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Empire and Social Reform: British Liberals and the “Civilizing Mission” in the Sugar Colonies, 1868–1874

James Patterson Smith

In contrast to the spirit of *laissez-faire*, the Colonial Office under Gladstone's first government served as a large-scale social engineering agency concerned with the cautious restructuring of volatile societies in the sugar-producing colonies of the West Indies and the Indian Ocean. From the perspective of the Colonial Office civilizing the barbarian made him more governable. There is a revealing paradox in the fact that so much of what Victorian Liberals did in the name of civilizing benighted natives involved active government initiatives in imperial settings. Under the banner of “peace, retrenchment, and reform” nineteenth-century British Liberals advocated cost-cutting and *laissez-faire* at home and non-expansion abroad. Liberal leaders' public statements in this vein helped set the historiographical stereotype of supposed Gladstonian Liberal “little Englandism” versus a dramatic imperial policy shift toward “forward movement” in the Disraelian Conservative era. Scholarship over the last thirty years has refuted this older view and has stressed the continuity of British imperialism throughout the nineteenth century.¹ However, a careful examination of the details of policy reveals that from 1868–74 the Liberals not only valued the Empire, but were willing to sacrifice their own theories of limited government

¹The works of R. L. Schuyler, C. A. Bodelsen, and A. P. Newton created the pre-World War II orthodox view that set the “little England” stereotype of Liberal imperial policy. See R. L. Schuyler, *The Fall of the Old Colonial System: A Study in British Free Trade, 1770–1870* (New York, 1945), pp. 245–76; R. L. Schuyler, “The Climax of Anti-Imperialism in England,” *Political Science Quarterly* 36 (1921): 537–60; C. A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (London, 1924), pp. 8 and 88–91; and A. P. Newton, “International Colonial Rivalry: The New World, 1815–1870,” in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, ed. J. H. Rose, A. P. Newton, and E. A. Benians, Vol. 2: *The Growth of the New Empire 1783–1870* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 525–47. The works of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher first challenged the orthodox view in the 1950s and early 1960s. For the development of this debate see John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., 6 (1953): 1–15; Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London, 1961); Other works contributing to the revisionist view include B. A. Knox, “Reconsidering Mid-Victorian Imperialism,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 1 (1973): 155–72; C. C. Eldridge, *England's Mission: The Imperial Idea in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli, 1868–1880* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973); idem, *Victorian Imperialism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1978); Susan Farnsworth, *The Evolution of British Imperial Policy During the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Study of the Peelie Contribution, 1846–74* (New York, 1992); and James Patterson Smith, “Retrenchment, Reform, and Empire: Lord Kimberley and the Liberal Imperial Dilemma, 1868–74,” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1984), in revision for publication. The expansionist impulse in Liberal colonial policy is stressed in W. D. McIntyre, *The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics, 1865–75* (London, 1967).

in order to strengthen the British hold—even on their bankrupt sugar colonies in the Caribbean and Indian oceans. Initiatives in colonial religion, education, health, justice, and labor regulation demonstrate a surprising Liberal bent toward government activism in the non-white Empire. Moreover, the self-conscious and energetic manipulation of such a wide range of policy tools reveals a serious Liberal commitment to empire, which further belies the old notion that from 1868–74, “little Englandism” reached its high point.

Victorian Liberals were of two minds about government activism. On the one hand they preached laissez-faire. On the other hand upper class fear of the laboring masses packed into urban industrial squalor prompted much speculation about the bases of order and social peace at home. Tools of repression ranging from professional police forces to prisons and the court system were seen as means to persuade England’s poor to inhibit their destructive proclivities. However, many Victorians believed that social stability needed extensive rooting beyond simple pain infliction, which taught only negative lessons whose effects were easily lost when the threat of suffering was removed.² To instill a positive view of civilized conduct required a host of other institutions. Where lower-class family life had failed to civilize, church, school, and employers were to fill the void. Where private efforts proved insufficient, state departures from laissez-faire orthodoxy were justified. Education, religion, family life, disciplined work, and wholesome leisure activities might all be used to tame the brutish multitudes and save society.³ That Victorians often speculated about such potential buttresses for social peace in no way establishes that they were actually effective. Such thinking was, however, a part of the intellectual environment out of which colonial policy emerged.

As an ideal, much of the underpinning of social stability was to be entrusted to the natural influence of “men of authority, property, and rank” performing their individual and local duties to those dependent on them. In the eyes of Victorian paternalists, men of property with permanent interests in the land, plus personal knowledge of their own dependents, would ensure appropriate management of the deserving poor through justice and mercy and of the undeserving through firmness. Furthermore, they believed that intimate contact between the poor and the powerful reinforced a tendency for the dependent and

²Robert D. Storch, “The Problem of Working-Class Leisure: Some Roots of Middle Class Reform in the Industrial North 1825–1850,” in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. A. P. Donajgradzki (London, 1977), pp. 138–42; A. P. Donajgradzki, “‘Social Police’ and the Bureaucratic Elite: A Vision of Order in the Age of Reform,” in *ibid.*, pp. 51–59; and David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1979), pp. 6–10.

³Richard Johnson, “Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England, 1833–39” *Past & Present* 49 (November 1970): 96; and Richard Johnson, “Educating the Educators: ‘Experts’ and the State 1822–29,” in *Social Control*, ed. Donajgradzki, pp. 77–80 and 94–95.

weak to identify with and absorb the values of their powerful benefactors, thereby promoting good order.⁴ This personal “influence” was cheaper and more effective than raw coercion. In matters touching social peace, local grandees were best left to themselves to devise workable solutions.⁵

However well or ill it may have worked in England, London’s non-interfering trust in local paternalism proved disastrous for her racially tense plantation societies in the West Indies and Mauritius. Before Jamaica’s 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, Britain followed a hands-off policy with regard to the internal affairs of these sugar-producing colonies. Prior to 1865 two forms of local government were to be found in Britain’s sugar colonies. Colonies such as Trinidad, British Guiana, and Mauritius, which were acquired during the French Revolutionary Wars, were given Crown Colony status with autocratic governors ruling through Crown-appointed councils. Older traditional British colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados were governed similarly to the North American Colonies before 1776 with two-house legislatures—one house Crown-appointed, the other elected by the colonists. With ninety to ninety-five percent non-white populations, property—not race—qualified their tiny electorates. However, over time these narrowly elected legislative bodies had degenerated into corrupt, oppressive, planter-controlled oligarchies. The collapse of world sugar prices, the 1830s emancipation of the slaves, and the adoption of free trade in the 1840s destroyed the economic value of the British West Indies and Mauritius and created massive social problems that, in good *laissez-faire* form, the corrupt local assemblies had refused to address.

The bloody Morant Bay Rebellion was one result of that refusal. With undertones of race war, the revolt called British control of the West Indies into question and heightened sensitivities to the potential for social turbulence in all of the sugar colonies. Over the next decade the Russell and Gladstone Liberal ministries moved to eliminate the elective elements in older West Indian governments in favor of new, authoritarian Crown Colony governments with effective power vested in the hands of Crown-appointed governors and councils.⁶ Where

⁴David C. Moore, *The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth Century English Political System* (New York, 1976), pp. 9–12, 234, 295–96, and 407–08; Roberts, *Paternalism*, pp. 1–10.

⁵John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857–68* (London, 1966), pp. 211–14.

