

## The Foreign Office and Forced Labour in Portuguese West Africa, 1894-1914

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Before the First World War the subject of slavery and forced labour in Portuguese West Africa, notably in the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe<sup>1</sup> located in the Gulf of Guinea close to the equator, attracted the attention of contemporary anti-slave campaigners and writers such as Henry Nevinson, the Reverend Charles Swan, John Harris, William Cadbury and Joseph Burrt.<sup>2</sup> Much later, Historians of Portuguese colonialism such as Richard Hammond, James Duffy and William Gervase Clarence-Smith focused their attention in the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s on slavery and forced labour in the Portuguese Empire with a largely Portuguese perspective.<sup>3</sup> James Duffy, in particular, concentrated on slavery and forced labour in Portuguese West Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in his book, *A Question of Slavery*, published in 1967, in which he paid some attention to the role of the Foreign Office, in particular the consular officials, as well as the British anti-slavery movement.<sup>4</sup> Nothing substantial has appeared since in English and after a forty year gap this current study aims to supplement and complement Duffy's research by a focused examination of successive Foreign Secretaries - Lord Kimberley, Lord Salisbury, Lord Lansdowne and Sir Edward Grey – and their officials and diplomats with regard to the prevalence and continuation of slavery and forced labour in Portuguese West Africa between 1894 and 1914.

The slave trade in Portugal was abolished in 1836, almost thirty years after Britain, in 1869 the children of slaves were declared free, and slavery was abolished officially in the Portuguese Empire in 1876. Under the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of February 1884 both countries bound themselves “to use all possible means for the purpose of finally extinguishing slavery and the Slave Trade on the eastern and western coasts of Africa” and in 1890 Portugal, along with Britain, was one of seventeen countries which signed the Brussels General Act for the repression of the African Slave Trade.<sup>5</sup> Yet, contrary to these agreements, the cocoa boom based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter the Portuguese version São Tomé and Príncipe is used except where they appear in quotation marks when the original anglicised version is used. The same is the case for Luanda, the capital of Angola, except when Loanda is referred to within quotation marks or in the footnotes to denote the location of British diplomats and consuls.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery*, London, 1906. Charles Swan, *The Slavery of Today*, London, 1909. John Harris, *Portuguese Slavery: Britain's Dilemma*, London, 1913. Joseph Burrt and William Cadbury, *Labour in Portuguese West Africa*, London, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Hammond, *Portugal and Africa, 1815-1910: A Study in Uneconomic Imperialism*, Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1966. James Duffy, *Portuguese Africa*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959. William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840-1926*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> James Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> For the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty see Roger Anstey, *Britain and the Congo in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, app. A, pp. 241-6. For the Brussels General Act see Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade*, London: Longman, 1975, app. I, pp. 346-63.

plantations of São Tomé and Príncipe, which had commenced in the late 1880s and was to last well into the twentieth century, had already resulted in a considerable increase in the export of *serviçaes*, forced labourers. Indeed, between 1887 and 1897 the export of *serviçaes* averaged 2,500 a year and 4,000 a year during the ensuing decade.<sup>6</sup> According to Clarence-Smith, some 70,000 slaves were purchased for ‘perpetual indenture’ in São Tomé and Príncipe between 1880 and 1908 most of whom came through Angolan ports from ‘a huge expanse of Central Africa’, although a few were also imported from Dahomey, Gabon and China.<sup>7</sup>

The tendency of Portugal to sign treaties and then to avoid their consequences was not unfamiliar to the Foreign Office but before 1894 it had for several years been disinclined to pursue the continuing existence of slavery in Portuguese West Africa having been involved in controversial disputes concerning the boundaries between British and Portuguese territories across southern Africa. However, in 1894 in response to a question made in the House of Commons by Joseph Pease MP, and information subsequently provided by a retired Royal Navy captain, Algernon Littleton, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, instituted an enquiry at Luanda in Portuguese Angola.<sup>8</sup> In his letter Littleton had claimed that while slavery had been abolished in Portuguese Africa it had been replaced by a system of contracted labour that was tantamount to slavery.

At the end of August William Brock, merchant and acting Consul at Luanda, dismissed such claims pointing out that the essential difference between slavery and contracted labour was that “whereas the former is slavery pure and simple, the latter is hired labour under government supervision”. To assume that they were one in the same was “to try to fit facts to a theory and to prejudice a good cause by taking for granted what is, to a great extent, hearsay”. The *serviçaes* were, according to Brock, “well treated and cared for” and there was “no hardship in the way they are worked”. He added that it was certain that the abolition of the present system would mean “absolute ruin to the island of San Thomé”.<sup>9</sup> Brock’s assessment, however, was not shared by the Consul at Luanda, William Clayton Pickersgill, a former agent of the London Missionary Society. Based on his experience and contacts, he insisted that the system of contract labour in Portuguese West Africa was “simply a form of Slave Trade, however well the so-called immigrants may be treated on arrival: since it is evident that the process of collecting migrants directly encourages native chiefs to make wars and take prisoners whom they can dispose of at a profit”.<sup>10</sup> In the Foreign Office it was recalled that the subject had previously been a constant source of correspondence with the Portuguese Government and of publication in Parliamentary Blue Books but also that slavery was nominally abolished in the Portuguese colonies. In January 1895, in discussing whether the Government should intervene with the

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<sup>6</sup> Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> William Gervase Clarence-Smith, ‘Labour conditions in the plantations of São Tomé and Príncipe, 1875-1914’, *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 14, 1993, p. 149.

<sup>8</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, fourth series, HC, vol. 25, cc.285-6. Joseph Pease MP to Sir Edward Grey, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, 5 June 1894. Captain Algernon Littleton RN Retired to Pease, 5 July 1894. Foreign Office to William Clayton Pickersgill, HM Consul at Loanda, 16 June 1894. The National Archives (TNA), FO63/1447.

<sup>9</sup> William Stewart Ranulph Brock, Acting Consul at Loanda, to Earl Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 28 August 1894. FO63/1447.

<sup>10</sup> Pickersgill to Kimberley, 15 December 1894. FO63/1447.

Portuguese authorities, the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Thomas Sanderson, thought that “for the present we had better leave it alone” as did the Liberal Foreign Secretary, Lord Kimberley, who thought it “a very old difficulty”.<sup>11</sup>

The matter was dismissed by the Foreign Office for two years until in March 1897 Pickersgill made a further critical report on labour conditions in São Tomé. According to the Consul, the *serviçal's* fate was to be “taken from his home in the distant interior as a slave; as a slave he is purchased by white men for the labour market; the contract by which he is supposed to engage to work out his redemption is a sham; and he is kept in servitude to the end of his days”. He could see no reason why the Portuguese Government should not reform the system by forbidding further importations of *serviçaes* and by liberating gradually those who were already on the islands. However, the Foreign Office thought differently recalling that when the subject was brought up in 1894 it was decided to take no notice and that decision still stood. Sir Francis Bertie, Superintending Under-Secretary to the African Department, insisted that it be left alone while the Conservative Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Lord Salisbury, in noting his comment, did not dissent.<sup>12</sup>

Five more years elapsed before the subject was again discussed in the Foreign Office in June 1902. On this occasion it was the claims of the Aborigines' Protection Society which compelled interest. The Society drew attention to the “systems of slavery, under the name of forced labour, in operation in Angola” which, it claimed, was increasing alarmingly both in extent and severity and in violation of the provisions of the 6th and 9th articles of the Berlin General Act of 1885.<sup>13</sup> Roger Casement, Consul at Gomba in the Congo State, subsequently confirmed that the Society's claims were “very largely borne out by fact”, that the “so called contract labour existing in Angola whether it be for internal use or export to the islands of San Thomé and Príncipe is nothing else but a system of slavery having the sanction of legal forms”. He insisted that “not one single native of the many thousand shipped to the cocoa plantations in San Thomé and Príncipe had been known to return to Angola”.<sup>14</sup> The Foreign Office accepted that in Portuguese West Africa recruited labour were never released and never paid and that a *serviçal's* children were considered as “indentured labourers”. Casement's report confirmed what was already known, that “the slave trade still exists in West Africa”.<sup>15</sup> Further confirmation that repatriation was non-existent was received from Consul Arthur Nightingale at Luanda in January 1903 when he advised that contracts lasted for five years but that up to the

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<sup>11</sup> Minutes by Sir Clement Lloyd Hill, Head of the African Department, 12 January 1895, Sir Thomas Sanderson, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, n.d., and Kimberley, n.d. FO63/1447.

<sup>12</sup> Pickersgill to the Marquess of Salisbury, Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 16 March 1897. Minute by Sir Francis Bertie, Superintending Under-Secretary African Department, n.d. FO63/1447.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Richard Fox Bourne, Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society, to the Marquess of Lansdowne, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 11 June 1902. FO63/1447.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Casement, British Consul at Gomba, to Lansdowne, 17 September 1902. FO63/1447.

