human and animal waste, sweeping, disposal of dead animals, leatherwork, etc.). Refusal to perform such tasks leads to physical abuse and social boycott.

3.3 What needs to be done to eradicate slavery today?

Engaging with the problem

The denial of slavery by the governments of countries affected contributes to the problem as it is interpreted by those responsible as official indifference or as a licence to continue these human rights abuses.

In order to begin to tackle the different manifestations of slavery today, all governments need to recognise the problem, ratify the appropriate international standards¹¹¹ and engage openly in a discussion on how to deal with it.

At a national level, governments should convene an inter-agency group to review the existence of slavery-like practices in their countries. The inter-agency group should include representatives from different government departments, as well as all relevant civil society actors (NGOs, trade unions, employers, etc.). This group should draft a national action plan and carry out surveys to establish the scale of any forced labour problem at a national or regional level.

A lack of political will?

- In Sudan, the penalty for the exaction of forced labour is only one year in prison and the Government has not secured a single prosecution for any of the thousands of cases of abduction and forced labour in the last 16 years.
- In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the use of children under 15 for work as camel jockeys has been prohibited since 1980. Despite a body of evidence showing that children aged between four and 14 years old are regularly trafficked to the UAE to work as jockeys, there have only been three successful prosecutions to date, none of which were taken against UAE citizens.
- In Niger, new legislation entered into force in June 2004 prohibiting slavery and setting a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison, but there was not a single successful prosecution during the first year it was in force.
- Many governments around the world still have not taken steps to make the trafficking of people for labour exploitation an offence or to provide adequate protection and support to trafficked people.

¹¹¹ Some 50 years after the *United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956* was completed there are still over 70 states which have not ratified it.



Prosecution and protection

Governments frequently do not have appropriate legislation which makes it easy to obtain prosecutions against those who force others into a situation of slavery or servitude. Where legislation does exist, it is often not used or does not carry adequate sanctions (see box on the previous page for examples).

Clearly political will and financial resources are required to ensure legislation is passed and properly implemented. Implementation requires public awareness raising, training for officials and labour inspection teams to root out cases of slavery and ensure that the problem does not recur.

In addition to this, governments must provide proper protection and support to those who have escaped from contemporary forms of slavery. This will help them to recover from their experiences and avoid them falling back into forced labour. It will also assist in gaining their co-operation and in ensuring successful prosecutions.

In recent years, the Government of Brazil has demonstrated that much can be achieved when there is a real commitment to address slavery-like practices (see the adjacent box on this page for more details).



J. R. Ripper/SocialPhotos



Ricardo Funari

above: From an operation to free forced labourers in December 2001 from an estate in the Amazon, Brazil.

left: As a result of the police raid and after months of working without pay workers receive the wages they are owed and get their first labour documents.

The Brazilian example: change is possible

In the 1880s, Julio Arana bought destitute workers from north eastern Brazil to the Amazon to work as rubber tappers, but few realised they were entering into a system of debt bondage. They were already £30 in debt for their passage when they arrived. Then at the estate's store they collected three month's supplies. This was worth around £4, but the tapper was debited some £70. At the end of the three months, workers could not collect enough rubber to cancel out their debt and would have to take more supplies and get even further into debt.¹¹²

In the 1980s, the same debt bondage system was still operating in the Amazon and thousands of Brazilians were exploited as forced labourers. However, since 2000, the Brazilian Government has responded to pressure from organisations like the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) and Anti-Slavery International and taken a range of measures designed to tackle this issue, which it recognises as slave labour.

Firstly, it set up the National Commission for the Eradication of Slave Labour which brought together different government departments, the federal police and NGOs to facilitate co-operation and discuss practical solutions to the problem.

Then in March 2003, President Lula da Silva launched the *National Plan for the Eradication of Slavery*. The Plan has many positive proposals, including the establishment of new penal offences relating to slavery and a proposal to allow the expropriation, without compensation, of land belonging to those who keep workers in conditions of slavery. In 2004, at the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Government made a commitment to eliminate slave labour in Brazil by 2006.

While more needs to be done if forced labour is to be eradicated in Brazil, the initiatives taken by the Government to date, including the use of the Special Mobile Inspection Group to investigate and inspect farms, have led to the release of nearly 12,000 people from slave labour conditions since 2000.

¹¹² Richard Collier, *op. cit.*, page 46. See pages 23-24 of this report for more on Arana's system of forced labour in the Amazon.



Romana Cacchioli/Anti-Slavery International



True Vision



top: Two *toureg* girls wearing anklets which signify their status as coming from a slave caste, Niger.

above: Cocoa workers in Côte d'Ivoire.

right: Marie Julienne Carriere became a *restavék* (live-in child domestic) as a young girl. At the age of 63 she remains a *restavék*, and has never been paid in her life, Haiti.



