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HONG KONG (LIEUT.-COMMANDER HASLEWOOD).

HC Deb 29 May 1922 vol 154 cc1678-80

[Thomas Inskip, Austen Chamberlain (Pilgrims Society). (May 29, 1922). HONG KONG (LIEUT.-COMMANDER HASLEWOOD), Colonial Office, HC Deb 29 May 1922 vol 154 cc1678-80. UK Parliament, Hansard. Reproduced for educational purposes only. Fair Use relied upon. Source: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1922/may/29/hong-kong-lieut-commander-haslewood>]

44. *Mr. INSKIP* asked the Lord Privy Seal whether he is aware that the Governor of Hong Kong requested the Naval Authorities at Hong Kong to restrain the wife of Lieut.-Commander Haslewood, then superintendent of the chart department, from advocating publicly the prohibition of the mui tsai system, and that the Commander-in-Chief thereupon tried to bring pressure to bear upon Mrs. Haslewood, through her husband, to desist from her public advocacy of a Measure which has now been substantially adopted by His Majesty's Government, as evidenced by the proclamation in Hong Kong that slavery is not allowed to exist in the British Empire and that, therefore, the mui tsai are not the property of their owners: and whether, in view of all the circumstances, the Government can make some amends both to Lieut.-Commander Haslewood and to Mrs. Haslewood.

[The pawing of young Chinese girls into forced labor and sex slavery under the ruse of "adoption" and "relief from poverty."]

Mr. CHAMBERLAIN I had better first state the facts as far as I have been able to ascertain them. According to the Governor's report, his attention was drawn to the fact that Mrs. Haslewood was at that time conducting her campaign, which included allegations of widespread cruelty to mui tsai, in terms which gave much annoyance to the Chinese community. The Chinese have a great regard for official position, and when an officer's wife, with the encouragement of her husband, made attacks of this character, the Governor considered that there was a danger that they might get the impression that the Government approved the terms which were employed, and that thus a state of ill-feeling towards the British Government would be created which would be highly undesirable, especially in view of the unsettled state of South China. A Governor is both entitled and bound to do all he can to restrain persons from acting in a manner likely to disturb the peace of the colony for which he is responsible. In these circumstances the Governor had decided to ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies to request the Admiralty to move Lieut.-Commander Haslewood to another station, but on further consideration, not wishing to damage Lieut.-Commander Haslewood's professional prospects, he communicated privately with the Commodore on the subject, suggesting that he should ask Lieut.-Commander Haslewood to restrain his wife from taking part in a public controversy affecting racial questions and customs and stirring strong and dangerous feeling in the Chinese community.

The Commodore, and subsequently the Commander-in-Chief, interviewed Lieut.-Commander Haslewood, and the Commander-in-Chief informed him that if he wished to continue his campaign he ought to resign his official appointment in the Dockyard. In the meantime, Mrs. Haslewood was taken to hospital, and her condition was such that the doctors had the gravest doubts as to her recovery if she did not leave the Colony at once. The Commander-in-Chief accordingly informed Lieut.-Commander Haslewood that he was prepared to allow him to proceed home with his wife and to replace him in the Chart Office by another officer. Lieut.-Commander Haslewood accepted this offer, and on returning home gave as his reason for leaving the Chart Depot: "I applied to proceed on urgent private affairs. This was approved by the Commander-in-Chief, China Station."

Lieut.-Commander Haslewood was a retired officer who had volunteered for service during the War. About the time of his leaving Hong Kong, the War being over, the Admiralty were reverting such officers to the retired list, and they were being warned in advance of the likelihood of their being relieved at an early date by active service officers as opportunity offered. Object of this warning was to give these officers as much notice as possible of the impending change. Lieut.-Commander Haslewood knew that this was the Admiralty policy at the time, though it is doubtful if the warning reached him before he left Hong Kong. It will be seen that the naval authorities acted at the request of the Governor, and the Governor seems to have shown all possible consideration in the performance of what he felt to be his duty to the Colony. Lieut.-Commander Haslewood suffered no injury to his professional career, and the Admiralty did not at any time express displeasure at his conduct.

I wish to make it quite clear that there has not at any time been any suggestion that Lieut.-Commander Haslewood and Mrs. Haslewood acted from any but the highest motives.

Sir J. D. REES Is not the Proclamation of the Governor a spirited negation of self-determination, seeing that the British are a mere handful among half a million of Chinese?



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CHILD SLAVERY UNDER BRITISH RULE.

By H. L. HASLEWOOD,
Lieut-Commander R.N. (retired).

It is high time that the British public were fully informed of the abominable system of child-slavery which prevails in the Crown Colony of Hong Kong.

For nearly a hundred years this island, with its 200,000 Chinese inhabitants, has been under our rule. There are now some 6,000 Europeans, and the island is controlled by the Governor and a Legislative Council. When I was acting as Superintendent of the Admiralty Chart Depot there in 1919 my wife and I were horrified by the screams of a child which came during the evening from a Chinese house.