<sup>15</sup> Foreign Office Minutes, 22 October 1902. FO63/1447.

present time the conditions had never been adhered to because of the assumption that “once a slave always a slave”.<sup>16</sup>

Aware of the increasing criticism of their labour system in West Africa the Portuguese Government issued a new decree on 29 January 1903 which purported to reform it. The British Minister in Lisbon, Sir Martin Gosselin, confirmed that despite its elaborate provision for securing contracted labourers from Mozambique, Macão, Guinea and elsewhere the main source would continue to be Angola. Moreover, while article 58 of the decree laid down a “labour and repatriation fund” to be established in São Tomé and Príncipe under government control into which would be paid bonus funds destined for the *serviçaes* it was to be feared that “the planters, in the future as in the past, will do their best to prevent repatriation” and unless a competent Portuguese officer was appointed with sufficient power there would be no repatriation.<sup>17</sup>

At this time, the Foreign Office was being pressed by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and by cocoa manufacturers, notably Cadbury of Birmingham and Fry of Bristol, to appoint a resident or agent to look after the interests of the labourers in São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>18</sup> The officials in the Office realised that the task of persuading the Portuguese Government to improve the condition and treatment of *serviçaes* would be difficult to say the least as the response of the Portuguese to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in February 1903 demonstrated. Allegations of the existence of slavery in Portuguese West Africa were refuted, the existing vigilance of the Portuguese authorities in West Africa stressed and the clear insistence made that the slave trade had been completely suppressed and now only existed “in the imagination of certain philanthropists”.<sup>19</sup> The position, however, became more pressing with the news, communicated by Nightingale in May 1903, that the Portuguese authorities were taking advantage of prolonged drought in the Cape Verde Islands to ship some inhabitants to São Tomé and Príncipe as *serviçaes*, 800 so far. Nightingale who had just arrived in Lisbon from the islands told Gosselin that “these unfortunate people reduced to the last state of want” could not possibly support the climate of the equatorial islands and would inevitably succumb.<sup>20</sup> In these circumstances, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, warned the Portuguese Minister at London, Marquis Luís de Soveral, that although no British subjects were involved and there was no direct ground for interference it was quite possible that the issue could be taken up in the British press and Parliament and an attempt made to create a feeling against Portugal similar to that aroused against the Congo Free State. He suggested that the Portuguese Government might institute a formal enquiry both as to recruitment and treatment of labourers and to give Nightingale every facility on the occasions when he visited the islands. Soveral confirmed that he would refer the suggestion of an enquiry to his Government but he assured Lansdowne that the islands

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Nightingale, British Consul at Loanda, to Lansdowne, 12 January 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Martin Gosselin, British Minister at Lisbon, to Lansdowne, 7 February 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>18</sup> Travers Buxton, Secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, to Gosselin, 24 April 1903. Gosselin to Lansdowne, 5 May 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>19</sup> Marquis Luís de Soveral. Portuguese Minister at London, to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 26 February 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>20</sup> Gosselin to Lansdowne, 6 May 1903. FO63/1447.

were “extremely rich and the climate conditions were upon the whole good”.<sup>21</sup> The Portuguese Government took the hint and suspended the shipment of labourers from Angola to São Tomé but “certain wealthy and influential people at Lisbon, owners of estates on San Thomé”, according to Soveral, protested vigorously and attacked the authorities and as a result the export of labourers was resumed.<sup>22</sup>

For almost twelve months after Lansdowne’s meeting with Soveral there was no sign of a formal enquiry but then in mid April 1904 it was announced that Dr Carlos Vaz, a medical officer, had been appointed by the Governor General of Angola, Custódio Borja, “to conduct enquiries and collect information as to the manner in which the emigration of natives was carried out, to report monthly and to communicate all cases of abuse and irregularity”.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Nightingale, who had yet to visit São Tomé and Príncipe, sent a despatch from Boma in the Congo which was highly critical of the Portuguese decree of 29 January 1903, regarding it as merely another elaborate set of regulations which like others before it did little or nothing to safeguard the interests of the *serviçaes*: “these elaborate decrees are nothing but a cloak to slave traffic”.<sup>24</sup> The news of the death of Carlos Vaz in July 1904 without the announcement of a successor<sup>25</sup> served to further undermine Foreign Office confidence in Portuguese rule in West Africa. But there was still indecision as to whether to intervene at Lisbon and following further discussion in October 1904 it was agreed to defer any decision to intervene until Brock finally delivered his report and Nightingale had visited the islands.<sup>26</sup>

When, in January 1905, Borja gave prominence to the exportation of labour from Angola in his farewell speech as Governor-General, Gosselin interpreted this as a sign that the Portuguese authorities were at last endeavouring to remedy the most flagrant abuses in the labour system and the African Department at the Foreign Office sought credit for this apparent change: “The Portuguese are waking up with regard to this Angolan slave trade. The various communications made to M. de Soveral have no doubt contributed to this”.<sup>27</sup> In reality, there was little in the way of improvement but the illusion that matters were improving in Angola was sustained by Brock’s report at the end of June which confirmed that the slave trade still existed but was falling into discredit, that the principal sources of supply were families whose members were sold by kinsmen under native laws generally for debt or for claims for damage arising out of wars with other tribes and that raiding was diminishing and the Portuguese Government was trying to stop it and would eventually succeed.<sup>28</sup> Brock, however, had not fulfilled his instructions to report on the effects of the decree of 29 January 1903 and with pressure being exerted by the Aborigines’ Protection Society in the summer of 1905 the Foreign Office still lacked first hand reliable knowledge of the state of affairs in Portuguese West Africa and were therefore compelled to temporise

<sup>21</sup> Lansdowne to Gosselin, 24 June 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>22</sup> Sir Francis Hyde Villiers, Superintending Under-Secretary African Department, to Lansdowne, 24 November 1903. FO63/1447.

<sup>23</sup> Gosselin to Lansdowne, 1 May 1904. FO63/1447.

<sup>24</sup> Nightingale, Boma, to Lansdowne, 5 May 1904. FO63/1447.

<sup>25</sup> Brock, Loanda, to Lansdowne, 23 July 1904. FO63/1447.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes by Edward Ashley Clarke, African Department, 11 October 1904 and by Lansdowne confirming his agreement to defer intervention at Lisbon. FO63/1447.

<sup>27</sup> Gosselin to Lansdowne, 16 January 1905. Minute by Clarke, 13 January 1905. FO63/1447.

<sup>28</sup> Brock to Lansdowne, 30 June 1905. FO63/1447.

while Lansdowne turned down a request from the Society to receive a deputation, pleading the number of engagements and pressure on his time.<sup>29</sup> Belatedly, and clearly not before time, Nightingale was reposted to Luanda as Consul in autumn 1905 and instructed “to obtain full and reliable information in regard to the actual conditions of the labourers” by a visit to São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>30</sup>

Nightingale commenced his visit to the islands on 24 November 1905 and remained there until 9 February 1906 and his report was completed in July and received in the Foreign Office on 20 August. Almost simultaneously, between August 1905 and February 1906 the well known campaigning British journalist, Henry Woods Nevinson, sometimes described by his critics, including the Portuguese and some officials in the Foreign Office, as a trouble-maker, international carpetbagger or hired hand for antislavery forces, wrote a series of monthly articles in *Harper's Magazine* which were subsequently reproduced in his book *A Modern Slavery*, published later in 1906. Nevinson's account of the traffic in contract labour from Angola to São Tomé, witnessed first hand, aroused international indignation and criticism of Portuguese colonial rule in West Africa which ignited the issue both in Britain and abroad.<sup>31</sup> The impact was immediate and following a visit to the Foreign Office by Nevinson and Henry Richard Fox Bourne, Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society, Sir Eric Barrington, Superintending Under-Secretary to the African Department, was compelled to warn Soveral on 14 March that “the philanthropists were much excited and it would be very disagreeable if public opinion were aroused by the fact that the Portuguese Government were encouraging something painfully akin to the slave trade”.<sup>32</sup> While awaiting the Nightingale Report, the Foreign Office were compelled to temporise anti-slavery pressure groups and MPs in the House of Commons who had commenced in July 1906 a concerted approach through parliamentary questions on the issue of labour in Portuguese West Africa that was to last through to 1914. In response to a question by Liberal MP Sir Gilbert Parker on 5 July as to what steps the Government intended to take “to direct the attention of the Portuguese Government” to the alleged practices of slavery in São Tomé and Príncipe, the Liberal Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, who had succeeded Lansdowne at the end of 1905, referred to Nightingale's visit and to his expected report and he reiterated this again on 18 July.<sup>33</sup> On 30 July Fox Bourne wrote to Grey urging the Foreign Office to make representations to the Portuguese Government to take effective measures to prevent the abuses which “were thought to

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<sup>29</sup> Memorandum by Edward Erskine, Assistant Head of the African Department, 28 July 1905 and seen by Lansdowne. FO63/1447. Foreign Office to the Aborigines' Protection Society, 9 August 1905. Foreign Office to the Editor of *Tropical Life*, 9 August 1905. FO63/1447.

<sup>30</sup> Foreign Office to Nightingale, 18 October 1905. Lansdowne minuted on 16 October that “I must meet Mr Nightingale” but there is no record in the file of such a meeting taking place. FO63/1447.

<sup>31</sup> Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, pp. 186-90. Duffy, *Portuguese Africa*, pp. 159-61. For a recent detailed account of Nevinson's campaign against Portuguese slavery see Angela John, *War, Journalism and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century: The Life and Times of Henry W. Nevinson*, London: I.B. Taurus, 2006, pp. 42-59.

