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4

Commerce, State, and Anti-Alienism: Balancing Britain's Interests in the Late-Victorian Period

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At the end of the nineteenth century, Britain governed one-quarter of the globe; her merchant and naval fleets ruled the waves. Yet despite being the most powerful industrial nation on earth, Britain panicked in the last decades of the Victorian era, as inward migration from Eastern Europe began to dominate its political and manufacturing heartlands. With foreign culture and commerce increasingly infiltrating the East End of London, the Leylands area of Leeds, and the Gorbals district of Glasgow, the more Conservative newspapers and their anti-alien spokesmen began to question Britain's policy of unrestricted asylum.¹ By 1902 there was sufficient political support to bring about a parliamentary review of immigration in the form of a Royal Commission on Alien Immigration.² Yet the proposals by the Conservative party to restrict alien immigration in the 1900s threatened Britain's liberal policies of asylum and free trade which had brought about much of Britain's economic strength.

This chapter demonstrates that commerce was as crucial to late-Victorian culture as anti-alienism: it is impossible to understand how the restrictions on immigration were gradually introduced in the late nineteenth century without recognizing the balancing act that stood behind them. The first section considers the crucial economic aspects of the passenger shipping business and the fears that the British merchant marine, already reeling from the effects of intense foreign competition, would be unduly hindered by the impact of draconian passenger shipping legislation. The role played by these commercial considerations in the making of the Aliens Act suggests that the vocal opposition of right-wing MPs was neutered in order to preserve Britain's liberal trading interests. The chapter then moves on to examine the evidence presented to the Royal Commission by maritime and medical authorities, and reproduced by the media. Although these findings were not

typical of the experience of the majority of migrants, they were instrumental in reinforcing contemporary associations between disease and race, leading to longer-term medical racialization at the Edwardian quayside. Placing Britain's response to alien immigration in the wider context of self-governing dominion states within the British Empire, the final section of this chapter will ask why some states introduced restricted immigration while others retained more liberal policies. The imperial relationship – Britain as an imperial power, not just as a domestic entity – adds another dimension to the interplay between these three elements – state, commerce, and anti-alienism. While British politicians sought to impose restrictions on alien migration into Britain, transmigration to the dominions was seen as an indispensable by-product of free trade in which British participation was to be encouraged.

The growth of passenger shipping and the emergence of anti-alienism

Most Europeans arrived in Britain via the Humber ports. Travelling third class as transmigrants, they were expected to leave Britain within 14 days of arrival. They chose to migrate to the United States, Canada, or South Africa via Britain because they deemed it cheaper, quicker, or safer than to journey on those direct emigrant services provided by Britain's competitors based in Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Copenhagen, and Le Havre. Hull was their main point of entry, Liverpool the main port of departure. The overland journey between these two ports was catered for by the provision of third-class trains called 'emigrant specials'. Others came via the Thames, arriving on immigrant tickets, hoping to purchase a ticket for the next stage of their journey upon arrival in London. It was this latter flow of aliens that came under the greatest scrutiny in the Parliamentary debates of the 1900s.

The question of restricting immigration was nothing new at the time of the Royal Commission. During times of political crises – like the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars – Britain had revised the Aliens Act that had first been introduced in 1793 to protect the country from the perceived political dangers of revolutionary Europe.³ Following the passing of the 1836 Aliens Act, the movement of people was to be monitored at all of the major points of entry, with quarterly returns sent by passenger ports to the Home Office (and, after 1873, to the Board of Trade). These figures enabled the government to quantify the scale and character of the alien influx.⁴ Yet the Act had ceased to be an effective indicator of alien movement by the late 1850s. When large-scale immigration emerged in the late Victorian period, officials' failure to quantify the problem caused popular concern. The 1888 Select Committee on the Immigration and Emigration of Foreigners concluded that more reliable data needed to be collated on the various movements into, through, or from Britain.⁵ After May 1890, the results were

presented annually to Parliament.⁶ Nevertheless, even this data showed regional variation in the accuracy of the information returned. As a report by the Board of Trade to the House of Commons noted in April 1892, 'with so vast a passenger movement as that to and from the United Kingdom it would probably be impossible to obtain a minutely complete return'.⁷ While government statisticians could generate volumes of data on diverse topics ranging from railway accidents to the scale of guano imports, maintaining an accurate account of alien arrivals into Britain was seemingly beyond the capabilities of late-Victorian bureaucracy. To those concerned with the appearance of concentrated pockets of foreigners in Britain's major urban areas, this was a danger associated with Britain's liberal asylum policy.