⁶For Victorian reflections on the problem of West Indian government see Arthur Mills, “Our Colonial Policy,” *Contemporary Review* 11 (June 1869), and W. J. Gardner, *A History of Jamaica From Its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the Year 1872* (London, 1873; repr., 1971). Secondary treatments of the government problem may be found in Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Second ed.; New York, 1990), pp. 159–92; Morley Ayearst, *The British West Indies: The Search for Self Government* (London, 1960), p. 17; Bruce Hamilton, *Barbados and the Confederation Question, 1871–1885* (London, 1956), p. 12; Samuel and Edith Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait* (New York, 1971), p. 177; Hume Wrong, *Government of the West Indies* (Oxford, 1923), p. 78; J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies* (New York, 1966), p. 215; C. S. S. Higham, “Sir Henry Taylor and the Establishment of

the Crown Colony form already existed, as in Mauritius, governors now sought ways to increase their influence and control over the existing Crown-appointed councils that over time had found ways to obstruct official policy.⁷

Given the material ruin of these troubled colonies and the sacrifice of political and economic principles involved in holding them, the question of why they were retained at all naturally suggests itself. Like their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors, Liberal policy-makers of the 1870s held a high opinion of the strategic value of their sugar colonies in the Caribbean. Blocking American expansion was now the concern rather than checkmating France or Spain. In the Gladstone era, possession of the West Indies provided Britain naval bases from which her interests in any future isthmian canal could be protected. As Lord Kimberley, the Colonial Secretary, explained to Gladstone, "someday when a canal is made from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the W. India Islands will greatly rise in importance."⁸ Post-Civil War U.S. efforts to acquire Santo Domingo and the Danish Virgin Islands, and American meddling in the Cuban insurrection provoked renewed British concern for the defence of her own possessions and set the stage for Britain's 1869 efforts to secure French support in matters relating to the future isthmian canal.⁹ General Ainslie, the British military commander in the area, believed it "more than probable that sooner or later the Americans would be found to be both disagreeable and troublesome neighbors."¹⁰ A number of memoranda on the defense of the British West Indies against U.S. attack passed between the Colonial Office and War Office throughout 1868 and 1869. Defensive strategy came to focus on project-

Crown Colony Government in the West Indies," *Scottish Historical Review* 23 (January 1926): 94; and Eric A. Williams, *A History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (London, 1962), p. 132.

⁷Gordon to Kimberley, 30 May 1871, *The Gladstone-Gordon Correspondence, 1851-1896: Selections From the Private Correspondence of a British Prime Minister and a Colonial Governor*, ed. Paul Knaplund, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new ser., 51 (1961): 58; Gordon to Kimberley, 1 June 1871, Colonial Office Files (C.O.), Confidential Correspondence Relating to Indian Immigrants in Mauritius, C.O. 882/2, Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey; and J. K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon: First Lord Stanmore 1829-1912* (Toronto, 1964), pp. 103-05.

⁸Kimberley to Gladstone, 23 August 1871, Gladstone Papers, British Library, London, Add. Mss. 44224/139.

⁹W. F. Reddaway, "International Colonial Rivalry; Great Britain and France, 1848-1870," *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, ed. E. A. Benians, et al., Vol. 2: *The Growth of the New Empire 1783-1870* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 563; Richard Van Alstyne, "Britain in Latin America After 1865," *Current History* 28 (March 1955): 149; Christopher Bartlet, "British Reaction to the Cuban Insurrection of 1868-1878," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 37 (August 1957): 296-98; and Charles C. Jacobs, "Jamaica and the Cuban Ten Years War, 1868-1878," *Jamaica Journal* 44 (June 1980): 80-92.

¹⁰Ainslie to the Military Secretary, 18 December 1867, Colonial Office Files, West Indies, Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, C.O. 318/254.

ing naval power from Bermuda. Thus, Gladstone's government presided over a massive upgrading of the naval and military facilities at Bermuda.¹¹

Similarly, strategic thinking prompted the Liberals to reject Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon's proposal to cede Mauritius in the Indian Ocean to France. Gordon argued that the opening of the Suez Canal had rendered Mauritius utterly valueless. Moreover, a British pull-out would save the Imperial Exchequer £30,000 per year. London saw things quite differently. The new age of steam navigation was dawning with its attendant needs for strategic coaling stations. There was a risk that Suez could fall into hostile foreign hands. Thus, Mauritius, along the alternate Cape route to India and China, seemed to London to be "of equal importance now to that which rendered it of so much interest in former times."¹² While many Liberal reformers, humanitarians, and mission societies still carried the abolitionist crusaders' sense of moral obligation to nurture these ex-slave societies toward progress, Thomas Holt, Douglas Lorimer, and Christine Bolt¹³ have shown that public support for such idealism had eroded seriously by the late 1860s. It is no surprise then that Liberal British officialdom most often couched discussions about retaining the sugar colonies in the pragmatic language of strategic power. In large measure, it was eighteenth-century conceptions of world power imperatives that continued to provide the ultimate official rationale for holding these poor outposts in the 1870s.

However, Morant Bay, plus a series of smaller indentured coolie labor riots in British Guiana, and threats of such disturbances in Mauritius, made it clear that there was a direct relation between the social health of the sugar colonies and Britain's ability safely and cheaply to retain them. Enlightened policies promoting justice, order, and security were essential to attracting the new investments, that might prevent further economic deterioration. Where the local planter-elites had failed to produce stability, London would have to act. In order

¹¹Minute by Rogers on War Office to Colonial Office, 23 January 1868, C.O. 318/254; War Office Confidential Memorandum, "Considerations on the Military Position of Great Britain with Respect to the United States, 28 May 1869," Gladstone Papers, Add. Mss. 44610, f. 53; Report of Colonel Drummond Jervois, 19 May 1869, Granville Papers, P.R.O. 30/29/53; Memorandum by Hugh Childers, 14 May 1869, Gladstone Papers (Cabinet Memorandums), Add. Mss. 44637, f. 59; and Henry C. Wilkinson, *Bermuda From Sail to Steam: The History of the Island from 1784 to 1901*, 2 vols., (London, 1973), 2: 743-55.

¹²Barkley to Granville, 10 April 1869, C.O. 882/2; Storks to Sanford, 12 June 1869, C.O. 882/2; Kimberley Diary, 29 May 1870, Kimberley Papers, A-3, Oxford, The Bodleian Library; Gordon to Gladstone, 3 May and 2 June 1871, *The Gladstone-Gordon Correspondence*, ed. Knaplund, 51: 57; Gordon to Kimberley, 2 June 1871, and Kimberley to Gordon, 9 June 1871, Kimberley Papers G-130; and Kimberley to Gladstone, 6 June 1871, Gladstone Papers, Add. Mss. 44224/139.

¹³Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, 1992), pp. xxii-xxiii, and 307-08; Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978), pp. 119-23; and Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971), pp. 77-105.

to perpetuate British control, central government would now command action in colonial settings that strict liberal ideology would flinch from doing at home. Ideology notwithstanding, well conceived reform would shore up British control in strategic areas. Moreover, because reform would also serve the interests of the masses of colonial subjects, humanitarian groups at home would welcome it.

Local initiative had failed in the sugar colonies. Neither white planters nor their black labor force fit the paternalistic mold cast for them in Britain. Rather than producing a united, self-assured elite that sensed its own permanent interest in justice for the lower orders, absentee landlordism in the West Indies left social leadership to a white managerial class more attuned to quick profits and status seeking than to long-lasting social peace. Governor Sir Henry Gregory of Ceylon, who presided over a colony with a tea and coffee-planter class similar in motivation to the West Indian and Mauritian sugar planters, described succinctly the deficiencies generally complained of in colonial planters. Gregory found that even the resident European landlord in Ceylon did not work the land "with the view of permanent occupation or of handing his plantation down to his children," as was typical in Europe. Rather, colonial planters worked the land "to make the most of it, sell it while its reputation remains, and be off" before soil exhaustion made estates worthless.¹⁴ Moreover, Mannoni and Thornton argue that pathological and socially destructive status seeking furnished the more powerful motive for many members of the white leadership clique who, as failed exiles from competitive European society, sought social dominance over the black under-classes as a psychological compensation.¹⁵ However difficult it may be to throw objective historical light on settler psychology, it is a fact that by the 1870s Gladstone's cabinet saw real danger in investing self-interested white settler minorities with power over black majorities anywhere in the Empire.¹⁶ To add confusion, in Mauritius and Trinidad bitter French versus English ethnic and religious conflicts divided the upper class white minority against itself.

If the master class could not play its proper paternalistic role, neither could the Afro-West Indian laborer. Bitter memories of slavery and the struggle for

¹⁴Gregory to Kimberley (Private) 21 March 1872, Kimberley Papers, G-132.

¹⁵O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (New York, 1956), pp. 11, 32, 102-04, 120-26, and 203-04; and A. P. Thornton, *Doctrines of Imperialism* (New York, 1965), pp. 191-94.