<sup>32</sup> Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vols. 160 and 161, c. 229, c. 193.

have been put a stop to many years ago, but which, under specious disguises, have been more harmful than ever since the Slave Trade Conference of 1889-1890".<sup>34</sup>

Before Nightingale's report arrived at the Foreign Office news was received via the Admiralty of a visit to Príncipe on 17 June 1906 by the Commanding Officer of HMS *Dwarf* who reported that: "The natives I saw employed on the plantations struck me as the most miserable looking beings I have ever seen in East or West Africa; large barracks are built for their accommodation, which certainly gives it the appearance of a slave compound".<sup>35</sup> Nightingale's report contradicted this impression. He had visited a considerable number of plantations both in São Tomé and Príncipe and considered that the labourers were both well treated and looked after and that in the main the new regulations were carried out. But, he also confirmed that the *serviçaes* were enlisted on the mainland without their wishes being consulted and that they were never repatriated; they were slaves in all but name. The considerable rise in the price of *serviçaes* during the previous twenty years, from about £5 for an adult male or female in the early 1880s to £25 currently, a sum more than a labourer could earn in four years, proved that in reality the *serviçal* was a slave and became the property of the person who contracted him "much the same as if he were a horse or some other marketable commodity" As Nightingale put it: "no sane man would pay such a fee for a contract unless he were certain of having the life-long services of the labourer". He concluded his report in agreement with the Aborigines' Protection Society that the real evil of the *serviçal* system was the manner in which the labourers were obtained on the mainland in Angola.<sup>36</sup>

Having read the report Grey decided that "no representations should be made to the Portuguese at present" and that "such portions of Consul Nightingale's report as relate to the present condition of affairs" might be communicated, though not for publication, to the Aborigines' Protection Society.<sup>37</sup> The Society, having received the abridged report continued to urge the Foreign Office to make representations to the Portuguese Government. In reply the Foreign Office insisted that the subject had received Grey's most careful attention and "it would not be lost sight of".<sup>38</sup> At the same time, further attention was called in Parliament to the *serviçal* question and demands made for the Nightingale Report to be published. Grey, however, insisted that the report was not written in a form for publication and dealt with only part of the issue but that, generally, the conclusion was that the labourers on São Tomé and Príncipe were well treated. In addition, he admitted that it was doubtful "whether the provisions for repatriation under the new regulations have hitherto been made effective" and he insisted that the Government intended to bring all the information they possessed to the notice of the Portuguese in the hope that they would take steps

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<sup>34</sup> Fox Bourne to Sir Edward Grey, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 30 July 1906. TNA, FO367/17, 26131/06.

<sup>35</sup> The Admiralty to the Foreign Office, 6 August 1906. FO367/17, 27074/06.

<sup>36</sup> "Report on the Treatment of the "Serviçaes" or Contract labourers in the Portuguese Islands known as the Province of São Thomé and Principe", 28 July 1906. FO367/17, 28370/06.

<sup>37</sup> Minute by Grey, n.d., late August. Foreign Office to Aborigines' Protection Society, 12 September 1906. FO367/17, 28370/06.

<sup>38</sup> Bourne to the Foreign Office, 24 September 1906. Sir Eric Barrington, Superintending Under-Secretary African Department, to Fox-Bourne, 10 October 1906. FO367/17, 32379/06.

to remedy the evils of the existing system.<sup>39</sup> Despite the conciliatory tone adopted by the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Luís de Magalhães, Grey's answer was criticised in the Portuguese Parliament where considerable resentment was shown at Britain's interference in the administrative service of Portugal.<sup>40</sup>

To ensure that the Portuguese got the message Sir Francis Villiers, British Minister at Lisbon, was instructed on 22 November 1906 to re-emphasise that the Nightingale report was not written originally for publication and that Grey considered it more courteous to place all the facts in their possession at the disposal of the Portuguese Government before publishing any reports concerning the administration of their colonies.<sup>41</sup> Villiers passed on Grey's view to Magalhães on 7 December. The Foreign Minister expressed the view that the Nightingale report, which he had not seen, would contain nothing that would require his Government to take action for there could be no doubt that "the natives were properly treated in the islands". As for the system of recruitment, he was adamant that no proof of the allegations had been furnished.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of 1906 the Foreign Office could be satisfied that it had treated the Portuguese slavery/forced labour issue with appropriate care and attention for a liberal democratic power needing to maintain cordial relations with its oldest ally, Portugal, while accommodating the demands of an increasingly critical public opinion in Parliament and anti-slavery pressure groups. But, as Grey and his officials recognised, the prospects of keeping a lid on the issue would diminish in the light of an expected report commissioned by the Cadbury Company who had sent special commissioners to West Africa months previously to examine the conditions of recruitment and service of the contracted labourers.<sup>43</sup> In early January 1907 Villiers drew Magalhães' attention to the anticipated Cadbury report (or Burt report after its author, Joseph Burt) which would be laid before the Portuguese Government and warned him that public attention on the issue of slavery and contracted labour in Britain was increasing and demanded some response from the British Government. He warned the Foreign Minister that mere denial of the existence of abuses was insufficient and it was advisable for the Portuguese authorities to hold a searching enquiry in order to disprove the allegations or correct the abuses if they existed.<sup>44</sup> There was, however, throughout 1907, no sign of the Portuguese instituting an enquiry and the Foreign Office were not prepared to press the authorities in Lisbon before further evidence in the form of the Burt report materialised. However, with the summer recess approaching, members of the Commons resumed asking questions about labour in the Portuguese islands and on 12 July Grey referred to the Burt report and the willingness of the Government to communicate it to the Portuguese Government for their information provided the Cadbury Company authorised it.<sup>45</sup>

In the event, because Burt refused to compromise any of his informants, the original report was watered down, by the deletion of names and "the general failure to

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<sup>39</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vol. 163, c. 675.

<sup>40</sup> Sir Francis Hyde Villiers, British Minister at Lisbon, to Grey, 7 November 1906. FO367/18, 38021/06.

<sup>41</sup> Grey to Villiers, 22 November 1906. FO367/18, 38021/06.

<sup>42</sup> Villiers to Grey, 7 December 1906. FO367/18, 41793/06.

<sup>43</sup> Grey to Villiers, 29 December 1906. FO367/18, 41793/06.

<sup>44</sup> Villiers to Grey, 5 January 1907. FO367/46, 1099/07.

<sup>45</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vol. 178, cc. 196-7. See also c. 916 and cc. 1189-90 and vol 179, c. 130.



give chapter and verse for his allegations, to such an extent as seriously to diminish its whole value". It was recognised in the African Department that the whole system of labour seemed to be "an extraordinarily bad one and indistinguishable from slavery" but that it would hardly be seriously shaken by the Burt report in its weakened form.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in October a Portuguese translation of the revised report along with an English version was sent to the Legation in London for communication to the Portuguese Government and Villiers was instructed to emphasise that unless circumstances had altered since Burt's visit in 1906 or the Portuguese intended "to remedy without delay" any abuses which had come to their attention, particularly with regard to the system of labour recruitment, the inevitable result of the publication of the report would be "an agitation which cannot but prove to be embarrassing both to His Majesty's Government and the Portuguese Government".<sup>47</sup>

Foreign Office pressure seemed to have an effect when in November the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Ayres d'Ornellas, told George Cadbury, who was visiting Lisbon on behalf of British cocoa manufacturers, that the Portuguese Government "intended at once to make a thorough investigation of the whole subject [of labour] in Angola with the intention of replacing the present irresponsible recruiting agents by a proper Government system, as far as possible on the lines employed with success in Mozambique". In addition, Ornellas promised that the revised system of recruiting "would serve as a means of repatriation and make it practicable for the native to return to his home in the interior". When Villiers saw Ornellas' successor, Wenceslau de Lima, in early March 1908, he was assured that the Government meant to carry out the intentions of their predecessors.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, in April a naval officer and former Governor of the district of Benguela of the province of Cape Verde and of São Tomé and Príncipe, Lieutenant-Captain Francisco Paula Cid, was appointed to study the labour question and to acquire more precise and practicable knowledge of conditions before a revision of the regulations was attempted.<sup>49</sup>

It was clear that yet more time would now elapse while the Cid enquiry took place and following a further intervention by the Aborigines' Protection Society to which the Foreign Office responded positively Villiers saw Lima on 6 June and advised that steps should be taken while it proceeded "to remedy any shortcomings" in the administration of the existing regulations.<sup>50</sup> Prior to going on leave in July Villiers visited the Portuguese Foreign Minister again and laid stress on the need for some positive response by the Portuguese Government. He warned Lima that if a similar campaign were commenced against Portugal as had taken place against the Congo Free State the result would be "exceedingly disagreeable for the Portuguese Government and also for His Majesty's Government". He advised that an assurance by the Portuguese Government that their intentions to reform the labour system were being "actively and efficiently carried out" and that "no hesitation or delay was being interposed" would go far to mitigate criticism in Britain, including Parliament. Lima

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<sup>46</sup> Lyell to Henry Beaumont, Chargé d'Affaires at Lisbon, 2 September 1907. FO367/46, 29406/07.

<sup>47</sup> Grey to Villiers, 17 October 1907. FO367/46, 33573/07.

<sup>48</sup> Villiers to Grey, 7 March 1908. FO367/86, 9057/08.

<sup>49</sup> Sir Walter Langley, Superintending Under-Secretary African Department, to Fox Bourne, 28 April 1908. FO367/86, 12693/08.