As a result of our efforts to make inquiries we came to the conclusion that this must be one of those cases of slavery which we had heard darkly hinted at. When I reported the case to the police I was told that it was "probably a slave girl." My wife immediately began investigations, and these revealed to us the fact, which had indeed already been discussed in a sermon by the British chaplain, that each Chinese house in the Colony had one or more girls virtually in a position of slavery. The custom is called adoption, but money payments are usually made, and in the majority of cases the girls become household drudges and worse. As the result of our action I relinquished my appointment, and step by step have forced the Colonial Office to admit the material fact in this grave indictment of British honour.

Slave Brokers.

A reply recently given by the Colonial Office to questions regarding the buying and selling of children in Hong Kong was as follows:

Buying and selling of human beings does not take place openly in Hong Kong. A custom does exist there, as elsewhere in China, by which, in return for a money payment, girls are transferred by their parents or natural guardians to the care of another household, usually for the purpose of domestic service, though the transaction is described by the Chinese as a form of adoption.

Outside official circles it is hard to believe that anyone can distinguish the difference between the transfer of a girl for a money payment and actual buying and selling.

Sheltering under this custom, the most revolting abuses in the traffic of girls and children are openly carried out. Go-betweens or brokers are employed for the sale and purchase of these unfortunate girls, and the fact that large numbers are sold into the local houses of ill-fame, and are shipped overseas for the same purpose, is perfectly well known to the whole shipping community.

Sold "in Marriage."

The "Hong Kong Weekly Press" of March 12, 1921, writes as follows:

We have heard one of the leading Chinese residents of Hong Kong express the opinion that fully 90 per cent. of the children bought in the Colony are bought really as a commercial speculation.

They are purchased at a very tender age for a few dollars, "trained to domestic service" for a few years, and sold in marriage perhaps for many times the original purchase price.

In circumstances like these it will instantly be recognised that the system is open to great abuse, especially in the case of children who fail to develop personal attractions which enhance their marketable value.

An astounding feature of the case is that the above practice has been definitely announced as illegal in China itself, and that the Colonial Office are fully aware of this fact, but in spite of this no steps are taken to abolish the practice in Hong Kong.

Burns and Bruises.

Revolting cases of brutal ill-treatment were brought before the Hong Kong magistracy on July 15 and August 3 of last year, when two girls were taken to the hospital covered with burns and bruises from head to foot as a result of the treatment they had received from their purchasers. On January 24 and on Jan 25 of this year, and also on Feb. 7, three small girl children were taken to hospital in the same condition. One of them while sick (as her mistress admitted) had been beaten and kicked about, and bore the marks of a rattan cane. To quote the exact words, "she was literally covered with bruises caused by some blunt, rough instrument."

The following case shows that the buying and selling is by no means confined to adoption and domestic service, as the Colonial Office would have us believe:

On December the 5th, 1920, a Chinese woman was charged with obtaining by false pretences the sum of thirty dollars. The evidence showed that she arranged for the sale of her sister as a concubine.

As is usual in these cases, incredible as it may seem, no exception was taken to the buying and selling, but only to the question of false pretences, the woman having represented her sister as being unmarried.

Babies' Burdens.

A case came before the courts recently in which tiny children aged 11 and 13 were found to be carrying weights of 60lb. up the steep hill of the Peak, Hong Kong.

Arising from this case questions in the House of Commons elicited the fact that there are no regulations in Hong Kong controlling the amount of work which a child may be called upon to do, nor any limit of hours for which a child may be called upon to work; and, further, that a resolution carried unanimously at a meeting of the Sanitary Board in Hong Kong in May, 1919, calling for by-laws prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 14 in factories or workshops for more than 10 hours in any one day was rejected.

It is intolerable that such a state of slavery should exist in a British colony, where a British Governor rules practically without check, and it would appear that nothing but public opinion is likely to effect any real or lasting reform.

TRANSCRIPTION:

H.L. Haslewood, Lieut-Commander, Royal Navy (ret.). (May 11, 1921). CHILD SLAVERY UNDER BRITISH RULE. Hong Kong Daily News, London Daily News.

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Hong Kong (Mui Tsai)

Volume 224: debated on Monday 4 February 1929

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17.

Mr. L'ESTRANGE MALONE

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asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is aware that a petition has been presented to the Governor of Hong Kong by British and Chinese subjects, praying that a declaration may be issued of personal freedom for all mui tsai on their reaching the age of 18 years; and whether, seeing that the Colonial Secretary in 1922 gave instructions to the Governor that the system of mui tsai was to be abolished within 12 months, he is prepared to advise the Governor against issuing a declaration which would retain in bondage the mui tsai until the age of 18 years?

18.

Miss WILKINSON

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asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is aware that, in spite of the pledge given to Parliament in 1922 by the then Colonial Secretary that mui tsai slavery in Hong Kong should be abolished in one year, the number of girls in this position has actually increased; and whether he will take action to remove this evil?

20 and 21.