Alex Smalles/COLORS Magazine

Tackling poverty and discrimination

People subjected to forced labour are frequently from minority or marginalised groups. For example, slavery in Sudan affects different ethnic or religious groups. Bonded labour in India, Nepal and Pakistan disproportionately affects *dalits* and those who are considered to be of "low" caste, *adivasis* (indigenous people) and those from other minority groups (including religious minorities). Similarly, caste or ethnic status underpins the use of forced labour in Niger and Mauritania. In Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru, it is indigenous groups who are mainly affected by debt bondage. In Ghana and India, it is girls who are exclusively the victims of *trokosi* and *devadasi* (both of which are contemporary forms of slavery).

These same groups are also among the most impoverished sections of society in their respective countries. Those in extreme poverty are more likely to be subjected to slavery-like practices, and those that are subjected to contemporary forms of slavery are unlikely to break out of the cycle of poverty and coerced labour. For example, statistics from the Department for Labour Inspections in Brazil show that up to 40 per cent of workers freed from slave labour in the last eight years have been freed more than once.

Thus, development policy is an essential part of the fight to eradicate forced labour and slavery. Land reform, fairer leasing arrangements, rural development programmes and micro-credit schemes would all help to reduce incidents of debt bondage and serfdom which affect millions of people across the world. Access to basic education, the provision of stable employment and the enforcement of the minimum wage are also important in ensuring that people do not become trapped in slavery-like practices.

Many governments will have limited resources to devote to such programmes, but projects can be focused on geographic areas where contemporary forms of slavery are prevalent or from which forced labourers originate. Programmes could also target groups which are specifically vulnerable to exploitation because of societal discrimination or exclusion.

The relevant inter-governmental organisations (such as UNICEF, WHO, UNDP and the World Bank) need to prioritise combating slavery as part of an integrated strategy to achieve long-term development targets like the Millennium Development Goals. These institutions should also ensure that Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers address forced labour issues and work together to increase assistance to governments which have formed national plans of action against contemporary forms of slavery.

Individual engagement

The sections above highlight what governments need to do in order to eradicate slavery today. However, as this



publication has illustrated, governments are only likely to prioritise action against slavery if they are put under concerted and sustained pressure to do so by individuals and organisations.

Anti-Slavery International's recent campaigning successes have been achieved through a combination of working together with local organisations who represent or work with those affected by slavery; by engaging directly with governments to advocate for the policies required to end slavery; and by informing and mobilising individuals to use their power as voters, as consumers and as members of society to help bring about change.

One example of a campaign which illustrates this, and the important role that individuals play in achieving change, is the campaign which began in 2000 when a British film crew documented cases of young men being trafficked between countries in West Africa, and used as forced labour on cocoa farms.

Public campaigning and international media attention raised consumer concerns that some of the chocolate they were eating may have been produced by forced labour. Hundreds of Anti-Slavery International's supporters wrote to the main companies in the confectionary industry and this helped spur the industry into action.

In 2001, a basic agreement, known as the Cocoa Protocol, was reached between the cocoa industry, human rights organisations and trade unions. The Protocol set out a framework to address the issue:

1. Research was carried out into labour conditions in Côte d'Ivoire. The results of this survey were published in July 2002 and claimed that over 200,000 children were working in hazardous conditions on cocoa farms. A smaller percentage was reported to have been trafficked from neighbouring countries.
2. An independent verification system was to be established to ensure the cocoa products we buy are free from forced labour. This system is due to be implemented in 2005 and volunteers have already been trained in Ghana who have identified and removed over 150 children from exploitative work.
3. The International Cocoa Initiative was established to encourage and support responsible cocoa farming through funding local projects and supporting governmental action plans in the region.

Public awareness and activism in relation to forced labour



Mike Shell/Black Star



Mike Shell/Black Star

above: Radio Gerddes Afrique, 89.5FM - Oueme Region, Benin. Radio Gerddes Afrique's programmes raise awareness of the dangers of trafficking and promote schemes to help people lift themselves out of the poverty trap.

left: Mathurin Bessan Amou holding his newsletter which informs students of the dangers of trafficking, Benin.

in the cocoa industry has shown the companies involved that consumers are committed to ethical purchasing and has helped drive forward a series of actions which demonstrate that individuals can have a positive impact on ending slavery practices.

Some people also switched to buying Fairtrade chocolate as way of ensuring that they were not contributing to the use of forced labour and this has further boosted the demand for Fairtrade goods.

Since the Fairtrade products were launched in the UK 10 years ago, sales have grown between 40 and 90 per cent a year, expanding from a single variety of coffee to over 250 brands of food and drink. There are also Fairtrade initiatives in 17 countries, mainly in Europe and North America. The growth in the availability of Fairtrade goods has only occurred because of public pressure and demand, just as it did during the 18th century campaign against the purchase of slave-made sugar.¹¹³

¹¹³ It is also worth noting that the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society campaigned against the use of forced labour on the cocoa plantations in Portuguese colonies in the 19th century and this led the Cadbury brothers to send a representative to Sao Tome to investigate the situation. By 1909, the four main British chocolate companies had agreed not to buy any more cocoa grown on the Portuguese islands.



Conclusion

If we are to avoid the charge that the only thing history has taught us is that we have not learned enough from history, then we do need to take on board the lessons that the Transatlantic Slave Trade can teach us.