¹⁶Wodehouse to Granville, 17 June 1870, C.O. 879/2/7; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 3rd ser., vol. 209 (8 March 1872): 1622-33; "Autobiographical Notes," in *The Letters of Frederick Lord Blachford*, ed. George E. Marindin (London, 1896), p. 298; Kimberley to Barkly, 21 July 1871, C.O. 879/2/101; Kimberley to Barkly, 6 October 1872, Kimberley Papers, G-110; Kimberley to Barkly, 17 October 1870, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 47 [C.459], p. 450; Barkly to Kimberley, 31 May 1871, C.O. 879/2/85; and Frederick Lord Blachford, "South African Policy," *The Nineteenth Century* 6 (August 1879): 269.

emancipation made black men less susceptible to the influence of the white upper classes than the European peasants. Moreover, religious differences further alienated master and servant in the West Indies. The zeal of Baptist and Methodist missionaries in making converts and opposing slavery endeared them to colonial blacks, while it drew the ill-will of the planters and resulted in bitter religious differences between the white Anglican elites and the largely non-conformist black working class.¹⁷ In the post emancipation era the addition of large numbers of immigrant Indian coolie indentured laborers further complicated master-laborer relationships in the West Indies and Mauritius.

Despite the fact that government-sponsored social activism in the colonies contradicted the received liberal dogma of *laissez-faire*, it produced little if any controversy in Gladstone's cabinet. Gladstone himself justified the departure as necessary to "secure the elevating and civilizing aims of emancipation."¹⁸ *The Economist*, a journal of moderate Liberal thinking, found "the one necessity essential to the development" of profitable trade with the non-white Empire was some system under which "very large bodies of dark labourers" could be induced to "work willingly under a few European supervisors." "In the absence of slavery," the editorialist argued, "the only possible relation" between whites and blacks must be based upon a "policy of justice to the darker races." Injustice had provoked the bloody clash in Jamaica and threatened to give Britain a negative reputation that would make it difficult to get cooperative black labor elsewhere. "Justice to the darker races" would prove more effective than repression in maintaining the Empire and promoting trade.¹⁹ Economic as well as social considerations thus demanded government action. In fact, reluctant governors found themselves prodded. "Government does, and it ought to do in India, much which in Europe is undertaken by Private Enterprise, or by municipal and other local bodies," the Duke of Argyll, Gladstone's Secretary of State for India, wrote Governor General Lord Mayo in 1870. In India, Argyll continued, "it may be said with substantial truth that private enterprise does not exist,...." and the local machinery of government "is yet but imperfectly developed."²⁰ India furnished the instructive model for much that was done in the non-white Empire. From London's perspective, in the sugar colonies, just as in India, local institutions—local leadership—had failed. Where "a deficiency of material" created

¹⁷ Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 (269), pp. 568–69; Chambers to Kimberley, 12 October 1872, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1873, vol. 48 (259), pp. 781–84; and "Memorial of the Jamaica Baptist Union on the Clergy Law," 1868 in C.O. 137/440.

¹⁸ William Ewart Gladstone, "England's Mission," *The Nineteenth Century* 4 (September 1878): 581–82.

¹⁹ "Economic Value of Justice to the Darker Races," *The Economist* 23 (December 1865): 1487–89.

²⁰ Argyll to the Governor General (India), 12 May 1870, India Office Records, Despatches to India, India Office Library, London, I.O.R. NEG. 4237.

a void in local initiative, according to liberal publicist Arthur Mills, central government had no choice but to act.²¹ Therefore, without any real debate, *laissez-faire* gave way to centrally-directed government activism. Thus in the sugar colonies social reforms often involving new social spending schemes took precedence over ideological correctness.

Like other Victorians, the Liberal politicians of the 1870s believed religion was a vital element in promoting social peace both at home and in colonial settings.²² In the non-white Empire officials saw church attendance as inoculation against sedition—as godliness increased, the dangers of popular outbreaks would decrease. Declining black church attendance was in-part blamed for the 1865 Jamaica Rebellion. Relapse into heathenism and barbarism threatened blacks apart from the civilizing influence of the church.²³ However, in the colonies religion was not aimed at the black poor alone. Governor Rawson of Barbados believed that “the moral and religious culture of the upper classes, and of the white race” was as much “needed for the welfare and happiness of these communities...” as that of the subject races. Rawson considered the spread of religion in the elites to be “almost as effectual towards the moral and religious culture of the coloured labourers as the direct teaching of those classes.” To Rawson nothing would “tend to fuse the two classes...as a high degree of religious culture in the upper classes.”²⁴ This same linkage of Christianity to civil order, security, and progress had led Parliament in 1824 to create a special imperial fund to expand the work of the Church of England among the slaves of the West Indies in preparation for emancipation. By 1868 appropriations from the British Consolidated fund for religious work in the West Indies amounted to £20,300 annually. The various colonies themselves appropriated another £60,000 per year to this cause from local revenues.²⁵

Despite almost half a century of imperial aid, by 1868 the established church in the West Indies was in a minority position much the same as the Irish Church. The poor, mainly black, non-conformist majority bitterly resented the West Indian Anglican Church as the tax-supported church of the white colonial elite. Angry agitations against the favored status of the established church had preceded the Morant Bay uprising. This hostility underscored the potential

²¹Arthur Mills, “Our Colonial Policy,” *Contemporary Review* 11 (June 1869): 226–29.

²²Frederick D. Schneider, “The Anglican Church in the British Empire,” (Nashville, unpublished manuscript), p. 678; and Jenifer Hart, “Religion and Social Control in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in *Social Control*, ed. Donajgrodzki (London, 1977), pp. 112–22.

²³Minute by Elliot on Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442; Morris to Myers, 1 January 1866, Douet to Myers, 1 January 1866, and Findlay to Myers, 16 January 1866, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, vol. 30 [C. 3682], pp. 40, 86, 89.

²⁴Rawson to Granville, 17 April 1870, C.O. 28/211.

²⁵*Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 3rd ser., vol. 193 (7 July 1868): 784–85.

volatility of sectarian animosities when combined with racial and class antagonisms that were the rule in all of the sugar colonies.²⁶ Derby and Disraeli's short-lived Tory government in 1868 had acted to end imperial funding, thereby throwing the West Indian Church totally onto local revenues for support.²⁷

In 1869 the Liberals decided to go a step further and disestablish the unpopular colonial church. A struggle over the form and extent of disestablishment followed. That struggle reveals a deep Liberal distrust of blanket laissez-faire approaches in religion. In sanctioning disestablishment, the Liberals at the same time pushed hard to maintain post-disestablishment state aid for colonial religion. The minimalist state so cherished in liberal ideology could not safely be relieved of all of its religious role. To both conciliate religious dissenters and maintain religious spending in financially destitute colonies required finesse. Whitehall proposed to do so through a new scheme called concurrent endowments—distributing state aid equally to all religious groups proportionate to their numbers.²⁸

Almost immediately, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Wesleyans in Jamaica challenged this approach and demanded total disendowment as well as disestablishment. Jamaican dissenters objected that state aid in any form was anti-scriptural and obnoxious. Any system, equally funded or not, they argued, would in effect force persons to pay for propagation of religious opinions with which they disagreed.²⁹ At the Colonial Office Lord Granville himself was somewhat sensitive to this view. The Colonial Secretary wondered how to deal with “those not very respectable coloured ministers who having separated from the parent sect, set up for themselves and obtain large congregations.” However objectionable, their numbers would create a claim under the proposed concurrent endowment scheme.³⁰

On more practical grounds, the Baptists tried to argue that voluntary action and voluntary financial support—religious laissez-faire if you please—would

²⁶“Memorial of the Jamaica Baptist Union on the Clergy Law,” 1868, C.O. 137/440; Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442; Chambers to Kimberley, 12 October 1872, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1873, vol. 48 (259), pp. 781–83; Morris to Myers, 1 January 1866, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, vol. 30 [C. 3682], p. 86; and Lawson to Myers, 11 January 1866, *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁷Schneider, “The Anglican Church in the British Empire,” p. 700; and “West Indian Colonies etc. (Ecclesiastical Funds),” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, vol. 50 (194), p. 811.

²⁸Granville to Grant, 16 November 1869, C.O. 137/442; Kimberley to Rawson, 13 September and 27 December 1871, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1873, vol. 48 (259), pp. 721–30 and 747; and Kimberley to Pine, 26 January 1872, *ibid.*, p. 777.

²⁹“Memorial of the Jamaica Baptist Union on the Clergy Law,” 1868, C.O. 137/440; “Extract from the Minutes of the Northern Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Jamaica,” 4 May 1869, C.O. 137/441; and “Memorial of the Missionaries and Ministers of the Gospel in the Parish of St. James” to Granville, June 1869, C.O. 137/441; and *The Times* (London), 29 June and 12 August 1868.