<sup>50</sup> Fox Bourne to the Foreign Office, 1 May 1908. Grey to Villiers, 20 May 1908. Villiers to Grey, 8 June 1908. FO367/86, 15049/20538/08.

was not entirely convinced and expressed his concern that by acceding to this request his Government might easily be accused of subservience to Britain.<sup>51</sup>

During the course of his conversation with the Portuguese Foreign Minister Villiers also disabused Lima of the notion that the movement agitating for changes in the Portuguese labour system was motivated by commercial and not philanthropic interests. Grey, however, suspected the motives of the cocoa manufacturers were at least partially commercial.<sup>52</sup> Whether the Foreign Secretary was being unduly suspicious the campaign against the Portuguese labour system was still attracting attention in Britain. Apart from the Aborigines' Protection Society, there was no lack of interest in Parliament. In February 1908 a former head of the African Department, now a Liberal MP, Sir Clement Hill, had requested a progress report on Foreign Office representations at Lisbon and the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, standing in for Grey, had responded by emphasising Portugal's intention to draw up fresh regulations placing "the recruitment of labourers for the plantations entirely and permanently under the control of Portuguese officials" and by adding that provision would also be made for repatriation.<sup>53</sup> In March the Liberal MP Sir Charles Dilke had enquired about the Portuguese intention to revise the regulations pertaining to indentured labour traffic to São Tomé and Príncipe and Grey had replied with a non-committal answer and then in June the Liberal MP and populist politician, Horatio Bottomley, had queried whether the Foreign Office would make representations to the Portuguese Government concerning the existence of slave labour on the cocoa plantations of São Tomé and Príncipe. On this occasion, Grey had stressed that the system in force on the plantations was contract labour not slave labour and that the Government were in communication with the Portuguese authorities with regard to the labour issue.<sup>54</sup> In July in response to further questioning by Dilke the Commons was assured that "the whole "serviçal" question" was engaging "the serious attention" of the Government.<sup>55</sup>

In the autumn of 1909, with no indication that the Cid mission was being carried out effectively, there was a growing conviction in the Foreign Office that an anti-slavery campaign was to be expected. For Grey as well as Sir Walter Langley, Superintending Under-Secretary to the African Department, the real evil was "the barbarous system or recruiting" and he anticipated that the completion of the Benguela railway through Angola would put a stop to it. Unfortunately, that might not be for some time and, meanwhile, it would be very useful if the Portuguese would provide information concerning recruitment.<sup>56</sup> Recognising that *serviçaes* recruited under the 1903 regulations were reaching the end of their contracts, Villiers was instructed in October to obtain from the Portuguese authorities a statement of the number of *serviçaes* who had become entitled to repatriation and the number actually repatriated.<sup>57</sup> In addition, in a move to influence the Cid mission with regard to repatriation, Villiers was further instructed in late November to advise Lima that one result which the British Government hoped for was "an arrangement whereby the

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<sup>51</sup> Villiers to Grey, 4 July 1908. FO367/86, 24110/08.

<sup>52</sup> Minute by Grey, 13 July 1908. FO367/86, 24110/08.

<sup>53</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vol. 183, c. 1408.

<sup>54</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vol. 185, c. 1748 and vol. 190, cc. 1033-4.

<sup>55</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 4th series, HC, vol. 193, c. 878.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes by Langley and Grey, 28 September 1908. FO367/87, 33499/08.

<sup>57</sup> Grey to Villiers, 10 October 1908. TNA, FO367/87, 33499/08.

return of natives might in some way be facilitated to their own homes and not merely from the islands to the mainland”.<sup>58</sup>

Following a meeting at the Caxton Hall, on 4 December 1908, which discussed the issue of Portuguese labour in West Africa, a small deputation was received by Grey in the House of Commons on 10 December. The deputation, consisting of the editor of *The Spectator*, St Loe Strachey, the Liberal MP, Rudolph Lehmann, the Reverend Robert Horton, a dissenting Minister, and Nevins were naturally critical and complained that the real evil lay in the recruitment process and they doubted the Portuguese, whose administration was extremely inefficient, had the capability to put a stop to it. Grey rejected the deputation’s idea of British naval action and insisted that any action taken by the Government must be of a diplomatic character though he recognised that to be effective it was necessary for the British Consul at Luanda to be allowed to observe and monitor the situation to determine whether “the final engagement of the labourers which takes place on the coast prior to embarkation was absolutely *bona fide* and voluntary”.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, Villiers was instructed at the end of December to request the presence of the British Consul at Luanda to observe and monitor the recruitment process.<sup>60</sup>

As it happened, Villiers saw the new Portuguese Prime Minister, Campos Henriques, on 2 January 1909 and the latter indicated he would discuss the request with the Minister of Colonies.<sup>61</sup> But Villiers was not sanguine about the Portuguese Government acceding to the request to provide facilities to enable the British Consul to monitor the contracting process in Luanda. Acceding to such an arrangement was evidently distasteful to the Portuguese authorities who, he understood, found it derogatory and feared it would expose them to the charge in the Portuguese Parliament and press that they were making “undue submission to a foreign power” and failing “to uphold Portuguese sovereign rights in the colonies”.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, William Cadbury in March 1909 concluded a visit to Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe which had lasted for five months and reported that no adequate steps had been taken by the Portuguese authorities to remedy the evils in the labour system. As a result Cadbury, Fry and Rowntree informed the Foreign Office that they had decided to make no further purchases of the cocoa produced in the islands.<sup>63</sup> Whether coincidentally or otherwise, Lima at the end of March suddenly informed Villiers that the Cid report had been received and contained proposals for improving the system of labour recruiting in Angola, including a strictly limited number of districts within which recruitment could take place that would be supervised and directly controlled by specially appointed officials responsible to the Governor-General of Angola.<sup>64</sup> The Foreign Office response, encouraged by Grey, was to express their gratification at the intention of the Portuguese Government to reform

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<sup>58</sup> Grey to Villiers, 27 November 1908. TNA, FO367/87, 44211/08.

<sup>59</sup> Minute by Clarke, 11 December 1908. TNA, FO367/87, 41211/08.

<sup>60</sup> Minute by Grey, n.d. Grey to Villiers, 28 December 1908. TNA, FO367/87, 41211/08.

<sup>61</sup> Villiers to Grey, 2 January 1909. TNA, FO367/140, 1282/09.

<sup>62</sup> Villiers to Grey, 23 March 1909. TNA, FO367/140, 11906/09.

<sup>63</sup> Cadbury Brothers to the Foreign Office, 15 March 1909. TNA, FO367/140, 10102/09.

<sup>64</sup> Villiers to Grey, 7 April 1909. Foreign Office to Cadbury Brothers, 29 April 1909. FO367/140, 13721/09.

labour recruitment but to advise the merits of public scrutiny which would put an end “to all possible allegations reflecting on the freedom of contracts”.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, yet another Government crisis in Portugal in April and May 1909 threatened progress on the labour issue as Soveral told Grey on 3 June 1909. The Portuguese Minister revealed that his Government now admitted the evil and would stop it.<sup>66</sup> As a first step it was decided in Lisbon that pending the introduction of new regulations which were nearing completion no further recruitment in Angola would be permitted and the new Foreign Minister, Colonel du Bocage, anticipated that the British Government would recognise that previous assurances were being fully carried out and expressed the hope that “all ground for attack having been removed” the campaign against Portuguese rule in West Africa would cease.<sup>67</sup> Part of the anti-Portuguese campaign continued to be conducted in the House of Commons where Grey earlier in the year was confronted by a range of questions and comments some of which were critical of the Government and notably the Foreign Office. Indeed, on one occasion in March 1909 the Foreign Secretary was moved to remind the House that Angola and the cocoa islands were not British but Portuguese territories and that it was necessary to use diplomatic negotiation to bring about reform, including revision of Portuguese colonial labour regulations.<sup>68</sup>

Revised regulations were introduced in the summer of 1909 by the Portuguese Government which on paper offered a range of improvements, including more effective regulation, the increase and systematisation of wages, the securing of repatriation for those who desired it, the reduction of the length of contracts at least for the time being and the temporary suspension of emigration.<sup>69</sup> Grey and the Foreign Office were not so sanguine, however, about the new regulations and declared intentions because as the Foreign Secretary observed repatriation was not to be obligatory and he regretted that although the renewal of contracts was to be effected in public, the actual engagement of labourers was not.<sup>70</sup> He put this point very strongly to the Portuguese Foreign Minister in November when he visited London insisting that from private sources it was beyond doubt that it had been the custom for natives “to be captured in the interior by people who were really slave-dealers” and that the captured natives were “then brought down to the coast and sent to work in the Portuguese islands”. He insisted that this could “easily be stopped” if Portuguese officials held an enquiry into “the case of each group of natives who came down from the coast” in order to make sure that “the natives had come voluntarily and had been engaged voluntarily”. Grey insisted further that if the enquiry was held in public “anyone could attend it and be satisfied that abuses were not being allowed”.

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<sup>65</sup> Minute by Grey, 15 April 1909. Grey to Villiers, 29 April 1909. Villiers to Grey, 1 June 1909. FO367/140, 13721/09.

<sup>66</sup> Minute by Grey, 2 June 1909. FO367/141, 20881/09.

<sup>67</sup> Villiers to Grey, 15 July 1909. “Correspondence respecting Contract Labour in Portuguese West Africa”, August 1912. *Parliamentary Papers*, Africa No. 2, cmd. 6322, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol. 2, cc. 492-4, 898. See also vol. 1, cc. 1258-9.

<sup>69</sup> Hugh Gaisford, British, Chargé d’Affaires at Lisbon, to Grey, 10 September 1909. FO367/141, 35839/09.

<sup>70</sup> Grey to Villiers, 16 October 1909. FO367/141, 35839/09.

