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Mr. INSKIP

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asked the Lord Privy Seal whether his attention has been called to the publication of a letter alleged to have been written by the Admiralty on 8th October, 1921, informing Lieut.-Commander Haslewood that the action of the Admiralty in requiring him to restrain his wife from making efforts to secure the abolition of the system of mui tsai was taken at the instigation of the Governor of Hong Kong; whether Lieut.-Commander Haslewood was afterwards retired from the Navy and whether, in view of the decision of the Government and of the proclamation of the Governor of Hong Kong prohibiting mui tsai on the ground that slavery is not allowed in the British Empire, the Government will take steps to repair the injury which Lieut.-Commander Haslewood has suffered and to withdraw the expression of displeasure which he received?

Mr. AMERY

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I have been asked to reply, but as the answer to this question is a long one, perhaps it would be for the convenience of hon. Members if I circulated it in the OFFICIAL REPORT.

Mr. INSKIP

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I do not know why the answer should be a long one. I asked a very definite question, as to whether the Government will take steps to repair the injury which Lieut. - Commander Haslewood has suffered.

Mr. SPEAKER

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I think the hon. Member representing the Admiralty might read the answer. It seems to be a matter of general interest to the house.

Mr. AMERY

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I am aware of the publication of the letter referred to, but my hon. and learned Friend seriously misquotes it. The Admiralty did not, and could not, take any action in requiring Lieut.-Commander Haslewood to restrain his wife, since the Admiralty had no knowledge whatever of the incidents referred to in the question until after Lieut.-Commander Haslewood had returned from Hong Kong to England at his own request. The facts, so far as we have been able to ascertain them, are that the Governor asked the Naval

Authorities at Hong Kong to induce Lieut.-Commander Haslewood to restrain his wife from propaganda which, in the opinion of the Governor, was being conducted on injudicious lines. As was quite proper, in view of such a request made by the officer responsible for the government of the Colony, the Naval Commander-in-Chief interviewed Lieut.-Commander Haslewood, who, however, was not willing to use his influence as suggested. Before the Commander-in-Chief had decided to take any steps officially, Mrs. Haslewood became seriously ill, and Lieut.-Commander Haslewood applied to return to England, which application was granted in order that he might proceed home with his wife. It is not the case that Lieut.-Commander Haslewood was afterwards retired from the Navy. He had

retired some years previously, and was only re-employed temporarily owing to the War, and his re-employment, like that of other re-employed officers, was about to terminate owing to the return of peace conditions. So far as the Admiralty are concerned, Lieut.-Commander Haslewood has suffered no injury and has received no expression of displeasure.

I would add that the opening Clause of the last part of the question misrepresents the terms of the Proclamation in question, which read as follows:

“Slavery is not allowed to exist in the British Empire, and therefore it must be understood that *mui tsai* are not the property of their employers.”

Mr. INSKIP

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Is it to be understood that the Governor of Hong Kong is at liberty to request a British lady, whether she is the wife of a British officer or not, to refrain from opposing something which is inconsistent with the constitution of the British nation; and is it right that a British officer should be liable to be visited with the displeasure, or something equivalent to the displeasure, of their Lordships at the Admiralty, because he has a wife who is public-spirited enough to advocate the abolition of something inconsistent with the British Constitution?

Sir J. D. REES

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Is there any obligation, expressed or implied, lying on the Government of Hong Kong to respect the laws and customs of the Chinese, who are the immense majority of the inhabitants?

Mr. AMERY

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I am afraid I am not able to deal with the second supplementary question. As regards the first, I can only repeat what I have said, that the officer in question did not incur in any way the official displeasure of the Admiralty, and I presume the Governor of any Colony is entitled to express his views as to the judiciousness or otherwise of propaganda, which, however well intentioned, may possibly be likely to create trouble in a community of a very different character from our own.

Mr. INSKIP

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As the hon. Gentleman has charged me with seriously misquoting a letter, may I ask my hon. Friend whether this is a correct transcription of the letter which the Admiralty wrote to Lieut.-Commander Haslewood:

“As regards the interference with your wife's actions in Hong Kong, such action was taken by the naval authorities to induce you to restrain your wife from interfering publicly in a controversial matter.”

And was that controversial matter the question as to whether the system of *mui tsai* was consistent with the adopted principles of the British Empire, namely, that slavery is not allowed in the Empire?

Mr. AMERY

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That is entirely consistent with the answer I have given. I have said that no steps were taken against the officer, who, of his own accord, asked to be transferred home.

Colonel WEDGWOOD

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Are we to understand that it is in order for a Governor of any Crown Colony to approach either an Army or a Navy commander in that Colony with a view to interfering with the action of the wife of a subordinate officer?

Mr. SPEAKER

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It seems to me that the initiative in this case was with the Governor. Any further questions on this point should, therefore, be addressed to the Colonial Office.

Colonel WEDGWOOD

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Then I will address my question to the Colonial Office.

Lieut.-Colonel J. WARD

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I would like to ask my hon. Friend whether he does not think, in view of the general feeling of the country relating to this connection of our administration with what is definitely slavery, that an apology is due to this young officer from his Department?

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There, again, I think, from the information now given to the House, that further questions should be addressed to the Colonial Office.

Captain W. BENN

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On a point of Order. May I draw attention to the fact that what is complained of is not only the initiative taken, but the action taken on that initiative by the Admiralty, so that this question is properly one for the Admiralty?

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This question was quite correctly put to the Admiralty, but it is now a question of an apology asked for, and it seems to me that that is a question which should be put to the Department responsible for the initiative.

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May I respectfully call attention to the fact that I took the course, rightly or wrongly, of putting the question to the, Lord Privy Seal on the ground that this is a question as to whether the Government should take action overriding the executive administration, both of the Admiralty and of the Colonial Office, and was not that a proper course to take?

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Yes, I think it was, and, perhaps, if the hon. and learned Member will put a further question to the Prime Minister, both Departments would be able to take the responsibility for the answer.

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I will adopt your suggestion, Sir, and put a further question, in the hope of eliciting a better answer.

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If I may by permission intervene, the general practice is that in these questions addressed to the Prime Minister and myself, if we think they are of a Departmental character, we ask the Minister of the Department, who will naturally be much more cognisant of the details, to answer them, and that course we pursued here; but after what has happened, I will make it my business to endeavour to secure an answer to the next question put by my hon. and learned Friend.

Rear-Admiral Sir R. HALL

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Is the House to understand that the Admiralty made no official communication at all to Lieut.-Commander Haslewood or was any official communication made by the Commander-in-Chief?

Mr. AMERY

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As I understand the position, the Commander-in-Chief raised the question with Lieut.-Commander Haslewood as to whether his wife's conduct was judicious or not, but nothing further happened because Lieut.-Commander Haslewood, owing to the state of his wife's health, asked to be transferred.

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Was this case reported by the Commander-in-Chief to the Admiralty, and did the Admiralty send any official despatch on the subject to the Commander-in-Chief which was in part or in whole communicated to Lieut.-Commander Haslewood?

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Hong Kong (Lieut-Commander Haslewood)

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