³⁰Minute by Granville on Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442.

better meet the spiritual needs of Jamaica than any system of state aid. Even Governor Pine of the Leewards believed that self-reliance made the unendowed churches in his territory more vigorous and their clergy less prone to scandal than the established church.³¹

However, few officials shared Pine's view. London authorities concluded that the kind of voluntary support the dissenters advocated and practiced had already proved a failure in Jamaica, Trinidad, and the Windward Islands. Neither the Baptists nor the more numerous Wesleyans of Jamaica had shown any real growth over the previous twenty-five years. Many Baptist ministers had to supplement their salaries with shop-keeping. Many Baptist pulpits were unoccupied and their "congregations lamentably disproportional to the accommodations for them."³² The largely peasant dissenting population seemed unable or unwilling to maintain existing churches and ministers voluntarily—let alone provide for the 200,000 to 250,000 Jamaicans beyond the reach of any religious instruction. From London's perspective it was "a duty (social and religious) to reclaim these people...." Governor Grant and the Colonial Office staff in London predicted that without state aid to religion there loomed a "lapse toward a state of heathen barbarism" with Haitian-style social evils in its wake. To the Colonial Office the stakes seemed high. Given the Baptists' failure to expand their base without state aid, London could not understand how the Baptists could object to equal state funding for missionary endeavors of all churches.³³

Object they did, however. The Baptist-led anti-endowment petition campaign in Jamaica was so vigorous that the Liberal Colonial Secretary modified the religious aid proposal. Late in 1869 London directed the Jamaican Governor to end religious spending altogether in that colony and use the money for education if he could not gain general consent for equal aid to all religious groups. In December of 1869, Jamaica's 40,000 Baptists refused the proposed aid. This forced a most reluctant total disendowment of all religion in the colony.³⁴

In the other West Indian colonies and in Mauritius, dissenting groups usually accepted the concurrent endowment principle. Where accepted, state aid was allocated according to the numerical strength of the various denominations. Still, the Liberals in London continued to look for ways to encourage religious outreach to the unchurched in the sugar colonies. Lord Kimberley, for example,

³¹Pine to Kimberley, 5 March, 1872, C.O. 884/2.

³²Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442; Minutes by Granville, Rogers, Taylor, and Elliot on Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442; Rawson to Granville, 17 April 1870, C.O. 28/211; and Message by Governor Longden to the Trinidad Legislative Council, 1 June 1871, enclosed in Longden to Kimberley, 22 July 1871, C.O. 884/2.

³³Minutes by Taylor and Rogers on Grant to Granville, 26 August 1869, C.O. 137/443.

³⁴Granville to Grant, 16 November 1869, C.O. 137/442; and *The Times* (London), 13 January and 27 September 1870.

wanted state funding formulas to consider the evangelizing vigor and voluntary efforts of particular religious groups as a balance to the purely census-based division of funds introduced in 1869.³⁵ For British Liberals, disestablishment in no way implied a wish to sever ties between religion and the state. Disestablishment served to defuse troublesome religious, racial, and class tensions. Still the value of religion as a tool of social order dictated its continued funding at pre-disestablishment levels. As Parliamentary Under Secretary Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen stated to the House of Commons, in the Liberal cabinet's view the lessening of religious influence in these colonies "would entail a larger expenditure for magistrates and police."³⁶ If religious spending could not be continued in Jamaica, education spending was to be its substitute.

British officialdom also saw education, like religion, as a gentle supplement to courts and police in ordering the lives of the poor.³⁷ However, left to themselves, the pre-1865 sugar colony planter-oligarchies had done little for public instruction. In 1864, for example, the unreformed Jamaican government spent a mere £2,137 on education for a population of half a million. As late as 1870 Bermuda spent only £500 per year on schools.³⁸ In Trinidad, with an 1868 population of 85,000, only 2,836 children attended thirty-five schools whose demoralized teachers worked in dilapidated and unsanitary buildings. Able to send their own children abroad for education, the white colonial elites feared that too much learning spoiled children for field work, or turned good hands to preaching or agitation.³⁹ Their neglect of education for the poor, according to an 1869 investigation, was enough to "bring discredit upon any country that recognizes civilization as a principle of government."⁴⁰ The Liberals acted on this indictment.

At home, the Forster Education Act signified the Gladstone cabinet's acceptance of the social, political, and moral need for expanding the limits of the liberal minimalist state in this new direction. In the sugar colonies, the conversion to Crown Colony government after 1865, meant that there, too, London

³⁵Kimberley to Longden, 11 January 1872, C.O. 884/2.

³⁶*Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3rd ser., vol. 206 (9 June 1871): 1817-20.

³⁷Victorian views on the relation of education and social control at home are explored in Richard Johnson, "Educational Policy and Social Control," pp. 96-119; and idem, "Educating the Educators," pp. 77-107.

³⁸Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, p. 248; Henry C. Wilkinson, *Bermuda from Sail to Steam: The History of the Island from 1784 to 1901*, 2 vols. (London Press, 1973), 2: 754; and J. K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon: First Lord Stanmore, 1829-1912* (Toronto, 1964), p. 64.

³⁹Mclean to Eyre, January 1866, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, vol., 30 [C. 3682], p. 76.

⁴⁰"Report on the State of Education in Trinidad," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, vol. 50 (450), p. 666.

could force new attention and new government funding for education. Jamaica's spending on public schools increased by sixty percent in the period 1867–69 and was sufficient to bring 33,343 of the colony's 148,000 school-aged children into government-inspected schools. Over the period 1864 to 1880, Jamaica's education spending soared from a mere £2,137 per year to £25,715. Enrollment in Trinidad's schools climbed from 2,836 in 1868 to 19,855 in 1890. In addition, Jamaica, Trinidad, British Guiana, the Windward Islands, and Mauritius undertook major education reform or reorganization programs.⁴¹ These colonial education initiatives represented a renewed emphasis on "civilization as a principle of government," which paralleled the Liberals' education reforms at home.

The civilizing process to be realized via education was seen to work in many directions. Education could be used to create a colonial collaborating class. In India, from the 1830s the British attempted to create an educated, native middle class to act as intermediaries between the rulers and the masses. Further, some believed that mass literacy in India, by acquainting people with the supposedly just laws of England, would foster loyalty to the imperial government.⁴² Beyond loyalty, there was morality and order. The Anti-Slavery Society commended the new sugar colony education efforts as a way to lift these colonies from their "low moral and social condition." Governor Pine of the Leeward Islands linked the ignorance of the laboring masses to their susceptibility to excitation and to being misled to riots and disturbances.⁴³

Moreover, the ripple effects of education were thought to extend beyond the child in the classroom to parents and the adult community at large. Thus Patrick Keenan, the Dublin expert who investigated Trinidad education in 1869 for the Colonial Office, lamented the island's lack of any schools for its thousands of Indian children because it meant they and their families were "uninfluenced by any humanizing agency except...the law." For Trinidad, Keenan envisioned that through the education of Indian laborers' children "there might come into play upon the parents, a series of reflective influences inculcating a respect for truth

⁴¹Grant to Granville, 8 February 1869, C.O. 137/440; Colonial Office Minutes on "Jamaica Report on Schools, 1871," C.O. 137/465. Gordon to Granville, 24 November 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, vol. 50 (450), p. 761; Elliot Minute on Gordon to Granville, 8 September 1869, C.O. Files, Trinidad, C.O. 295/248; W. L. Burn, *The British West Indies* (Westport, Conn., 1951), p. 44; Parry and Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies*, p. 249; and Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon*, pp. 64, 136.

⁴²Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959), p. 252.

⁴³Pine to Kimberley, 26 January 1871, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C. 353], p. 683; and Statement by Deputation of the Anti-Slavery Society to Governor J. P. Grant, 8 June 1870, Minutebook, Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford, Mss. Br. Emp. S20/E2/9.

and other virtues” believed missing from coolie character. Schools, acting through the children, would improve family tone and social discipline.⁴⁴

Approaches to educational reform reflected each colony’s unique character. Beyond increased budget support for existing schools, Governor Grant of Jamaica in 1870 funded a training school for teachers and inaugurated a system of opening grants for new schools in areas where none previously existed. Moreover, Grant led Jamaican education to emphasize vocational and technical training, forms considered “safe” for blacks.⁴⁵

Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon brought education reform to both Trinidad and Mauritius in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Both communities were former French possessions conquered in the Napoleonic wars. Unsuccessful Anglicization efforts directed through the secular schools had alienated the predominantly French Catholic white elites from the government and, by the late 1860s, fueled increasing religious and ethnic strife. French Catholics had deserted the hated public primary and secondary schools out of bitter objection both to their English language-based primary instruction and to their lack of religious training. French-settler creation of a Catholic, French-language school system in competition with the existing public schools alarmed British officials. Governor Gordon feared that education segregated along ethnic and religious lines would perpetuate or even exacerbate already serious social tensions in Trinidad and Mauritius.⁴⁶ Thus, a central feature of education reform was the creation of suitable collaborating classes through the integration of French and English, and Protestant and Catholic communities.