Finally, he emphasised the strength of feeling in Britain on the subject and “the certainty that abuses in the interior had been very great”.<sup>71</sup>

In January 1910 the Foreign Office received a despatch from Consul Horatio Mackie at Luanda which reinforced their misgivings. He observed that regulations had been disregarded in the past and stressed that everything depended on compulsory repatriation. In this connection, Mackie revealed that 67,000 Angolan labourers had been shipped to São Tomé and Príncipe during the past twenty years not including minors under the age of twelve or infants accompanying their parents and no provision was made for their repatriation.<sup>72</sup> In an attempt to allay British concerns Villiers was told in January 1910 that the resumption of recruitment would not be permitted until there was assurance that due provision had been made for bringing the new regulations into effect.<sup>73</sup> Again, in February, Villiers learned that José Almeida, an official experienced in native affairs, had been appointed under special commission to superintend the labour regulations in Angola and instructed “to suppress any abuses which may come to his knowledge”.<sup>74</sup>

But many in Parliament remained to be convinced and Grey was compelled to defend the Portuguese authorities in the Commons early in April 1910 when he stated that they had promised to reform slave traffic in Angola and had taken steps to suspend all recruiting except in a few restricted zones, had appointed a special commissioner to superintend in Angola the execution of the regulations and expressed their intention of reforming the labour system and dealing severely with any cases of irregularity.<sup>75</sup> It was clear that Grey occupied a difficult position and needed the Portuguese to take action rather than merely to make promises and write regulations. He told Soveral on 12 April that the best way of allaying suspicion both in Parliament and elsewhere, such as the recent news that recruiting in Mozambique and been discontinued but renewed in Angola, would be for the British Consul at Luanda to make “a favourable report” as to the “facts of recruiting under the new regulations”.<sup>76</sup> The Foreign Secretary returned to this theme in late June 1910 with the Portuguese Minister but Soveral insisted that it was unreasonable to demand compulsory repatriation because the labourers in São Tomé were “so well treated and the conditions there so much better than those in the places from which the labourers came that the latter often did not wish to go back”. But he agreed with Grey when he said that it would be necessary “to make sure that the labourers had full opportunity to go back if they wished to do so” and he admitted that it was owing to British action that the question had been dealt with at all.<sup>77</sup> A month later in July 1910, when faced

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<sup>71</sup> Grey to Gaisford, 22 November 1909. FO367/141, 43081/09.

<sup>72</sup> Consul Horatio Mackie at Loanda to Grey, 30 November 1909. FO367/186, 1505/10.

<sup>73</sup> Villiers to Grey, 11 January 1910. FO367/186, 1815/10. The news was tempered somewhat when a week later it was decided that from 1 February 1910 recruitment would be resumed in the one zone, Quillenges, Bailundo and Jinga de Ammbaca, in which control could be most effectively exercised. FO367/186, 2423/10.

<sup>74</sup> Villiers to Grey, 22 February 1910, enclosing a memorandum by the Portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs, 17 February 1910. FO367/186, 6973/10.

<sup>75</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol. 16, cc. 192-4. See also vol. 17, cc. 625-6.

<sup>76</sup> Grey to Villiers, 12 April 1910. FO367/185, 12274/10.

<sup>77</sup> Grey to Gaisford, 27 June 1910. FO367/187 23774/10.

with further parliamentary criticism, Grey again defended his approach of bringing the Portuguese to accept labour reform through diplomatic means.<sup>78</sup>

The Foreign Secretary's faith in the Portuguese was to be sorely tested. While the Foreign Office learned in October 1910 that no *serviçaes* had embarked from Angola for São Tomé and Príncipe since the new regulation came into force in February, it was also clear that the repatriation system was scarcely operating with only thirty nine repatriated during the same period.<sup>79</sup> As a result, Villiers was instructed at beginning of November, following the recent overthrow of the Portuguese Monarchy by Republican forces,<sup>80</sup> to tell the Portuguese that in order to maintain cordial relations with Britain it was necessary to enable "His Majesty's Government to point to some decisive action by the Portuguese Government in the direction of reforming the system of contract labour employed in the Portuguese colonies". The new regulations were excellent in spirit but it was to their thorough enforcement that the British Government looked and one excellent test would be the rate and method of repatriation.<sup>81</sup> When Villiers carried out his instructions on 19 November the Portuguese Republican Foreign Minister, Bernardino Machado, acknowledged the serious character of the labour question and promised that special attention would be paid to the matter of repatriation.<sup>82</sup>

Words seemed to have been translated into action when Machado informed Villiers in February 1911 that in future workers could only be engaged in Angola for short periods of eighteen months at most and they would not be able to be re-engaged during the following year even if they wished to and efforts would be made to obtain work for those repatriated to Angola at the places where they landed. In communicating these instructions Villiers warned that they were provisional and had still to be approved by the Council of Ministers in Lisbon and would meet with opposition and resistance from the plantation owners, resident in Portugal.<sup>83</sup> In the House of Commons, meanwhile, Grey continued to be confronted by a range of critical questions. In several exchanges during March 1911 he informed members that he understood recruitment to continue to be suspended and repatriation to be the subject of discussion before the Portuguese Cabinet in Lisbon while denying the need to make representations to the Portuguese on the basis of treaty provisions such as the Brussels Act of 1890.<sup>84</sup> However, in late April he was able to inform the recently merged Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society that according to the Consul at Luanda, Francis Drummond-Hay, there was a distinct improvement concerning the slave traffic in Angola and he had been assured that the Governor-General, António Guedes, was doing all he could to put an end to it and was appointing district

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<sup>78</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.19, cc. 1569-75, 1588-93.

<sup>79</sup> Consul Francis Drummond-Hay at Loanda to Grey, 16 September 1910. FO367/187, 36997/10.

<sup>80</sup> For British responses to the overthrow of the Portuguese Monarchy and the establishment of the Parliamentary Republic see John Vincent-Smith, "The Portuguese Republic and Britain", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 10, 1975, pp. 707-28.

<sup>81</sup> Grey to Villiers, 3 November 1910. FO367/187, 40016/10.

<sup>82</sup> Villiers to Grey, 19 November 1910. FO367/187, 42686/10.

<sup>83</sup> Villiers to Grey, 17 February 1911 and note from Bernardino Machado to Villiers, 14 February 1911. FO367/234, 6391/11.

<sup>84</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.22, cc. 354, 522 and 1002; vol. 23, cc. 212-13 and 1294-5.

Governors and extra police in all parts of the colony.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, in mid April the Foreign Secretary reiterated to the Portuguese Minister that “British public opinion attached great importance to the recruitment of labour in Angola being carried out in free conditions” and that after the elections, which were to take place in Portugal in late May 1911, British public opinion would “recognise the Portuguese Government most willingly if the labour recruiting was entirely free”.<sup>86</sup>

British recognition of the Republican regime was finally granted after almost a year’s delay in September 1911 though there was no marked improvement with regard to recruitment and repatriation in Angola. Previously, in May 1911, the Provisional Republican Government had passed a decree modifying the regulations concerning native labour in the Portuguese colonies. It was intended to encourage shorter contracts and ease the process of repatriation. But as Drummond-Hay emphasised in mid-December 1911 the law of 13 May was “elastic enough to procure any given number of “serviçaes””.<sup>87</sup> This was scarcely music to the ears of the Foreign Office who had also learned recently that contrary to Machado’s claim of February 1911 that future contracts would be no longer than eighteen months they were now to be for two years with a possibility of a further increase at a later date. Hardinge was instructed to raise this issue with the Portuguese Foreign Minister and also to insist that contracts be made in public, whether for engagement or re-engagement, a point to which the British Government had always attached considerable importance.<sup>88</sup> When confronted by Hardinge on 16 March 1912 Augusto Vasconcelos stated that the Portuguese Republic wished “to be a humane and progressive force in the civilisation of Africa” but admitted that governors sent out to carry out the Government’s instructions had been “to a great extent paralysed by the power of the vested interests, European and native”.<sup>89</sup> The power of these interests was demonstrated on 30 March with the issue of a decree by the President of the Republic, Manuel Castro, which increased the duration of contracts for labour in São Tomé and Príncipe from two to three years.<sup>90</sup>

At this time a leading article appeared in *The Spectator* which called into question the British alliance with Portugal. Largely based on a letter received from John Harris, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society, writing from the island of São Tomé, the article argued that contrary to the received wisdom that once on the islands the labourers were well treated their actual condition was akin to slavery, attended by “all the horrors that go with predial slavery – imprisonments, floggings, the separation of husbands and wives, of parents and children, misery, shame and cruelty”. In these circumstances the British Government ought not, argued the article, renew the alliance with Portugal until they were satisfied that slavery did not exist in any part of the Portuguese colonies.<sup>91</sup> There was no intention of abandoning the alliance and Sir Eyre Crowe, Superintending Under-

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<sup>85</sup> Foreign Office to the Secretary, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society, 25 April 1911. FO367/234, 14086/11.

<sup>86</sup> Grey to Villiers, 13 April 1911. FO367/234, 14370/11.

<sup>87</sup> Drummond-Hay to Grey, 14 December 1911. FO367/285, 1323/12.

<sup>88</sup> Grey to Hardinge, 7 March 1912. FO367/285, 7641/12.

<sup>89</sup> Hardinge to Grey, 19 March 1912. FO367/285, 12635/12.

<sup>90</sup> Hardinge to Grey, 22 April 1912. “Correspondence respecting Contract Labour in Portuguese West Africa”, August 1912. *Parliamentary Papers*, Africa No. 2, cmd. 6322, p.96.

<sup>91</sup> *The Spectator*, 23 March 1912, p. 465.