Mr. CECIL WILSON

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asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies (1) whether the mui tsai in Hong Kong have in the past received weekly wages; if so, what is the amount; whether any proposals have been made to the Governor on the matter; and, if so, what is their nature;

(2) whether, seeing that it is now more than six years since an undertaking was given to this House by the Colonial Secretary that the system known as mui tsai slavery in Hong Kong should be abolished within one year, his attention has been drawn to the fact that the system is still in full operation and that cruelty has increased; and what steps he proposes to take in the matter?

Mr. AMERY

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In pursuance of the undertaking by the then Secretary of State for Colonies on the 21st of March, 1922, an Ordinance was passed in Hong Kong on the 15th February, 1923, which declared the complete personal freedom of all mui tsai, and their unrestricted right to leave their employers if they so desired, prohibited the taking into employment of any fresh mui tsai after the Ordinance came into effect and made provision for the proper treatment of existing mui tsai who might continue in the service of their employers. I have

effect and made provision for the proper treatment of existing mui tsai who might continue in the service of their employers. I have recently called for a report on the working of the Ordinance, and I propose to defer any statement on the various points of detail which have been raised until that report is received.

Mr. MALONE

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Is it not the fact that the number of these mui tsai has increased from 8,000 to over 10,000 in this period; are they not being sold for money and employed without wages; and is it not time to bring into force legislation to prevent this slavery in the British Empire?

Mr. AMERY

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No, Sir. I have received no information bearing out all those statements, but I am anxious to get the fullest statement possible from the Governor.

Miss LAWRENCE

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Has the right hon. Gentleman seen the very alarming statements in the public Press; and will he take steps to contradict those statements?

Mr. AMERY

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Obviously, I can only contradict them after I have received full information from the Governor.

Mr. LOOKER

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Is it not the fact that this practice has been prevalent and recognised in China for thousands of years; and that the constant changes of population between the adjoining provinces and Hong Kong results in a great number of these girls coming from Canton and elsewhere, and that the practice is very difficult to check; and is not the real remedy for the difficulty that action should be taken by the Chinese authorities?

Viscountess ASTOR

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Have not some of us been writing every year to the Colonial Office about this, and does the right hon. Gentleman's Department not know about it, since there has been as much discontent regarding it on this side of the House as on the other? Even if it has been going on in China for thousands of years, why should it be continued under British administration, if it is possible to stop it?

Miss LAWRENCE

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When does the right hon. Gentleman hope to have full reports from the Governor?

Mr. AMERY

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I communicated with the Governor some time ago. I hope to receive his answer in the course of the next few weeks. With regard to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for South Eastern Essex (Mr. Looker), it is very probable that the large influx of Chinese families from the mainland may have included a considerable number of these girls, described as members of the families

families from the mainland may have included a considerable number of these girls, described as members of the families.

Mr. WILSON

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Why has the very specific declaration made in the House in 1922 not been complied with? The then Colonial Secretary said:

"Both I and the Governor are determined to effect the abolition of the system at the earliest practicable date, and I have indicated to the Governor that I expect the change to be carried out within a year."—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 21st March, 1922; col. 215, Volume 152.]”

Further, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Ordinance of that date provided for the Governor preparing and keeping a register; and has that been done?

Mr. AMERY

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The promise given by the then Secretary of State was fulfilled, and I have no reason to believe that the authorities of Hong Kong are not carefully watching any case of ill-treatment or any case of a girl who wishes to leave the family with which she is living. Obviously, nothing could be more cruel than to drive these girls out of the families in which they are living when they are, perhaps, separated by many hundreds of miles from their original homes in China.

Miss WILKINSON

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rose—

Mr. SPEAKER

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Any further questions on this subject should be put on the Paper.

Miss WILKINSON

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May I ask a supplementary question on question No. 18 which is in my name?

Mr. AMERY

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I was endeavouring to answer questions 17, 18, 20 and 21 together.

Mr. SPEAKER

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Then the hon. Lady may ask her supplementary question.

Miss WILKINSON

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In reference to the right hon. Gentleman's statement that the Hong Kong authorities are carefully watching this matter, is he aware that it is not so much a question of ill-treatment as of the system under which these girls are detained?

Mr. AMERY

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Everything has been done to make it clear to the girls that they are absolutely free, and in a great many cases, I think, they prefer to continue with a family with whom they have perhaps been living for a great many years.

Hansard

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Hong Kong (Mui Tsai)

Volume 224: debated on Monday 4 February 1929

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Sir R. THOMAS

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asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether he is aware that the Ordinance of 1922, which provided for the abolition of mui tsai slavery in Hong Kong within one year, is a dead letter; that the number of child slaves under this system actually shows an increase; and will he take immediate action in the matter?

Mr. AMERY

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I would refer the hon. Member to my oral reply made to-day to other questions on this subject.

Colonel WEDGWOOD

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asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies whether his attention has been called to the failure to implement the undertaking given to Parliament in 1922 that the system of girl-purchase known as mui tsai would be abolished within one year in Hong Kong; and will he explain the reasons for this?

Mr. AMERY

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I would refer the right hon. Member to my oral reply made today to other questions on this subject. I cannot agree that the undertaking given by Mr. Churchill in 1922 has not been implemented.