In 1869, Patrick Keenan toured Trinidad’s schools and made a number of recommendations to better manage the schools as well as to blunt Catholic criticism. Keenan proposed a system of local control for primary education that would bring the school facilities and faculties under the supervision of the clergy of the majority denomination in a given area. In addition, Keenan recommended that Catholic religious objections be met with a system of purely voluntary religious instruction in the public schools. Keenan further recommended a new primary school program for the island’s Indian immigrant children. With full backing from the Colonial Office, Gordon carried into effect most of Keenan’s recommendations.⁴⁷

⁴⁴“Report on the State of Education in Trinidad,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, vol. 50 (450), p. 666.

⁴⁵Grant to Granville, 8 February 1869, C.O. 137/440; Colonial Office Minutes on “Jamaica Report on Schools, 1871,” C.O. 137/465; Governor Grant’s Response to Deputation From the Anti-Slavery Society, 8 June 1870, Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Minutebook, Mss. Br. Emp. S20/E2/9.

⁴⁶Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 72–73.

⁴⁷“Report on the State of Education in Trinidad,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, vol. 50 (450), pp. 665–704.

These reforms concerned primary education; secondary education reform required additional ingenuity. In Trinidad and Mauritius, Gordon brought the existing secular state-supported secondary schools into a collegiate association with their more popular Catholic rivals. Through shared faculty and attendance at common lectures and exams, Gordon hoped to produce an amalgamation of the upper classes that would gradually overcome the religious, national, and racial animosities threatening the stability of these communities.⁴⁸

The push for educational reform in the sugar colonies represented a concerted Liberal effort to establish a firmer basis for social peace and continued British control of these economically bankrupt and racially troubled colonies. Belief in the transforming effects of education even had an impact on colonial road building and land reform, which in part aimed to provide easier lower class access to schools and churches as well as labor markets—all of which were presumed to civilize.⁴⁹

While education served an imperial purpose, it also held the potential of developing the local talents needed to give colonial subjects some control over their own social, economic, and even political destinies. Without these Crown-dictated investments the slide toward social disintegration would have been more rapid, and the available human resources for recovery and renewal would have been far fewer. Crown-dictated education investments were certainly wise. Moreover, because they held promise for great benefit to colonial peoples, these education reforms were morally commendable by every standard both then and now.

However, a fuller moral and political assessment of the overall wisdom of sugar-colony government activism requires that these dramatic changes in education spending be placed in a wider context. In Jamaica, of a total 1873 budget of £500,000, the government spent only £20,000, or four percent, on education. It spent three to four times that amount annually on the importation of coolie labor.⁵⁰ Aid to the sugar industry through subsidized indentured labor schemes took funding precedence over mass education in colonial budgets.

The importation of indentured coolie labor was arguably the most nefarious aspect of British policy in the sugar colonies.⁵¹ Contemporary humanitarian

⁴⁸Gordon to Granville, 8 September 1869, and Granville to Gordon, 12 November 1869, C.O. 295/248; Gordon to Granville, 24 November 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 50 (450), pp. 761–68; and Gertrude Carmichael, *The History of the West Indian Islands of Trinidad and Tobago* (London, 1961), p. 265.

⁴⁹Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (London, 1968), pp. 268–69.

⁵⁰*The Times* (London), 16 February 1874; and Clarke to Grant, 28 April 1873, Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Mss. Br. Emp. S22/G65.

⁵¹Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830–1920* (Oxford, 1974), pp. xiv–xv. Tinker exhaustively studies a system of pervasive abuse of indentured

groups viewed post-emancipation indentured labor systems as morally suspect at best and at worst, little different from slavery. Because freed blacks preferred self-employment to plantation wage labor, the end of slavery in the 1830s jeopardized plantation sugar production. Rather than allow free labor in a free market to dictate the economic evolution of the sugar colonies, successive British governments sanctioned government-subsidized indentured labor systems. At home, the sugar lobby remained powerful. To Whitehall the survival of plantation sugar production still seemed the best hope for the colonial financial solvency that would save British taxpayers from unpleasant colonial burdens. Gladstone Liberals accepted this logic without controversy. Furthermore, regressive colonial tax systems forced the black free laborer to subsidize his own labor competition and to bear a disproportionate share of the cost of educating his own children. Moreover, there were alternatives to plantation agriculture. Thomas C. Holt's recent study of Jamaica challenges strongly the assumed economic necessity of propping up the plantation system and demonstrates the emergence of an overlooked but vigorous small-producer sector in the nineteenth-century Jamaican economy.⁵² Saving the plantation with imported coolie labor served an imperial purpose, not a local one. With imperial policy focused so sharply on the needs of the declining plantation sector, resources were diverted from projects of greater potential benefit to colonial peoples, and widespread illiteracy remained a problem in all of the sugar colonies for some time to come.

The post-emancipation resort to indentured coolie labor to replace the slaves on colonial sugar plantations further disturbed already troubled societies and created serious new challenges for colonial justice systems as well as for education. The Liberals had to take seriously the challenge of providing justice in colonial settings. Resentment of prejudiced local justice lay behind Jamaica's 1865 Morant Bay insurrection, which had actually begun at a session of the local court⁵³ and had led to the killing of thirty whites including the local magistrate.⁵⁴ Deficient and corrupt justice threatened control and could be costly. plantation workers, which remained "a blot on the British Empire" until it ended in the aftermath of World War I.

⁵²Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain 1832-1938* (Baltimore and London, 1992), pp. 142-49 and 270-71.

⁵³Eyre to Cardwell, January 1866, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1866, vol. 30 [C. 3682], pp. 12-18.

⁵⁴The disturbances at Morant Bay in 1865 are treated in the following: Frank Cundall, *Political and Social Disturbances in the West Indies: A Brief Account and Bibliography* (London, 1906); Hume Wrong, *Government of the West Indies* (Oxford, 1923), p. 74; W. L. Burn, *The British West Indies* (Westport, Connecticut, 1951), 140-42; Arvel Erickson, "Empire or Anarchy: The Jamaica Rebellion of 1865," *The Journal of Negro History* 44 (April 1959): 99-122; Sir Alan Burns, *History of the British West Indies* (London, 1965), pp. 672-73; Bernard Semmel, *Democracy Versus Empire: The Jamaica Riots of 1865 and the Governor Eyre Controversy* (New York, 1969), pp. 11-23.

At its best, justice could channel discord, promote peace, and save lives and money. All of this was accepted as an intellectual proposition. However, it was fear of revolt that prompted much that the Liberals did to reform colonial justice.

A series of small-scale 1869 coolie revolts on plantations in British Guiana and protests on behalf of abused indentured labor in Mauritius prompted Liberal action on the justice issue and set in motion a major expansion of colonial government to provide health care to indentured laborers. The Guiana disturbances revealed the ill-health and abuse of indentured plantation laborers and their powerlessness when facing corrupt local judges. Following the riots, George William Des Voeux, the administrator of St. Lucia and a former British Guiana magistrate, wrote a scathing public indictment of the entire system of justice in British Guiana, which added force to the furor. Similar protests in Mauritius led Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon to call for investigation there. According to Des Voeux the largest number of cases he heard involved breach of contract accusations against indentured coolie laborers whose “half starved appearance” caused him grave concern. Food and medical services were, Des Voeux charged, woefully lacking on many plantations, and many of the coolies he jailed for breach of contract were idle due to sickness and premature dismissals from plantation infirmaries. Planter-paid estate physicians were prone to look to the planter’s interest in getting maximum work days from each indentured laborer rather than to the laborer’s health. Half a world away in Mauritius, protests charged that planters exploited irregular wage payments so as to coerce unwilling reindentures. Similar misuse was alleged in other plantation colonies. The result was high desertion rates, high death rates, and coolie unrest and disturbances.⁵⁵ These abuses made the indenture system “in some respects not far removed from slavery” as Des Voeux saw it.⁵⁶

Both Gordon and Des Voeux leveled their most forceful indictments at the local stipendiary magistrates who passed judgment in vagrancy and breach of contract cases. Gordon found the judicial system in Mauritius biased and hopelessly intertwined with the planting interest. In British Guiana, as Des Voeux saw it, the magistrates tended to be men of humble origins who had acquired an unhealthy awe of the powerful planting classes, whose influence could make life either miserable or easy for a magistrate. In some instances, estate managers or planters themselves served as magistrates. Thus, black and Indian coolie laborers stood little chance in court against powerful employers and stringent

⁵⁵Gordon to Kimberley, 1 June 1871, 8 August 1871, 2 September 1871, and 17 October 1871, C.O. 882/2; Gordon to Gladstone, 3 May 1871, and Gordon to Kimberley, 31 May 1871, in *Gladstone Gordon Correspondence, 1851–1896: Selections From the Private Correspondence of a British Prime Minister and A Colonial Governor*, ed. Knaplund, vol. 51, pt. 4, pp. 56–58.