Secretary of the African Department with responsibility for the Portuguese colonies in Africa, was disinclined to believe Harris, preferring instead the observations of Alexander Cumming who had written to the Foreign Office, having been until recently Vice-Consul at São Tomé. Cumming questioned Harris's sources, denied that flogging took place on the island except in isolated cases, expressed the conviction that the Portuguese were attempting to solve the repatriation problem and accused Harris and the editor of *The Spectator* of persecuting the Portuguese nation.<sup>92</sup> Eyre Crowe was equally unconvinced by an article on "Portuguese Slavery" written by Harris in the *Contemporary Review* of May 1912 which claimed a total shipment to São Tomé and Príncipe of over 63,000 slaves within the last twenty five years; a human cargo, according to Harris, worth £2,500,000.<sup>93</sup> Grey continued to defend the Portuguese but remained uneasy in doing so. At the beginning of July 1912 in the House of Commons he refused to accept references to slavery insisting that the natives of São Tomé and Príncipe were not slaves but indentured labourers yet he confessed to his officials that it was, nevertheless, "true in fact that before recruiting to Angola was stopped the labourers had practically all been captured by force and were not voluntary contract labourers".<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, the Portuguese Government felt compelled to intervene in the unofficial debate taking place in Britain through the attendance of former Foreign Minister Machado and José d'Almada, First Secretary in the Portuguese Colonial Office, at a meeting held under the auspices of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society in the Westminster Palace Hotel, London, on 25 June 1912. Machado denied that slavery existed in the Portuguese islands; "labourers on the islands were paid and labour paid for was not slavery". On 2 July Almada had published in *The Times* a letter in which he vigorously defended the Portuguese position. The Foreign Office view was that Almada had made a very good defence as far as the plantations and recruitment were concerned but that he had not touched the repatriation question.<sup>95</sup> As if to answer it, the Portuguese Minister at London, Manuel Teixeira Gomes, on a visit to the Foreign Office on 2 July to reinforce the Almada letter, insisted that many of the labourers had no wish to be repatriated as they had no place to which they could go and no means of earning a living when they reached the mainland.<sup>96</sup>

Needless to say, the anti-slavery movement remained unconvinced. In a leading article on 29 June, reporting the meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel, *The Spectator* roundly condemned the Portuguese connection arguing that so long as the treaty of alliance with Portugal remained in force Britain was obliged to protect her and therefore incidentally to protect the institution of slavery. In a second article of 13 July *The Spectator* drew attention to the resolve of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society to wage an unrelenting campaign by keeping "the country continually informed as to what is happening" in order "to do its utmost to save

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<sup>92</sup> Sir Eyre Crowe to Hardinge, 11 April 1912. Alexander Cumming to John Tilley, Head of the African Department, 28 April 1912. FO367/285, 14381/18241/12.

<sup>93</sup> Minutes by Eyre Crowe and Grey, 13 May 1912. FO367/285, 19413/12.

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.40, cc. 928-9. FO367/285, 29219/12.

<sup>95</sup> Minute by Sir Walter Langley, Superintending Under-Secretary African Department (with Eyre Crowe), 16 July 1912. FO367/285, 29638/12.

<sup>96</sup> Grey to Hardinge, 18 July 1912. FO367/285, 28264/12.



Englishmen from the disgrace of holding themselves responsible for slavery".<sup>97</sup> As if on cue, a Society deputation presented a detailed letter to Grey personally on 15 July in which, in order to speed up the repatriation process, they recommended the appointment of an international commission composed of Portuguese, British and Belgian representatives assisted by "men experienced in the tribal languages and cicatrices" of the Angola, Congo and Rhodesian hinterlands". The commission to be empowered "to issue manumission papers to slaves demanding freedom; the process to be completed within six to twelve months to enable the planters to replace slave labour with *serviçal* labour from Mozambique and elsewhere and allow time to make arrangements for the return of the slaves".<sup>98</sup> In view of the increasing parliamentary and public pressure, the Foreign Office could not ignore the Society's proposal even if they wanted to and the Legation in Lisbon, the Consulate at Luanda and the Vice-Consul in São Tomé were instructed to investigate and respond.<sup>99</sup>

Shortly before the deputation saw Grey the Foreign Office received on 10 July a favourable report of conditions on São Tomé from Drummond-Hay at Luanda who had spent eight days on the island followed by a visit to the Cabinda enclave. Drummond-Hay saw the acting Governor and curator for the *serviçaes*, Ferreira dos Santos, who vehemently denied that corporal punishment was permitted. He told the Consul that he was determined to carry out the law strictly concerning repatriation in spite of the opposition of the managers of the *roças* (plantations) and he had already ensured the appointment of a resident doctor on each of the principal estates. He made a most favourable impression on Drummond-Hay as a serious man "who is earnestly endeavouring to carry out the law". On visits to several plantations Drummond-Hay was impressed by the treatment of the *serviçaes* using words such as "admirable condition" to describe one *roças* and "most favourably impressed with all I saw" to describe another. One doctor, a Dr Dias, assured him that he had never seen any flogging or ill treatment of *serviçaes*. Drummond-Hay himself questioned several *serviçaes* on another plantation and "they all said their employers were good to them, and that they were contented".<sup>100</sup>

Later in October 1912 the Foreign Office received a report from Acting-Consul Robert Smallbones at Luanda which was somewhat less favourable in that he admitted that slavery among the natives existed but he had no evidence to show that it was "fostered by the authorities". He confirmed that the actual repatriation of *serviçaes* was by no means satisfactory but he rejected the idea of an international commission on the grounds that tribal identity would be impossible to confirm; that the Portuguese would never accept powers of manumission being invested in the commission because it would imply a state of slavery which they denied existed; that it could be claimed that the *serviçaes* had been legally recontracted and their arbitrary repatriation had no justification in law; that the Portuguese could claim they were already doing all in their power to accelerate repatriation within the limits of the law; and that the policy of providing repatriated *serviçaes* with small holdings was now

<sup>97</sup> *The Spectator*, 29 June 1912 and 13 July 1912, pp. 1032-3, 46-7.

<sup>98</sup> Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society to Grey, 15 July 1912. FO367/285, 30248/12.

<sup>99</sup> See Foreign Office to Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, 6 August 1912. See also Grey to Hardinge, 12 August 1912. FO367/285, 30248/12.

<sup>100</sup> Drummond-Hay to Grey, 8 June 1912. "Correspondence respecting Contract Labour in Portuguese West Africa", August 1912. *Parliamentary Papers*, Africa No. 2, cmd. 6322, pp. 109-12.

about to be tried and should be given a fair trial before more “heroic measures” were applied.<sup>101</sup>

Confronted with the increasing intensity of the anti-slavery movement, Grey and his Cabinet colleagues had taken the decision to issue a parliamentary white paper (White Book) detailing correspondence on the issue of “Contract Labour in Portuguese West Africa” which was laid before the House of Commons in August 1912 and drew immediate criticism from *The Spectator* which declared on 17 August that “once and for all this White Paper explodes the fiction that contract labour in the Portuguese colonies of West Africa is not slavery” and warned that in the autumn there would be an anti-slavery campaign and that “the Government should be forced to commit themselves to some constructive policy” namely, the international commission proposed by the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society.<sup>102</sup> Grey was not impressed and the Society was informed on 14 October that he was “unable to concur in the views expressed as to present conditions in Portuguese West Africa” which were not borne out by British consular sources and on 4 November in formally responding to its letter of 15 July the Foreign Secretary expressed no opinion concerning the proposed international commission but revealed his intention to lay a further collection of papers before Parliament as the most satisfactory way of dealing with the issue.<sup>103</sup> Despite the flurry of correspondence, there was clearly no meeting of minds between the Foreign Office and the Society and the latter continued to insist that unless Portugal fulfilled its pledges to abolish without delay slavery and the slave trade “as now exposed in the recent White Book” Britain should withdraw from the alliance.<sup>104</sup>

While the Foreign Office, including Grey, would not concede to the anti-slavery movement’s interpretation on contract labour or to its demands to consider ending the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, continuing pressure was put on the Portuguese to effectively carry out their declared reforms. In late November 1912 Hardinge was informed that under Grey’s direction Eyre Crowe had spoken with Gomes on several occasions emphasising “the importance attached by both His Majesty’s Government and by public opinion in this country to the satisfactory regulation of the contract labour in the Portuguese colonies”. The Portuguese Minister had responded by insisting that the Republican Government had done more in two short years than was ever conceived of under the monarchical regime and was fully alive to their obligations and would steadily press forward the measures of reform which had been carefully planned and laid down in various laws and regulations.<sup>105</sup> Hardinge, for his part, had intervened in Lisbon to urge that there should be no interruption in the facilities for large scale repatriation which he understood would be resumed before the end of November.<sup>106</sup>

The dual Foreign Office approach of not conceding to the arguments and demands of the anti-slavery movement while continuing to apply diplomatic pressure

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<sup>101</sup> Acting Consul Robert Smallbones at Loanda to Grey, 26 September 1912. FO367/286, 43254/12.

<sup>102</sup> *The Spectator*, 17 August 1912, pp. 225-7.

<sup>103</sup> Eyre Crowe to Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society, 14 October 1912 and 4 November 1912. FO367/286, 42326/45082/12.

<sup>104</sup> Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society to Grey, 8 November 1912. FO367/286, 47707/12.

<sup>105</sup> Grey to Hardinge, 27 November 1912. FO367/287, 50715/12.

