

# CAPITALISM AND ANTISLAVERY

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(The First Anstey Memorial Lectures in the  
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**ECONOCIDE: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition**  
**ANTI-SLAVERY, RELIGION AND REFORM**  
(with *Christine Bolt*)

# CAPITALISM AND ANTISLAVERY

*British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective*

*The Second Anstey Memorial  
Lectures in the University of Kent at Canterbury, 1984*

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*To my mother and father*

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# Foreword

The Anstey Memorial Lectures, to be given and published biennially, were established in 1982 to honour Roger Anstey, the first Professor of Modern History in the University of Kent at Canterbury. Before his premature death in 1979, Roger Anstey was working on a sequel to his acclaimed study of *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810*. This work was the culmination of a scholarly career which had included teaching appointments at the Universities of Durham and Ibadan; books on *Britain and the Congo in the Nineteenth Century*, and *King Leopold's Legacy: The Congo Under Belgian Rule*; and many articles in collaborative volumes and academic journals. Roger's scholarship is remembered and his company is missed by his colleagues at Kent, especially those in the History school which he helped to build up.

In 1982 the first series of Anstey Memorial Lectures was delivered by John Iliffe of St John's College, Cambridge, on *The Emergence of African Capitalism*, and they were published a year later by Macmillan. Seymour Drescher of the University of Pittsburgh gave the second set of Lectures in 1984, and they have been expanded into this book. Patrick Collinson, who has recently moved from the University of Kent to the University of Sheffield, will give the third series in 1986, on the general theme of religion in history.

The topics covered by these three lecturers clearly relate to Roger Anstey's major intellectual interests, with *Capitalism and Antislavery* addressing an issue which was the principal preoccupation of his last years. Seymour Drescher and Roger Anstey were excellent friends and intellectual sparring partners throughout that time. In one sense rivals in an exacting field of research, they none the less exemplified the generous exchange of ideas and information which is the best side of academic life. It is therefore peculiarly fitting that Seymour Drescher has been able to undertake this volume, and no one would have appreciated more keenly than Roger its freshness in terms of material and interpretation. *Capitalism and Antislavery* focuses on a critical but hitherto neglected aspect of antislavery: the role of popular

mobilization. It sheds new light on the Somerset Case and the ending of slavery in Britain. It makes us think again about the composition, methods, regional strengths and distinctiveness of British antislavery, and reexamines its impact on other reform movements, the reactions of the campaign's opponents, and the connection with antislavery of the slave communities themselves. From this deeply felt study, reform re-emerges as reform, rather than capitalist dominance or elite reaction in disguise. There are findings here that should influence the course of the debate on British antislavery for many years to come.

*University of Kent at Canterbury*

CHRISTINE BOLT

# Preface

When Thomas Clarkson published his *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* exactly two centuries ago, personal bondage was the prevailing form of labour in most of the world. For those, like Adam Smith, who were endowed with a long historical perspective and a global vision it seemed unlikely that slavery would ever be generally abolished. Freedom, not slavery, was the peculiar institution. Yet, just over a century after Clarkson's book appeared chattel slavery had been abolished in the Americas and international machinery was in place to facilitate its demise in Africa. However ambiguous were the long-term consequences of that historical process for the welfare of the affected populations, chattel slavery had itself become a peculiar and vanishing institution. Even in the longer perspective of two centuries it remains one of the most remarkable events in modern history, the first and, in a narrow sense, the most successful human rights movement.

A briefer version of what follows was presented as the Roger T. Anstey Memorial Lectures in May 1984. This book is intended as the fleshing out of an approach to British abolitionism first suggested in my earlier book, *Econocide*. At every stage I have been indebted to the international scholarly community. A period of intensive research, provided by a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship in 1977–8, was supplemented by a Huntington Library fellowship in 1982 and an American Philosophical Society grant in 1985. Two exploratory essays on British popular mobilization were written during a residency at Bellagio in the summer of 1980. Both the Anstey Memorial Lectures and the first draft of the present study were written during a Fellowship year at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. The final version was completed while I was the first Secretary of the Center's European Program in 1984–85.

The gathering of materials was eased at every stage by archivists and librarians in Bedford, Brussels, Cambridge, Dublin, Duke University, Gloucester, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, New York, Oxford, Shrewsbury and Washington. For more extended demands

on their service, I am grateful to the staffs of Friends House Library in London, Rhodes House Library in Oxford, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Archives Nationales in Paris, the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino and the Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh. Debbie Nye at the Wilson Center and Faye Schneider at Pitt ably demonstrated the prowess of the word processor in taking on innumerable revisions.

Colleagues and friends have offered me an abundance of opportunities to explore various lines of argument along the way. My deeply missed companion, Roger Anstey, provided an international forum for the comparative analysis of antislavery at a Bellagio conference in 1978. Robert Fogel and David Landes enabled me to present one aspect of my thoughts on abolitionist mobilization at a Harvard seminar in 1980. Duncan Rice brought me to Hamilton College to present some soundings on the relationship between the ideologies of antislavery and industrial reform. The Woodrow Wilson Center offered an unprecedented mass of critical interlocutors from every field in the humanities and social sciences, as well as the opportunity for a formal colloquium on British popular mobilization, with Stanley Engerman and Robert Fogel as commentators. Finally, the Anstey lectures' audience constituted a lively and challenging mixture of scholars and nonspecialists.