⁵⁶Des Voeux to Granville, 25 December 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 20 [C. 393], pp. 487–500.

employer-inspired labor codes.⁵⁷ Des Voeux recommended creation of a new independent court system to deal with labor cases and an independent government-paid medical service. Improved justice, Des Voeux argued, could help avert a blood bath.⁵⁸

Despite opposition from the West India lobby at home,⁵⁹ the Liberal Government sent Royal Investigatory Commissions to both Guiana and Mauritius. They reasoned quite simply that local justice had once again failed, and stability was threatened. Lord Kimberley, the Liberal Colonial Secretary, warned that while investigations themselves ran the risk of exciting the “overexcitable” black and brown laboring classes, it was “even more dangerous to allow them [the laborers]...any grounds for supposing that complaints respecting their condition or the administration of justice are left unnoticed by Her Majesty’s Government.” Moreover, the Colonial Office was concerned that the planters might use a failure to investigate these allegations as proof that there was no ground for dissatisfaction with existing arrangements. Finally, and if for no other reason, these reports had to be taken seriously because the government of India threatened to end coolie emigration to colonies suspected of ill treatment.⁶⁰ London was certain that “many evils and abuses would be found.”⁶¹

While commissioners gathered evidence in Guiana and Mauritius, immigration officers in each sugar colony gained full authority to remove indentured labor from plantations not meeting minimum standards for working conditions, food, housing, and medical care.⁶² With London’s support, colonial Governors went much further with reforms touching laborers. In Jamaica Governor John Peter Grant created a new system of district courts under Crown control with special powers over labor cases. Jamaica also abolished imprisonment for debt and reformed local government to reduce corruption. In the Leeward Islands in 1869, Governor Benjamin Pine implemented a Federation Scheme that promised improved justice through a federal “circuit court of highly qualified judges” empowered to grant changes of venue when local prejudice or planter power

⁵⁷Des Voeux to Granville, 25 December 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871 vol. 20 [C. 393], pp. 487–500; and George William Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service in British Guiana, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Fiji, Australia, New Foundland, and Hong Kong*, 2 vols. (London, 1903), 1: 119–121.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹West India Committee to Granville, 24 May 1870, C.O. 318/258.

⁶⁰Colonial Office to Governors Gordon, Pine, Rushworth, Scott, Rawson, and Grant, 27 May 1870, C.O. 318/259; and India Office to Colonial Office, 28 October 1872, C.O. 882/2.

⁶¹Rogers to MacGregor, 31 May 1870, C.O. 318/258; and Kimberley to Gordon, 19 January 1872, Kimberley Papers, G-130.

⁶²Murdock to Rogers, 26 January and 16 February 1870, C.O. 318/259.

threatened justice.⁶³ Similar reforms were undertaken in Mauritius and the other sugar colonies in the 1870s. Local magnates resisted in some places, leaving laborers the impression that the planters would block their access to improved justice in order to “ride them down by the hand of oppression.” However, the push for reform soon produced evidence enough that the lower classes now looked upon Crown officials “as more friendly to them than the planting body.”⁶⁴ This, after all, was the practical objective of the policy of “justice to the darker races.”

One of the most interesting and surprising expansions of state activity that came in the wake of these investigations was the creation of government health services in the coolie importing colonies. Governor Grant of Jamaica created the model followed in many colonies. Grant placed plantation medical officers on government payroll. This removed the profit motive and brought responsibility for coolie health directly into the government’s hands. The reformed Jamaican system also required partial payment of plantation wages in the form of daily food rations.⁶⁵ Government intervention like this was unprecedented at home.

Even though the Liberals sought to build colonial social peace through fairer systems of justice, they were still quite sure that police and armed forces were also required. British experience in India and Ireland reinforced these conclusions. In the non-white Empire, Arthur Mills was sure that “when our scepter can no longer be supported by our sword, the days of our dominion...will be numbered.” James Fitzjames Stephen, a member of the Indian Viceroy’s Council from 1869–72, compared the British position in India to a bridge over which natives passed from brute violence to peace and industry. One pier supporting that bridge was justice; the other was military power.⁶⁶

Informed by personal experience in Ireland, Lord Kimberley at the Colonial Office preached repression of crime as “a duty which must be discharged at any cost,” even if it risked “violating the constitutional liberties” of subject

⁶³Granville to Pine, 21 June 1869 and 16 May 1870, and Pine to Granville, 11 December 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C. 353], pp. 629, 634, and 666; and *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 3rd ser. vol. 106 (19 May 1871): 1024.

⁶⁴Pine to Granville, 23 March 1870, Petition to Kimberley 24 August 1870, and Pine to Kimberley, 12 December 1870, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C. 353] pp. 654–60, 664, and 673–74.

⁶⁵Grant to Granville, 19 December 1869, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C.334], pp. 7–8; “Thirtieth General Report of the Emigration Commission, 1870,” *ibid.*, 1870. vol. 17 [C. 196], 139–46; and “Thirty-First General Report of the Emigration Commission, 1871,” *ibid.*, 1871, vol. 20 [C. 369], 355–59.

⁶⁶Mills, “Our Colonial Policy,” 217; *The Times* (London), 4 January 1878, quoted in D. A. Low, *Lion Rampant: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism* (London, 1973), p.55.

peoples, as did the Liberals' suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland at this time. "We want Thor's hammer for the purpose,"⁶⁷ wrote Kimberley. He urged that natives be made to understand that Britain "was strong enough to avenge any atrocity committed on its subjects." For Kimberley, just laws could have no healing effect "unless outrages and disturbances were stopped by stern law enforcement."⁶⁸ Progress and police work went hand-in-hand.

Colonial Governors in the sugar colonies echoed these views. Grant in Jamaica believed that restored law and order would "make economic vigor in the future sure." In the Leewards, Governor Benjamin Pine was certain that "strong government...fair and prompt administration of justice, and...full and complete protection of the lives and properties of subjects" was "so necessary, so absolutely essential, to give confidence to capital enterprise."⁶⁹

High costs and predictable political controversies meant that actual resort to blood letting held few attractions. Nonetheless, the 1869 Reil Rebellion in Manitoba and the Ashantee War in 1873–74 prove the Liberals' willingness to use force when challenged in colonial settings. Kimberley particularly seemed ready to do so. When apprised of election riots in Quebec in 1872, Kimberley could not understand "for the life of me...why the authorities did not order the Police, and if necessary the Soldiers to fire at the mob point blank" when the first shot rang from the crowd. When it came to firearms Kimberley wanted "to teach a mob at once that disciplined men can use them best."⁷⁰ If authority was challenged, effective demonstrations of power were required to recover lost prestige. A swift—rather than delayed—show of force was thought most humane and less costly in lives and money. Delay in punishment would only embolden challengers. This was especially true for peoples whom Liberals like Kimberley stigmatized as racially excitable, impulsive, and peculiarly susceptible to mob psychology and panic.⁷¹ Even John Bright, a moralistic Quaker and the most

⁶⁷Thor's hammer was the lightning rod, a symbol of justice, see Kimberley Diary, 9 February 1871, Kimberley Papers, A-3. Kimberley's personal diary now available in his private papers at the Bodleian contains many comments not published in the *Journal* below which he apparently intended for publication.

⁶⁸John, first Earl of Kimberley, *A Journal of Events During the Gladstone Ministry 1868–1874*, ed. Ethel Drus, The Camden Miscellany, vol. 21 (London, 1958), 14 December 1869, and 2 March 1870, pp. 10 and 12; and *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords) 3rd ser., vol. 200 (20 March 1870): 817–21, vol. 206 (2 May 1871): 1–14, and vol. 214 (June 1873): 628–29.