<sup>106</sup> Hardinge to Grey, 23 November 1912. FO367/287, 51287/12.

on the Portuguese continued in 1913. The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society was told firmly in January that there was no prospect of summarily terminating the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. However, the Government were ready to do all in their power to see that recruitment was carried out under proper conditions, that repatriation continued and that the labourers were treated fairly both in the islands and on their return to Angola. While in the main these conditions appeared to be satisfied, they had not hesitated to draw to Portugal's attention any infringements and they had found the Portuguese authorities ready to remove them. The Foreign Office view of the 30,000 labourers on São Tomé and Príncipe was that they were no longer in a condition of slavery in which manumission came into question. It was made abundantly clear to the Society that Grey and his officials did not feel able to do more concerning repatriation other than to continue to press the Portuguese not to let the rate of repatriation slacken.<sup>107</sup>

The publication of a second White Book in February 1913 did not diminish criticisms and condemnations of Portuguese colonial rule; rather it provided the anti-slavery movement with more ammunition to fire at the Government and particularly the Foreign Office.<sup>108</sup> In a stinging rebuke *The Spectator* on 8 March claimed that the contentions of the anti-slavery movement were vindicated by both white books, but more so by the second, and accused the Foreign Office of getting itself into "the intolerable and humiliating position of standing forth as the apologist of Portuguese slavery".<sup>109</sup> Further though milder criticism was directed against Grey and his officials in Parliament in March but the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Francis Acland, in Grey's absence, was able to announce the appointment of two Vice-Consuls, one to spend some time on São Tomé and the rest at Fernando Po and the other at Benguela along with the Consul at Luanda. The Government intended, Acland argued, to watch the situation carefully, provide counsel and advice and encourage improvements rather than bring specific grievances to the notice of the Portuguese authorities who had been "so very definitely trying of late years to meet the criticisms and the points which we have made".<sup>110</sup> Two months later, at the end of May, Acland was compelled to defend the Portuguese again by refuting claims in the House of Commons that slave trading between the Angolan mainland and the islands still continued. He insisted that slave trading was a closed chapter and that repatriation was proceeding with over 600 labourers repatriated in January and February 1913 alone.<sup>111</sup>

It was certainly the case that during 1913 the criticisms of the anti-slavery movement, and particularly those of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, proved considerably irksome to the Foreign Office. On 13 February the Society claimed that the Portuguese in delaying and prevaricating over repatriation were deliberately enacting a stratagem to keep the *serviçais* on the islands at the bidding of the plantation owners.<sup>112</sup> Within two days the Foreign Office had

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<sup>107</sup> Eyre Crowe to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, 31 January 1913. FO367/334, 4929/13.

<sup>108</sup> "Further Correspondence respecting Contract Labour in Portuguese West Africa", February 1913. *Parliamentary Papers*, Africa No. 2, (1913) cmd. 6607.

<sup>109</sup> *The Spectator*, 8 March 1913, pp. 389-90.

<sup>110</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.50, cc. 1874-83.

<sup>111</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.53, cc. 458-9.

<sup>112</sup> Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society to Foreign Office, 13 February 1913. FO367/334, 6981/13.

vigorously refuted this claim and insisted that the actual conditions on the islands had improved during the last few years owing to the intervention of the Portuguese Government.<sup>113</sup> Subsequently, in their correspondence and private discussion, the Foreign Office continued to adopt a critical attitude vis-à-vis the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society. In June, incensed by what was identified as a tendency on the part of the Society to misinterpret official statements made in Parliament, Eyre Crowe advised that Grey should insist that he was not prepared to discuss such statements except in the confines of the House of Commons and the Foreign Secretary concurred.<sup>114</sup>

The anti-slavery movement had powerful allies in Parliament who could not be ignored, however, and in a debate in the House of Lords on 23 July 1913 the Foreign Office came in for a great deal of criticism. The Earl of Mayo who initiated the debate charged that the second White Book published in February 1913 left the reader cold. He accused the Foreign Office of "explaining away the 40,000 slaves working in the cocoa plantations of St. Thomé and Príncipe" and of denying that "contract labour is not slavery at all". He demanded that either slave owning or slave trading should cease or that Britain should no longer be bound by treaty with Portugal. The Archbishop of Canterbury was no less critical. He felt the reading of the second White Book as a whole "to be rather humiliating" and deplored the Foreign Office's "curiously cold view of the wrong which is being done". The Earl of Cromer, recalling his own experience of countering slavery in the Sudan, adopted a milder approach but insisted that it was a matter of will and that it was essential "to keep on insisting on the Portuguese Government putting pressure upon their own officials and keeping them steadily up to the mark". He was concerned that if the Portuguese called for assistance in time of war it would be extremely embarrassing to use British forces to support "a slave State". The former Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, used the same argument but with a different slant pointing to a situation in which Britain was confronted by her treaty obligations on the one hand and by a very strong and almost irresistible outburst of public opinion on the other; so difficult that "it might make it difficult for us to act up to them". Even Viscount Morley, Secretary of State for India, was forced to admit that nobody denied that the conditions under which the labourers on the islands existed were "in effect bondage". At the same time, he insisted that the Portuguese authorities were doing their best to improve matters and that some of them were acting "extraordinarily courageously", including the Governor-General of Angola, José Norton de Matos. He reminded the Lords that the Government could not intervene directly in Portuguese affairs but what it could do, had done and was doing was "by counsel, advice, protest, and remonstrance, to induce the authorities who are responsible to take measures which will, at all events, ameliorate the mischief". As a statement of intent and policy it was an extremely accurate reflection of the position adopted by the Foreign Office.<sup>115</sup>

The House of Lords debate did nothing to move the Foreign Office in a different direction and nor did the continuing and insistent agitation of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society. Eyre Crowe was adamant that the Office should resist "being dragged by the Society into an attitude towards the Portuguese authorities which would practically amount to a claim to exercise police supervision

<sup>113</sup> Eyre Crowe to Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, 15 February 1913. FO367/334, 6981/13.

<sup>114</sup> Minutes by Eyre Crowe and Grey, 24 June 1913. FO367/335, 26055/13.

<sup>115</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HL, vol.14, cc. 1283-1307.

in their colonies”.<sup>116</sup> He was equally critical of a series of articles by Lord Cromer in *The Spectator* during August 1913.<sup>117</sup> Later, at the end of 1913, he expressed a clearly held opinion that it was stretching the meaning of words unreasonably to apply the word “slavery” to the conditions existing in Angola and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>118</sup>

The prevailing view in the Foreign Office, that it was more productive to work closely with the Portuguese to achieve improvements, received a jolt in the autumn of 1913 when Smallbones reported that many of the *serviçaes* were working beyond their contracts and that it was not true that the authorities on São Tomé had made every effort to ensure the repatriation of those labourers who had completed their contracts. In May, June and July 2,189 *serviçaes* entered São Tomé and Príncipe whereas only 956 left these islands. Smallbones considered that the Portuguese plea that repatriation was being carried out as fast as available shipping permitted was “devoid of all foundation”.<sup>119</sup> On 15 November following a further intervention at Lisbon by the new British Minister, Lancelot Carnegie, the Portuguese Prime Minister, Afonso Costa, announced that he was endeavouring to have made available more ships to speed up the process of repatriation and that he welcomed a proposal to appoint a British consul on the west coast of Africa, one of whose duties, he recognised, was to be the inspection of the labour conditions on the islands.<sup>120</sup> But there was still disquiet in the Foreign Office when it was learned later that month that recontracting on a large scale was taking place on the islands and from past experience this could only be achieved by some form of compulsion. As a result, Carnegie was instructed to stress the great importance which the British Government attached to the steady repatriation of the *serviçaes* on the termination of their contracts.<sup>121</sup> When Carnegie carried out his instructions on 12 December António Macieira, the Portuguese Foreign Minister, accepted that it was entirely in Portuguese interests that the proposed consul-general should have the fullest facilities on the islands for making accurate reports in order to confound the inaccurate ones supplied by the British anti-slavery movement. He was still preoccupied by “the necessity of avoiding any semblance of giving jurisdiction to a foreign official in Portuguese territory” but having consulted his colleagues he told Carnegie on 20 December that because of his conviction that the request was based solely on the British Government’s “friendly sentiments” and of their desire to see “an end to the campaign carried on against Portugal by the Anti-Slavery Society” it was in the interests of the Portuguese Government to afford all necessary facilities to the proposed consular official.<sup>122</sup>

In early 1914 further consular reports were received at the Foreign Office which had been prepared by Lewis Bernays, the Vice-Consul attached to São Tomé,

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<sup>116</sup> Minute by Eyre Crowe, 30 August 1913. FO367/336, 39871/13.

<sup>117</sup> Minute by Eyre Crowe, 30 August 1914. FO367/336, 40955/13. For Cromer’s articles see *The Spectator*, 16, 23 and 30 August 1913, pp. 235-7, 268-70, 304-5.

<sup>118</sup> Minute by Eyre Crowe, 22 December 1913. FO367/337, 56493/13.

<sup>119</sup> Consul Herbert Hall Hall at Loanda to Grey, 27 September 1913 enclosing report from Smallbones to Hall Hall, 26 September 1913. FO367/336, 47570/13.

<sup>120</sup> Lancelot Carnegie, British Minister at Lisbon, to Grey, 11 November 1913. FO367/337, 52186/13. Carnegie to Grey, 15 November 1913. FO367/337, 52767/13.

<sup>121</sup> Grey to Carnegie, 25 November 1913. FO367/336, 47570/13.

<sup>122</sup> Carnegie to Grey, 12, 13 and 20 December 1913. FO367/337, 56923/56925/58235/13.