By promoting an accurate and complete account of this part of our history in our schools and in our society more generally, we will be better placed to understand the legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, including its role in racism and discrimination today, as well as the long-term impact it has had in both the development and underdevelopment of communities and countries affected by the trade.¹¹⁴

Given this publication's focus on campaigning, it is appropriate to conclude by reviewing the impact of the anti-slavery campaign in Britain. From the first meeting of 12 men in May 1787 to the actual abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies in 1838, it took fifty one years.

In this relatively short period of time, the campaign developed into a mass movement that not only managed to challenge assumptions about slavery that had been embedded over hundreds of years, but also convinced many people that they had an obligation to end it. Its achievements were unparalleled at the time and even today there are only a limited number of campaigns which could claim to have had the same impact.

There are many factors which contributed to the success of this movement. One of these was the identification of a clearly defined goal

for the movement. While this focused only on the abolition of the trade rather than slavery itself, the conservative nature of the objective facilitated the establishment of a mass movement supported by different sections of society, including radicals, conservatives, members of the political elite and working class people. The inclusive and non-hierarchical structure that the campaign developed allowed these different ideological wings of the movement to co-exist, but also left local groups free to pursue more radical agendas and push the movement forward.

Another key factor in the success of the movement was the role of Africans who were or had been enslaved. There can be no doubt that, through rebellions, personal acts of resistance and as anti-slavery campaigners in their own right, Africans were absolutely pivotal to the development of the abolitionist movement as well as bringing an end to the Transatlantic Slave Trade itself.

Also of particular note was the campaign's pioneering use of advocacy tools that today we take for granted. These included: coalition building, investigative research, public petitioning, local groups, public meetings, newsletters, logos, iconic posters, parliamentary lobbying, boycotts, media work, judicial challenges and the arts.

Above all, the lesson of the campaign against the Transatlantic Slave Trade and of subsequent anti-slavery campaigns is that individuals can and do change the world in which we live, both through their individual actions and as part of movements.

If you have been inspired by this publication and want to help fight slavery today then visit Anti-Slavery International's website and find out more about how to get involved in our campaigning work and other ways in which you can help to end slavery.

www.antislavery.org/2007

¹¹⁴ Considering the legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is beyond the scope of this publication, but for some discussion of these issues see James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery*, Routledge, London, 1996; S.I. Martin, *op. cit.*, and the *Breaking the Silence* website at: <http://www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence/main/08/index.shtml>



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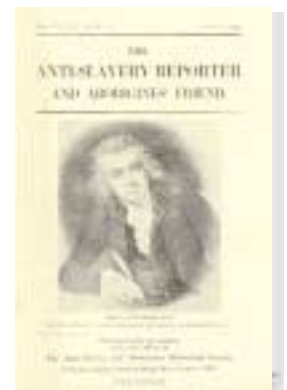
1885



1910



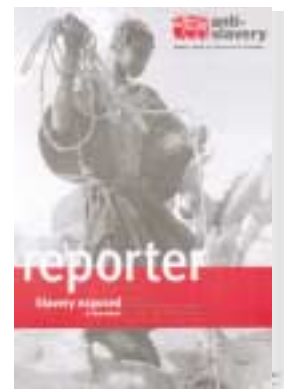
1917



1938



1989



2005

above: The Anti-Slavery Reporter through the years.

Many of the above publications are available from Anti-Slavery International. For a complete list of our resources (including books, education materials, videos and posters), call Becky Shand on **020 7501 8922** or email b.shand@antislavery.org or visit our website at: <http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/resources>

Anti-Slavery International's quarterly magazine the *Reporter* has been published since 1825 and continues to be a leading source of news and analysis in relation to slavery issues. If you want to find out more about subscribing, call Anti-Slavery International on **020 7501 8920** or email info@antislavery.org or go to: <http://www.antislavery.org/support/join/join.htm#reporter>

Anti-Slavery International has produced this report as part of its campaign to use the 200th anniversary of the end of the slave trade in the British colonies to raise awareness of both historical and contemporary forms of slavery.

This publication gives an overview of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and considers the factors that, in less than twenty years, led isolated voices of protest to develop into a popular movement, which helped bring about the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.

The report also traces how, after the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, new forms of slavery began to manifest themselves and how these contemporary forms of slavery were challenged through popular campaigns and by the development of international standards to prohibit them. It also considers what action needs to be taken to assist the millions of people who continue to be subjected to contemporary forms of slavery today.

Anti-Slavery International hopes this publication will revitalise the abolitionist spirit which helped to end the Transatlantic Slave Trade and inspire people to support our campaigning work against all contemporary forms of slavery.

Join the fight for freedom at: www.antislavery.org/2007

Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839, is committed to eliminating all forms of slavery throughout the world. Slavery, servitude and forced labour are violations of individual freedoms, which deny millions of people their basic dignity and fundamental human rights. Anti-Slavery International works to end these abuses by exposing current cases of slavery, campaigning for its eradication, supporting the initiatives of local organisations to release people, and pressing for more effective implementation of international laws against slavery. For further information see: www.antislavery.org

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