⁶⁹*The Times* (London), 28 October 1868; and Pine to the Legislative Assembly of Nevis, 1 December 1870, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C. 353], pp. 678–79.

⁷⁰Kimberley to Dufferin, 28 August 1872, Kimberley Papers, G-119.

⁷¹Kimberley to Gladstone, 18 August 1873, and 27 May 1874, Gladstone Papers, Add. Mss. 44225, 80 and 150–53; Kimberley to Goschen, 12 September 1873, and Cardwell to Goschen, 12 September 1873, quoted in Arthur D. Elliot, *The Life of George Joachim Goschen 1831–1902*, 2 vols. (London, 1911), 2: 122–24; and *The Times* (London) 25 September 1873.

squeamish Liberal in Gladstone's cabinet, held that demonstrations of force among such people might be mercy to them.⁷²

Short of its actual use, the mere presence of armed force was thought to exert a beneficial "moral influence" with colored races, who were believed especially impressed with the "signs and symbols of authority." Kimberley argued that adequate displays of force to subject peoples would prevent disorders from occurring in the first place.⁷³ Therefore, the West Indies and Mauritius were granted exemption from the Liberals' imperial military reorganization program of the 1870s, which aimed to concentrate British power in Europe through removing troops from outlying areas. Despite the recognition that except for Bermuda there was "no strictly imperial ground for stationing troops in any part of the West Indies," seven white regiments, two black regiments, and two artillery batteries were left there. Hereafter, these troops were deployed in the islands in patterns designed primarily for response to domestic disturbances.⁷⁴ Similar concerns about internal control left 1,100 imperial troops on station in Mauritius, although the colonists had to pay nearly half their cost.⁷⁵

Imperial troops constituted "signs and symbols" of British control, but local police forces made that authority effective in the day-to-day lives of colonists. The 1869 Guiana coolie disturbances led to the immediate diversion of \$40,000 from the colony's immigration fund toward the expense of a new police force.⁷⁶ Colonial police reform was a high priority from 1868-74. Its emphasis was improved discipline and control. Once again, Jamaica led the way. Here in 1869 Governor Grant centralized police administration and constituted a new rural police force under direct Crown control.⁷⁷ A year later on Nevis in the Leeward Islands, planter resistance to Governor Pine's push for federation proved the unreformed local police forces unreliable in face of planter terror and coercion. From the perspective of social peace, the Leewards' federation plan held the

⁷²James L. Sturgis, *John Bright and the Empire* (London, 1969), p. 40.

⁷³Wodehouse to Ripon, 17 January 1866, Ripon Papers, British Library, London, Add. Mss. 43522/ff. 93-95; See also opinion to this effect in J. Spedding, "The Future of the British Empire," *Westminster Review* 38 (July 1870): 58-60; and *The Times* (London), 4 November and 13 November 1865.

⁷⁴Grant to Major General O'Connor, 17 August 1869, C.O. 137/443; Lowe to Cardwell, 9 November 1870, Cardwell Papers, The Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, P.R.O. 30/48/22; Colonial Office to War Office, 19 April 1873, C.O. 318/272; and Kimberley Minute 25 May 1873, C.O. 318/272.

⁷⁵Barkly to Buckingham, 16 November 1868, Barkly to Granville, 29 April 1869, and Storks to Sanford, 12 June 1869, C.O. 882/2.

⁷⁶Emigration Board to Governor Scott, 10 March 1870, and Murdock to Rogers, 24 August 1870, C.O. 318/259.

⁷⁷Hurwitz and Hurwitz, *Jamaica: A Historical Portrait*, pp. 180-81; and Gardner, *A History of Jamaica*, pp. 495-505.

advantage of creating a more efficient federal police force under Crown command, which could be concentrated quickly at any danger point. This was "a matter of no small moment" to the Liberal Colonial Secretary.⁷⁸ The Liberals also constituted new or reformed police forces in the Bahamas, Ceylon, and Hong Kong.⁷⁹

Among their duties, reformed, centrally-controlled police forces reached into the lives of the poor to enforce severe colonial vagrancy laws. In Guiana, coolie contract laborers caught without a pass more than two miles from their estate were subject to arrest without warrant. In Trinidad, arrest without warrant threatened any indentured worker "found in or upon any public highway or street, or on any land or house, not being the land or house of his employer" without his employer's signed permission.⁸⁰

In Mauritius the law required even free, non-indentured Indians to carry a police pass with identifying photograph. Loss of the police pass incurred fines equal to two months' average wages. Failure to obtain a pass made Indians automatically vagrant and subject to imprisonment at hard labor for twenty-eight days on the first conviction and nine months on subsequent convictions. Still further, the right to work as a free laborer in Mauritius required purchase of an annual license—the cost of which was £1, or almost two months' pay. Heavy fines, arrest as a vagrant, or confinement until an employer could be found awaited those caught working without licenses. Moreover, the Mauritian law demanded police notification of changes of employer or any travel outside one's district of residence.⁸¹

The Mauritian laws are notable because they applied to all of the Indian population whether free or indentured. By 1870 Indians made up sixty-eight percent of that island's population.⁸² Elsewhere, vagrancy statutes more often singled out indentured coolies alone. Despite the fact that Indian government officials labeled vagrancy laws in Trinidad, Mauritius, and British Guiana "harsh and unjustifiable,"⁸³ the Liberals in London let them stand unchanged.

⁷⁸Granville to Pine, 21 June 1869 and 16 May 1870, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C.353], pp. 629 and 666; Pine to Granville, 11 December 1869, *ibid.*, 634; Pine to Kimberley, 12 December 1870, *ibid.*, 676–77; and *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 3rd ser., vol. 106 (19 May 1871): 1024.

⁷⁹Gregory to Kimberley, 14 November 1873, Kimberley Papers, G-132; James Pope-Hennessy, *Verandah, Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies, 1867–1889* (New York, 1964), pp. 184–85; and G. B. Endacott, *A History of Hong Kong* (London, 1958), p. 161.

⁸⁰Scott to Kimberley, 21 December 1871, C.O. 884/2.

⁸¹Gordon to Kimberley, 8 August 1871, C.O. 882/2.

⁸²Murdock to Colonial Office, 26 July 1872, C.O. 882/2; and P. J. Barnwell and A. Toussaint, *A Short History of Mauritius* (London, 1949), pp. 157–60.

⁸³Official Secretary to the Government of Bengal to Secretary to the Government of India, 7 May 1872, C.O. 882/2.

Hard coercion also typified laws governing an indentured laborer's breach of contract. Most colonies treated a worker's breach of contract as a criminal offense with penalties ranging from prison sentences to fines, loss of wages, prolonged indenture, or all four. By contrast, when planters failed to keep faith with workers, the matter was treated as strictly a civil rather than a criminal case. Thus, the planter's liability was limited to payment of rightful back wages with no punitive threats at all comparable to the criminal fines or imprisonment imposed on laborers for like breaches of contract.⁸⁴

That Gladstone's government supported labor laws of such an intrusive, and illiberal nature illustrates the limitations of the English Liberals' concept of limited government. The private lives of dark-skinned laborers certainly constituted no sacred boundary beyond which government should not intrude. For the Liberals social necessity was ample justification for all sorts of government meddling. For the poor, freedom was safe only within narrow limits. Thus, Bishop Vincent Ryan of Mauritius urged stringent regulation of even non-indentured coolies as necessary "to develop anything like civilization and industry amongst them." He argued that high Indian crime rates justified the tough labor laws, and pointed to the parallels between the Mauritian coolies and "Her Majesty's subjects in England" who were "liable to be taken up by the police if they are not able to give account of themselves and their means of subsistence." Arthur Hamilton Gordon, a Liberal governor who earned high marks for reforms in Trinidad and Mauritius, found no fault with the stringency of the Mauritian vagrancy laws, but instead objected to the fact that they applied only to coolies and not to the creole and black populations of the island who were "neither less idle, vicious, or lawless, than the Indian."⁸⁵ Similarly, when a local Chief Justice ruled that breach of contract could no longer be treated as a criminal offense in British Guiana, Emigration Commissioner T. W. C. Murdock showed no rejoicing for the coolies. Instead Murdock found the laws "defensible as a matter of local necessity," and lamented the negative effect that employers' loss of these deterrents would have on the colony's prosperity.⁸⁶

London never challenged these views. Disciplined—even coerced—labor and leisure had their place in the civilizing mission that was part of the Liberals' approach to empire. The argument of "local necessity" satisfied the Colonial Office that, in the main, colonial vagrancy laws should be left alone. The only modifications the Colonial Office urged were for married women unlawfully

⁸⁴Gordon to Kimberley, 8 August 1871, C.O. 882/2; and Scott to Kimberley, 21 December 1871, C.O. 884/2.

