


Slavery Abolition Act 1833

Slavery Abolition Act 1833

 United Kingdom	
Long title	An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves.
Chapter	3 & 4 Will.4 c.73
Dates	
Royal Assent	28 August 1833
Commencement	1 August 1834 1 December 1834 (Cape of Good Hope) 1 February 1835 (Mauritius)
Repeal date	19 November 1998
Other legislation	
Related legislation	Slave Trade Act 1807, Slave Trade Act 1824, Slave Trade Act 1843, Slave Trade Act 1873
Repealing legislation	Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1998
Status: Repealed	
Text of statute as originally enacted ^[1]	

The *Slavery Abolition Act 1833* (citation *3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73*) was an 1833 Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire (with the exceptions "of the Territories in the Possession of the East India Company," the "Island of Ceylon," and "the Island of Saint Helena", which exceptions were eliminated in 1843).^[2] The Act was repealed in 1998 as part of a wider rationalisation of English statute law, but later anti-slavery legislation remains in force.

Background

In 1772, Lord Mansfield's judgement in the *Somerset's Case* emancipated a slave in England, which helped launch the movement to abolish slavery.^[3] While slavery was unsupported by law in England and Scotland and no authority could be exercised on slaves entering English or Scottish soil, this did not yet apply to the rest of the British Empire.^[4] In 1785, English poet William Cowper wrote: "We have no slaves at home – Then why abroad? Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs receive our air, that moment they are free. They touch our country, and their shackles fall. That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud. And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then, And let it circulate through every vein."^[5] By 1783, an anti-slavery movement to abolish the slave trade throughout the Empire had begun among the British public.

In 1808, after Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act of 1807, the Royal Navy established the West Africa Squadron. The squadron's task was to suppress the Atlantic slave trade by patrolling the coast of West Africa. It did suppress the slave trade, but did not stop it entirely. It is possible that, when slave ships were in danger of being captured by

the Royal Navy, some captains may have ordered the slaves to be thrown into the sea to reduce the fines they had to pay. Between 1808 and 1860 the West Africa Squadron captured 1,600 slave ships and freed 150,000 Africans.^{[6][7]}

Notwithstanding what had been done to suppress the trade, further measures were soon discovered to be necessary, and in 1823, the Anti-Slavery Society was founded. Members included Joseph Sturge, Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, Henry Brougham, Thomas Fowell Buxton, Elizabeth Heyrick, Mary Lloyd, Jane Smeal, Elizabeth Pease and Anne Knight.^[8]

During the Christmas holiday of 1831, a large-scale slave revolt in Jamaica known as the Baptist War broke out. It was organised originally as a peaceful strike by Baptist minister Samuel Sharpe. The rebellion was suppressed by the militia of the Jamaican plantocracy and the British garrison ten days later in early 1832. Because of the loss of property and life in the 1831 rebellion, the British Parliament held two inquiries. The results of these inquiries contributed greatly to the abolition of slavery with the Slavery Abolition Act 1833.

A successor organisation to the Anti-Slavery Society was formed in London in 1839, which worked to outlaw slavery in other countries. Its official name was the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.^[9] The world's oldest international human rights organisation, it continues today as Anti-Slavery International.^[10]

Main points of the Act

Slavery was officially abolished in most of the British Empire on 1 August 1834.^[11] In practical terms, however, only slaves below the age of six were freed in the colonies, as all former slaves over the age of six were redesignated as "apprentices", which was abolished in two stages; the first set of apprenticeships came to an end on 1 August 1838, while the final apprenticeships were scheduled to cease on 1 August 1840. The Act also included the right of compensation for slave-owners who would be losing their property. The amount of money to be spent on the compensation claims was set at "the Sum of Twenty Millions Pounds Sterling".^[12] Under the terms of the Act the British government raised £20 million to pay out in compensation for the loss of the slaves as business assets to the registered owners of the freed slaves. The names listed in the returns for slave compensation show that ownership was spread over many hundreds of British families,^[13] many of them of high social standing. For example, Henry Phillpotts (then the Bishop of Exeter), in a partnership with three business colleagues, received £12,700 for 665 slaves in the West Indies.^[14] The majority of men and women who were awarded compensation under the 1833 Abolition Act are listed in a Parliamentary Return, entitled Slavery Abolition Act, which is an account of all moneys awarded by the Commissioners of Slave Compensation in the Parliamentary Papers 1837–8 Vol. 48.

In all, the government paid out over 5,000 separate awards. The £20 million fund was 40% of the government's total annual expenditure.

As a notable exception to the rest of the British Empire, the Act did not "extend to any of the Territories in the Possession of the East India Company, or to the Island of Ceylon, or to the Island of Saint Helena."^[2]

On 1 August 1834, an unarmed group of mainly elderly people being addressed by the Governor at Government House in Port of Spain, Trinidad, about the new laws, began chanting: "Pas de six ans. Point de six ans" ("Not six years. No six years"), drowning out the voice of the Governor. Peaceful protests continued until a resolution to abolish apprenticeship was passed and *de facto* freedom was achieved. Full emancipation for all was legally granted ahead of schedule on 1 August 1838.^[15]

Repeal

The Slavery Abolition Act 1833 was repealed in its entirety under the Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1998.^{[16][17]} However, this repeal has not made slavery legal again, as sections of the Slave Trade Act 1824, Slave Trade Act 1843 and Slave Trade Act 1873 are still in force. In addition the Human Rights Act 1998 incorporates into British Law Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights which prohibits the holding of persons as slaves.^{[18][19][20][21]}

References

- [1] http://www.pdavis.nl/Legis_07.htm
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- [9] Sharman, Anne-Marie (1993), ed., *Anti-Slavery Reporter vol 13 no 8*. P.35. London:Anti-Slavery International
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- [16] "Statute Law (Repeals) Act 1998" (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/ukpga_19980043_en_1). 1998-11-19. . Retrieved 2008-06-04.
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External links

- The Parliamentary Archives holds the original of this historic record (<http://www.parliament.uk/archives>)
- Text of the Slavery Abolition Act 1833 (http://www.pdavis.nl/Legis_07.htm)
- Teaching resources about Slavery and Abolition on blackhistory4schools.com (<http://www.blackhistory4schools.com/slavetrade/>)

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