

**REPORT OF THE ACTING
COMMITTEE TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE OF
WEST INDIA AND MERCHANTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649366934

Report of the Acting Committee to the Standing Committee of West India and Merchants by
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**REPORT OF THE ACTING
COMMITTEE TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE OF
WEST INDIA AND MERCHANTS**

James Oswald Esq. M.P.

[PRINTED FOR THE WEST INDIA BODY.]

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REPORT

OF

THE ACTING COMMITTEE

TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE

OF

WEST INDIA PLANTERS AND
MERCHANTS, *London.*

LONDON :

MAURICE & CO., HOWFORD BUILDINGS, FENCHURCH STREET.

DECEMBER 1843.

811-11-24 very few names.

Latin-Amer. Inst.
Phillips
7-19-29
20059

C O N T E N T S .

REPORT page 1

APPENDIX :—

Memorial to Lord Stanley, dated 11th July, 1843 9

Letter to Lord Stanley, relative to Chinese Laborers, dated 24th July 13

Letter to Lord Stanley, dated 9th August 16

Letter from Mr. Hope, dated 4th September 17

Letter to Lord Stanley, relative to Chinese Emigrants, dated 13th September 25

Letter from Mr. Stephen, dated 3rd October 29

Letter from the same, with a Memorandum respecting Chinese Immigration into the West Indies, dated 7th October 30

Letter to Lord Stanley, in further reply to Mr. Hope's Letter of the 4th September, dated 19th October 38

Letter from Mr. Hope, dated 6th November 46

Letter to Lord Stanley, with Extract of Evidence taken by the West Coast of Africa Committee in 1842, relative to Emigration, dated 15th November 47

Letter from Mr. Hope, dated 23rd November 57

Extract from the Circular issued by the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, relative to "Chinese Emigration to the West Indies," on the 30th October 58

Minute of the Commissioners, dated 27th November, containing amended Rules for the Regulation of the same 62

CONTENTS.

Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, appointed in 1842 to inquire into the state of the West India Colonies . . .	64
Report of the Committee of the House of Commons, appointed in 1842 to inquire into the State of the British Possessions on the West Coast of Africa.—Extract relative to Emigration . . .	68
Return of the number of Emigrants who have proceeded from Sierra Leone to the West India Colonies	75
Extracts from the General Report of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, 1843:—	
1. Instructions to Lieutenants in charge of Emigrant Transports .	75
2. Reports from the same	78
3. Instructions to Surgeons of Emigrant Transports	81

R E P O R T .

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ACCORDING to the new rules of the Standing Committee, a General Meeting should have been held in July last; but it did not take place, because the Acting Committee had then been very recently appointed, and were not in a condition to make any report.

They lost no time in bringing the lamentable state of the West India Colonies again under the consideration of Her Majesty's Government, by addressing to Lord Stanley a Memorial, which will be found in the Appendix. Having afterwards had an interview by deputation, and transmitted further communications

to his Lordship, a general reply to these representations, and others which had been made by different members of the Committee, was received in a letter from Mr. Hope, the Under-Secretary of State, dated the 4th of September. This letter, and the correspondence to which it has given rise, they now also communicate, and they beg particular reference to all these documents.

While anxious to recommend and promote every possible improvement, whether in cultivation, manufacture, or management, the primary and essential remedy they seek for the evils from which the Colonies at present suffer is immigration,—to be effected at their expense, and to be conducted, in accordance with the Passengers' Act, under the direct superintendence of Her Majesty's Government. This, it will be recollected, was the leading suggestion made by the Committee of the House of Commons last year.*

Africa, India, and China being the only countries where suitable labourers may be found, and from which emigration may be encouraged with any probability of extensive success, the Committee have diligently endeavoured to obtain correct information respecting them, and have attentively examined every objection which has, by any party, been alleged against freedom of intercourse between those countries and the West India Colonies. The result of their inquiries is set forth generally in the correspondence and relative papers contained in the Appendix.

With regard to China, it will be observed that Lord

* See Report of Committee on the West India Colonies, Appendix, p. 64.

Stanley has permitted an attempt to be made to introduce a limited number of the Chinese labourers who resort to the British settlements in the Straits of Malacca in quest of employment. Whether it will be attended with success seems doubtful. If it should prove successful, it is not improbable that a considerable immigration of these people may eventually take place. The special regulations under which they may be conveyed to the West Indies will be found in the Circular issued on the 30th October last, and in a subsequent minute made on the 27th November, by the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, copies of which will also appear in the Appendix.

The Committee have to express their particular regret that the intercourse between the East and West Indies is still prohibited, India being the source to which they could look with most confidence for *immediate* relief. This remarkable interference with the rights of property on the one hand, and of labour on the other, within the British dominions, has been admitted by statesmen of all parties to be at variance with the principles of freedom and just government; but, though no longer vindicated, the grievous injury inflicted on the West India Colonies by this prohibition is not duly estimated. The Committee, however, believe they are now entitled to state that Her Majesty's Government are satisfied that the experiment of emigration to Mauritius has been highly successful, and that they are at length disposed to allow the same benefit to be extended to the West India Colonies. The relaxation granted in favour of Mauritius in January 1842 has been for some time in ope-

ration, and has already been productive of immense advantage to that colony, as well as to the Indian people who have been permitted to proceed thither.

Although the Committee have been anxious to obtain emigration from India, as the most certain means of providing for the present urgent necessity, yet they are persuaded it is extremely desirable, as well as practicable, to cultivate a more extended intercourse with Africa. The necessary expense of conveyance is much less, and the affinity of the people with the predominant race in the West Indies renders them eligible immigrants. All the impressions in the public mind relative to Africa have long been associated with the Slave-trade; the proposition to encourage voluntary emigration to our free Colonies in the West Indies was, therefore, so novel, that it was received with great suspicion; and vague apprehensions of possible abuse, which cannot be defined, are still entertained. Her Majesty's Government, yielding to this jealousy, were induced not only to confine the intercourse to one port—Sierra Leone—but also to prescribe regulations which have in practice operated as so many obstructions. This prejudice has already been greatly moderated by the experience of the limited emigration which has taken place, and it will doubtless give way to further discussion and inquiry. There is no reason why free emigration from Africa to our West India Colonies may not be permitted from all the British settlements on the west coast of that continent. In addition to the provisions of the Passengers' Act, one simple regulation would be universally applicable and sufficient; namely, "That a