⁸⁵Ryan to Kimberley, 8 February 1872, C.O. 882/2; and Gordon to Kimberley, 14 November 1871 and 9 February 1872, C.O. 882/2.

⁸⁶Murdock to Rogers, 18 January 1868, C.O. 318/252; Murdock to Colonial Office, 10 January 1872, C.O. 882/2; and Kimberley to Gordon, 16 December 1871, C.O. 882/2.

absenting themselves from work due to pregnancy and child care, in which case imprisonment seemed inhumane.⁸⁷

Moreover, women themselves were thought beneficial to promoting social order, because they were believed to have a civilizing effect on male laborers. In the mid 1860s the Colonial Office forced labor recruiters to increase to at least forty percent the female-to-male ratio in shipments of immigrant coolie labor to the sugar colonies. Throughout the Gladstone era, the Colonial Office upheld this requirement despite pressure for its reduction from colonial agents, the Emigration Commission, and even the Government of India.⁸⁸ The Colonial Office held that shortages of coolie women in the sugar colonies increased crime rates, including the "ferocity and frequency of murders." Moreover, "raising the social condition of the people" was more difficult where women were few.⁸⁹ Conversely, greater numbers of women would diminish crime and tend to produce "industrious, well-conducted and peaceable" laborers and "good subjects of India on their return to their native country." A secondary hope was that Indian men with families would be more likely to stay in the colonial labor force rather than go back to India at the end of their indenture. Greater numbers of women would thus reduce immigration expenses and make production more profitable. Both of Gladstone's Colonial Secretaries successfully pressed to maintain "as high a proportion of females as possible" in the coolie immigration to British colonies.⁹⁰

Humanitarian groups such as the Anti-Slavery Society condemned the entire indentured labor system both for its abuse of coolies and for its ill effects on the freed black laboring classes of the sugar colonies. "The sole object and chief effect of coolie immigration," according to the Society, was to depress the wages of black native labor. Especially it objected to financing coolie immigration from general revenues that were raised through regressive colonial tax structures. By falling heavily on the poor, such taxes forced the black man to subsidize his own labor competition.⁹¹

⁸⁷Circular Despatch to West Indian Colonies, 8 February 1870, C.O. 318/259.

⁸⁸Murdock to Elliot, 21 October 1868, C.O. 318/252; Rogers Minute on Murdock to Rogers, 31 October 1868, C.O. 318/252; Colonial Office Circular to Coolie Importing Colonies, 1 February 1869, C.O. 318/255; and Colonial Office to India Office, 2 October 1870, C.O. 318/259.

⁸⁹Secretary of State's Minute on Murdock to Rogers, 31 October 1868, C.O. 318/252; Sturge to Normandy, 17 April 1871, Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Mss. Br. Emp. S22/G101A; and Bishop Ryan to Kimberley, 8 February 1872, C.O. 882/2.

⁹⁰Colonial Office to Emigration Commission, 2 December 1868, C.O. 318/252.

⁹¹Statement by Deputation of the Anti-Slavery Society to Governor J.P. Grant, 8 June 1870, and Minutes, 6 December 1872, Minutebook, Anti Slavery Society Papers, Mss. Br. Emp. S20/E2/9; Clarke to Grant, 28 March and 28 April 1873, Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Mss. Br. Emp. S22/G65; and *The Times* (London) 16 February 1874.

Colonial officials recognized that unfair tax structures could exacerbate social conflicts,⁹² but the Liberals also placed a premium on colonial governments' paying for themselves. The unreformed, pre-1865 West Indian assemblies had created the pattern of subsidized immigrant labor and regressive taxation. By forcing wages down and food prices up they aimed to drive free blacks to plantation work.⁹³ Gladstone's cabinet did not reverse this pattern once the Crown gained effective power. The Colonial Office had no real objections to taxing the poor heavily, so long as the proceeds of the taxation were used to educate, civilize, and "promote their welfare in all ways possible."⁹⁴ New government investment in schools, roads, sanitation, and medical services more obviously fit this rationale than did subsidized coolie immigration.

Reform and spending priorities in the West Indies and Mauritius reveal much about real world limits to the Liberals' quest for the minimalist state so idealized in nineteenth-century laissez-faire theory. More importantly, this array of activist initiatives demonstrates the real strength of the Liberal commitment to the Empire. For strategic reasons London had determined to keep the sugar colonies going. Schools, churches, police, and courts—benevolent ends in themselves to humanitarians—would help save the home government from costly and embarrassing colonial social turmoil. Similarly, no foreign threat dictated continued imperial troop deployments in the West Indies beyond Bermuda. Deterrence of local outbreaks was accepted as reason enough for the troops to stay on at London's expense.

In practice, the Liberal social reforms created a more judicious mix of benevolent versus coercive tools to diminish the risk of future upheavals. Crown Colony government made this shift in emphasis possible. Disestablishment of the Anglican Church removed a bitterly divisive issue from West Indian society, while concurrent endowment of all denominations enabled governments to continue supporting religious outreach in hopes that the multiplication of faith would increase personal moral restraint and promote social peace. However, government religious policy was blind to the serious implications of subsidizing Christian sects while promoting the importation of large numbers of East Indian Hindu and Muslim laborers.

In the schools the benefits of the new government activist reforms flowed equally to both sides in the imperial relationship. Using the new Crown ability

⁹²Pine to Granville, 23 March 1870, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871, vol. 48 [C. 353], p. 664.

⁹³*The Times* (London), 15 June 1868 and 18 July 1868; Gordon to Gladstone, 3 May 1871, *Gladstone-Gordon Correspondence*, ed. Knaplund, p. 46. Gordon was "appalled" at Mauritius' taxation, which fell "almost wholly on the poor" while the rich were "pretty nearly exempted from taxation."

⁹⁴Taylor Minute, 14 July 1869, on Cairns to Pine, 28 June 1869, C.O. Files, St. Christopher, C.O. 239/121; and Taylor Minute on Grant to Granville, 23 July 1869, C.O. 137/442.

to overpower the planting interests, which suspected that education spoiled a man for field work, imperial education initiatives held the promise of promoting social order while multiplying marketable skills and opportunities for the colonial population. If fault is to be found with sugar colony education efforts, it is in the comparatively low proportion of available resources allocated to schools, rather than in the intention behind the investment that was made. Similarly, the trend toward government take-overs of health services for indentured laborers was of definite potential benefit to the laborer and removed one of the principle causes of criminal breach of contract prosecutions. While the indentured labor system itself was morally objectionable in the extreme, Crown efforts to increase the proportion of women in the flow of indentured labor were well warranted both from the standpoint of the intrinsic needs of immigrant workers and from the perspective of promoting social peace. Moreover, reformed, centrally-controlled police forces and reformed courts promised greater fairness in law enforcement and thus held the potential to deter violence and contribute to basic public order and security.

However, local interests and humanitarian concerns were clearly subordinate. The preeminence of imperial rather than local interests is best demonstrated in the retention and further development of the indentured coolie labor system. The maze of harsh personal restrictions and regulations to which coolie indentured workers continued to be subjected counter-balanced the positive effects of police and court reform and guaranteed periodic riots and disturbances. However inhumane, Whitehall let the oppressive labor codes stand. Subsidized immigrant labor taxed the poor disproportionately and made a volatile ethnic and racial mix more so. Yet Liberal policy-makers accepted the necessity of indentured labor and never once seem to have questioned its wisdom. Government-financed indentured labor propped up the inefficient plantation economies, which London believed it must save if colonial governments were to come close to being self-financing. Saving the plantation offered policymakers hope for keeping these strategic assets with minimum expense to the taxpayers at home. In this, the black man and the Indian coolie were manipulated to serve world power objectives far beyond their range of understanding. No squeamish "little Englandism" is to be found in Liberal policy toward these colonies. Guided by an enduring vision of the strategic value of their bankrupt sugar colonies, Gladstone's first government undertook a host of activist reform programs aimed at consolidating the British hold. In all of this, the "civilizing mission" served the larger imperial purpose.