Príncipe and Fernando Po which indicated that an increasing number of *serviçaes*, whose contracts had terminated, still remained on the islands.<sup>123</sup> When Carnegie saw Prime Minister Bernardino Machado and the Colonial Minister, Lisboa de Lima, on 7 March he impressed on them the great importance of carrying out repatriation at a more rapid rate and on 20 March he impressed on Machado the desirability of codifying the existing laws and regulations.<sup>124</sup> Acting with unaccustomed speed the Portuguese instructed the Governor of São Tomé to effect repatriations as quickly as possible at the termination of contracts, reorganised the functions of the curator's office to secure prompt repatriation and began the process of codifying labour regulations into a single, clear corpus.<sup>125</sup>

Yet, none of these improvements led to a substantial increase in repatriation during the remaining months before the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. At the same time, the continuing anti-Slavery campaign in Britain provoked a bitter response in Lisbon where on 7 July the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Freire d'Andrade, complained of the lack of credit given to his country for the improvements which had taken place on behalf of the labourers on the cocoa islands and could only conclude that there was a conspiracy "on the part of certain interested persons to ruin the planters, depreciate the value of their estates with the view of buying them cheaply, and of eventually cornering the cocoa market". When Carnegie did not rise to the alleged conspiracy but observed instead that much could be done to silence the campaign in England by increasing the slow rate of repatriation which was the principal object of criticism, Andrade countered by arguing that repatriation was being carried out on a far larger scale than the previous year and there was every reason to expect that most if not all the labourers brought to the islands before 1903 would be repatriated in about three years time.<sup>126</sup> This was scarcely a statement for congratulation and could be interpreted as feet dragging on the part of the Portuguese yet Grey stood up in Parliament on 10 July to express his belief that there had been a steady improvement in repatriation and the reports he had seen recently had produced on his mind "the impression that, although a good deal remains to be done the Portuguese Government are really trying to remove the abuses that have existed".<sup>127</sup>

It remains true that the British Government and in particular the Foreign Office had not succeeded by 1914 in bringing about a complete solution to the problem of slavery/forced labour in Portuguese West Africa. Issues such as repatriation, contracting and re-contracting remained to be resolved. Over a period of twenty years since 1894, and particularly with the advent of the Liberal Government at the end of 1905, the Foreign Office endeavoured by means of diplomacy to bring about real improvements in recruiting, the treatment of *serviçaes* labourers and their repatriation. As demonstrated in successive white books the consular service in West Africa, though often undermanned, did sterling work in reporting conditions and developments pertaining to the labour question, including those on São Tomé and Príncipe while Ministers such as Gosselin, Villiers, Hardinge and Carnegie exercised their diplomatic skills in pressing for reform at Lisbon without unduly alienating the

<sup>123</sup> Hall to Grey, 23 January 1914. TNA, FO371/1955, 6646/14.

<sup>124</sup> Carnegie to Grey, 7 March 1914 and 20 March 1914. FO371/1955, 11087/13148/14.

<sup>125</sup> Carnegie to Grey, 30 March 1914. FO371/1955, 15107/14.

<sup>126</sup> Carnegie to Grey, 7 July 1914. FO371/1956, 31658/14.

<sup>127</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 5th series, HC, vol.64, cc.1149-50. See also cc. 1421-6 for a critical speech by Sir Gilbert Parker MP.

Portuguese authorities. The clerks in the African Department of the Foreign Office, notably Hill, Edwards Ashley Clarke and John Tilley supported by senior officials such as Villiers, Barrington, Langley and Eyre Crowe, sought to provide advice which on balance was probably more sympathetic to the Portuguese Government than their anti-slavery adversaries. Of the two Foreign Secretaries most involved with the labour question, Lansdowne and Grey, it was the latter who felt the brunt of the anti-slavery agitation conducted by a number of organisations, most notably the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, and their parliamentary and press allies who succeeded in keeping the issue of Portuguese labour in West Africa within the public view and in the public domain to the chagrin of the Portuguese Government and occasionally the Foreign Office itself. It is a point of conjecture whether the intervention of the anti-slavery movement was entirely effective and decisive but there can be no doubt as to its influence on Anglo-Portuguese diplomacy during the period under review.

The three Foreign Secretaries before Grey – Kimberley, Salisbury and Lansdowne – approached the issue of slavery in São Tomé and Príncipe with a degree of indifference and they were certainly not prepared to disturb their relations with Portugal by intervening too forcefully at Lisbon to persuade the Portuguese authorities to end the traffic and exploitation of slaves even under the guise of forced labour. In the wider perspective of Britain's relations with Portugal issues such as frontier claims and rectifications between Portuguese and British territories in southern Africa and the provision of Mozambican labour for the gold fields of South Africa, estimated in 1897 to constitute more than half of the labour force, carried greater significance.<sup>128</sup> As a result there was a disinclination to disturb Anglo-Portuguese relations any more than need be by raising the slavery issue. In addition, Portugal's support became essential to counter the Boer challenge in the Transvaal and the renewal of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of alliance in 1899, by guaranteeing that support at a critical time, added to the disinclination to act on the slavery issue as did the absence of a concerted campaign against Portuguese rule in West Africa by anti-slavery bodies, otherwise distracted by events and developments in the Congo in the late 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>129</sup>

Grey himself was never entirely comfortable in defending the Portuguese authorities in the House of Commons on the labour issue though he made a number of positive statements in support when faced by the criticism of members on both sides of the House. In the confines of the Foreign Office and at Cabinet he occasionally revealed his reservations about the Portuguese colonial empire and was disinclined to defend it. In this he was influenced not only by the West African labour issue but by his knowledge of developments in other parts of the Portuguese empire, notably the *prazo* system in Mozambique and the "scandalous" conditions in the island colony of Macao centring on gambling and drugs. In December 1911 in a private letter to Sir George Goschen, British Ambassador at Berlin, Grey referred to the Portuguese colonies as being "worst than derelict" so long as Portugal had them and he called

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<sup>128</sup> For Mozambican labour on the Rand see Duffy, *A Question of Slavery*, p. 141.

<sup>129</sup> Harold Temperley and Lillian Penson (eds.), *Foundations of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt (1792) to Salisbury (1902)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938, pp. 512-16. Sylvanus Cooley, *Britain and the Congo Question, 1885-1913*, New York: Humanities Press, 1968, pp. 56-131.

them “sinks of iniquity”.<sup>130</sup> Later, in July 1912 in the middle of protracted negotiations with Germany concerning a new agreement to replace the Anglo-German Agreement of 1898,<sup>131</sup> which had envisaged in certain eventualities the partition of Portugal’s colonies between the two powers, Grey told Cabinet that the administration of the Portuguese colonies was “hopelessly bad” and that “the scandals of Portuguese administration are such that public opinion would hardly support us in protecting the state of things that now exists in the Portuguese colonies”. The position was “very uncomfortable if not inherently false” and Grey admitted that “it would be shameful to throw over the Portuguese alliance in order to facilitate a division of her African colonies between Germany and ourselves” but that it would also “be morally indefensible to protect the scandalous state of things that exist in the Portuguese colonies”. Unfortunately, he concluded “the alliance gives us no discretion in the matter”.<sup>132</sup>

It was the existence of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance with Britain’s obligation to defend Portugal and her colonial possessions which encouraged the anti-slavery movement to believe that the Foreign Office had the means to force the Portuguese to end slavery and forced labour in their West African colonies once and for all by threatening to terminate or actually ending the alliance. The Foreign Office rejected this approach preferring to use their influence which was elevated by the existence of the alliance to apply diplomatic pressure. Under the terms of the ancient alliance, which had commenced in 1373 and which had been renewed as recently as 1899, the British Government was obliged “to protect and defend the Portuguese colonies” but had always reserved the right to judge the circumstances when and whether to activate the alliance. The Anglo-German negotiations of 1912-1914 failed to produce an agreement which had it materialised would have terminated the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. Ironically, during the course of negotiations the Foreign Office had taken a disinterested stance with regard to São Tomé and Príncipe and had agreed not to put forward a claim to the islands.<sup>133</sup> The proposed Anglo-German Agreement would have solved the issue of Portuguese slavery and forced labour in West Africa once and for all. Apart from the moral issues, an agreement was not signed because of concern at the growth of German colonial power in West Africa which was opposed by Britain’s entente partner, France, and to the recognition of the significance of the Portuguese connection to British security and strategic interests. This salient fact was demonstrated in a powerfully argued memorandum written by Eyre Crowe in 1913 in defence of the alliance which, he argued, provided Britain with the *locus standi* to utilise and deny to an enemy the Atlantic islands – the Azores and Cape Verde Islands – so vital to British Atlantic strategy that even Winston Churchill, a powerful critic of the Republican regime in Lisbon, was forced to admit as First Lord of the Admiralty that Portugal remained “an important factor in our naval strategy whatever form her

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<sup>130</sup> Richard Langhorne, ‘Anglo-German negotiations concerning the future of the Portuguese colonies, 1911-1914’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 16, 1973, p. 369.

<sup>131</sup> For the 1898 Anglo-German Agreement see *ibid.*, pp. 361-7.

<sup>132</sup> Sir Edward Grey: Note for the Cabinet, 17 July 1912. FO367/384, 31120/12

<sup>133</sup> Grey to Earl Granville, 1 August 1912. FO367/284, 30828/12. See also Prince Karl von Lichnowsky, German Ambassador at London, to Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, Imperial German Chancellor, 20 November 1912 and 17 January 1913 in Prince Lichnowsky, *Heading for the Abyss: Reminiscences*, London: Constable, 1928, pp. 270-4.



government may be".<sup>134</sup> Without the alliance Britain's strategic position would be seriously weakened and put at risk and the price for preserving it was a British guarantee of the Portuguese empire in its entirety. The politics of grand strategy demanded that the Foreign Office adopt the diplomatic approach without the threat of force when seeking to resolve the issue of slavery/forced labour in Portuguese West Africa.

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<sup>134</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum by Eyre Crowe, 12 February 1913. FO367/342, 7899/13. See also Glyn Stone, "The official British attitude to the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, 1910-1945", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 10, 1975, pp. 730-1 and John Vincent-Smith, "The Anglo-German negotiations over the Portuguese colonies in Africa, 1911-1914", *Historical Journal*, Vol. 17, 1974, p. 626.