A glimpse at the notes amply reveals how much my own analysis involves interchanges with a host of contemporary scholars. Some, above all David Eltis and Robert Fogel, have generously furnished me with unpublished drafts of essays or books in progress. Others, like David Brion Davis, James Walvin and James Epstein brought new data and essays to my attention. In return, I hope that I have fairly summarized the views of others. Fellow scholars will recognize interrogation as the sincerest form of flattery.

I have been fortunate in having colleagues prepared to flatter my own ideas in just that spirit. Van Beck Hall, Mary Turner and Lawrence Lipking provided valuable advice on various points of substance and presentation. Howard Temperley offered judicious comments on an early draft. Stanley Engerman, to whom I am already indebted for having read two drafts of *Econocide*, performed a similar service for all three drafts of this study. His enthusiasm and incredibly rapid responses stand in clear defiance of the scholarly laws of supply and demand.

I am grateful for the warm hospitality extended to me during the past decade by the Anstey family, Serge Daget, Margo Lieberman,

Brian and Andrea Levy, David Richardson, Margaret Stocks, Howard Temperley, James Walvin and Richard Weiss. The burdens of hospitality were not borne only by friends and colleagues. Each week for eighteen months my resourceful wife dissolved the monotonal rhythm of commuter marriage in the counterpoint of weekend honeymoons.

Finally, I would like to thank Christine and Ian Bolt for lavishly offering me their home in Kent and their indefatigable support during the Anstey lectures at Canterbury. They and the sponsors of those lectures allowed me to resume a discourse on the history of slavery only a few yards from the spot where I so often exchanged ideas with Roger himself. As I wrote in *Econocide*, whatever divergences of interpretation are apparent in our works, his impact will still be evident.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER

# A Chronology of Emancipation, 1772–1851

- 1772 Chief Justice Mansfield rules that slavery is not supported by English law.
- 1774 The English Society of Friends votes to expel members engaged in the slave trade. The US Continental Congress bans slave importations.
- 1776 The Societies of Friends in England and Pennsylvania require members to free their slaves or face expulsion.
- 1777 The Vermont Constitution prohibits slavery.
- 1780 Pennsylvania adopts a policy of gradual emancipation.
- 1783 A Massachusetts judicial decision interprets the state Constitution as having abolished slavery. British Quakers petition Parliament against the slave trade.
- 1784 Rhode Island and Connecticut pass gradual emancipation laws.
- 1787 Sierra Leone Colony is founded. An anti-slave trade society is formed in London. Manchester launches the first petition campaign.
- 1788 A *Société des Amis des Noirs* is formed in France. Four Northern US States make the slave trade illegal.
- 1791 Slave Revolution breaks out in St Domingue
- 1792 Second abolitionist campaign in England. The House of Commons resolves on gradual abolition. A Danish ordinance decrees gradual slave trade abolition. Sierra Leone is re-settled.
- 1793 Upper Canada enacts gradual emancipation. Abolitionist activity in Britain declines.
- 1794 The French National Convention abolishes slavery in the French colonies, a law which is repealed by Napoleon in 1802. The British occupy some French colonies, restoring slavery.

- 1795 Revolutionary warfare spreads in the Caribbean, including British colonies.
- 1796–7 British Caribbean slave territory expands through conquest.
- 1799 New York passes a gradual emancipation law.
- 1804 Haiti wins its independence.
- 1806–8 Popular abolition societies revive in Britain. Britain and the USA prohibit the slave trade.
- 1811 Slave trading is made a felony in Britain.
- 1813 Gradual emancipation is adopted in Argentina.
- 1814 A public campaign is launched against the revival of the French slave trade under terms of the Anglo–French peace treaty. The Netherlands prohibits slave trading. Gradual emancipation begins in Colombia.
- 1815 Napoleon decrees French slave trade abolition. The Congress of Vienna condemns the slave trade. A Parliamentary campaign begins for British slave registration.
- 1816 Blacks begin to win emancipation in the Latin American wars of Independence. A slave uprising occurs in Barbados.
- 1817 Portugal prohibits slave trading north of the equator.
- 1819 Britain establishes an anti-slave trade squadron on the Coast of Africa. The USA also authorizes an African naval patrol.
- 1820 The USA makes slave trading piracy.
- 1823 A London Anti-Slavery Committee is formed. Another petition campaign is launched. Slavery is abolished in Chile. A slave uprising occurs in Demerara.
- 1824 Slavery is abolished in Central America.
- 1829 Slavery is abolished in Mexico.
- 1831 Slavery is abolished in Bolivia. A British petition is launched for the immediate emancipation of British colonial slaves. The ‘Baptist War’ breaks out in Jamaica. The French again abolish their slave trade.
- 1833 The British again petition for immediate emancipation. An Emancipation Act is passed.
- 1834 British slavery is transformed in the colonies into Negro apprenticeship. A new French Society for the Abolition of Slavery is formed.
- 1838 After another petition campaign Negro Apprenticeship is abolished.
- 1839 The Papacy condemns the slave trade.
- 1840 An international anti-slavery conference is held in London.

- 1841 A multi-power Treaty is signed in Europe, guaranteeing mutual rights to search vessels for slaves. France refuses to ratify it.
- 1842 Slavery is abolished in Uruguay.
- 1844 French workers petition the Chamber of Deputies for slave emancipation.
- 1847 A second petition for slave emancipation is sent to the French Chambers.
- 1848 Slavery is abolished in the French and Danish colonies.
- 1851 Slavery is abolished in Ecuador. The slave trade to Brazil is ended.