Such weaknesses were of particular significance in London, where many of those arriving were classed as 'immigrants', even though they were actually transmigrants. This mislabelling fuelled tension, since it led to the perception that immigration was far higher than it was in reality. As one Edwardian noted, unrestricted asylum, particularly as the influx was dominated by Jews, would enable Jewish influence to dominate British commerce as it had already done in Italy. In the frontispiece of his copy of W.H. Wilkins's *The Alien Immigrant* (1892), this anonymous individual noted that the long-term effect would be the emergence of 'Cosmopolitan Jewry' whose 'great object is the *Business & financial control* of the World'.⁸ Politicians like William Evans-Gordon (Conservative MP for the Stepney Division of Tower Hamlets, and member of the Royal Commission) and Harry Samuel (Conservative MP for the Limehouse Division of Tower Hamlets) were quick to cash in on these anxieties: maximizing the ambiguity of official passenger statistics, they highlighted the increased presence of the foreign-born population in key areas of London and Britain's industrial heartlands. Such anti-alienists pointed out that it was necessary to restrict immigration to ensure that British workers would not have their wages reduced by aliens under-pricing their services. If only the influence of the foreign menace could be minimized, they argued, Britain would remain firmly British.

Nevertheless, there were other issues to consider – issues that were equally critical for Britain's political interests and imperial standing. After all, the idea of restricting alien entry and thus reducing passenger traffic posed a serious threat to British commerce, challenging the liberal policy of free trade which had benefited British maritime expansion since the repeal of the Navigation Laws in 1851. Britain's ship-owners had emerged during the nineteenth century as the largest providers of passenger shipping. Though the market was highly competitive, companies like Cunard, White Star, Union-Castle, Allan, Anchor, and Guion helped to turn the British mercantile marine into the most powerful merchant fleet on earth. As the *Fortnightly Review* noted in 1903, Britain and her Empire had 8,532 steamships registered under their flag, Germany 1,365, the United States 1,094, France 630, and Russia 544.⁹ Yet while Britain's share of the inter-continental market

had grown, her dominance of the intra-European trade had weakened, as European nations invested heavily to develop their shipping interests. By 1900, the short-sea routes to Britain were largely in the hands of German, Dutch, Danish, Belgian, and French lines. Though Britain shared the Baltic routes with Germany and Denmark, and continued to dominate the Scandinavian routes, expanding foreign fleets controlled the main North Sea routes upon which immigrants were conveyed to Britain.¹⁰

In other words, any restriction on the shipment of aliens to Britain from the Baltic (and from Europe in general) threatened to lessen Britain's involvement in intra-continental passenger shipping even further. It would have done so by reducing the revenue generated through transporting immigrants (or by impairing the quick turn around of migrant-carrying vessels), and, even more crucially, by threatening the supply of transmigrants who, after arriving in Britain – often on the same boats as immigrants – sailed from Britain elsewhere. These transmigrants were needed to fill third class steerage berths on ocean liners leaving Liverpool, Glasgow, London, or Southampton. Indeed, to retain the commercial advantage, Britain's steamship operators were building ever-larger vessels. New crafts launched during the Edwardian era – such as *Aquitania*, *Olympic*, or *Mauretania* – cost huge sums of money to build, maintain, and operate. Too large to transport British emigrants only, their future success relied on the constant supply of European transmigrants, needed to fill the third class compartments.¹¹

The significance of these huge ocean liners was not merely commercial. It is enough to read Kipling's poem, 'The Secret of the Machines', to realize that vessels like Cunard's *Mauretania*, launched in 1906, were seen as mighty symbols of British imperial power.¹² Since 1840, Britain had held the coveted Blue Riband, the award given for the fastest transatlantic crossing. But in 1897 the situation changed when Germany successfully challenged Britain's supremacy with Norddeutscher Lloyd's *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, which emerged as the fastest vessel afloat. German companies, namely the Norddeutscher Lloyd and the Hamburg-America Lines, subsequently won for the ensuing nine years.¹³

Paradoxically, then, it was precisely the anti-alien cause – keeping Britain British – that threatened to undermine a symbol of Britain's mercantile strength by reducing her commercial position and hindering the business of ports such as London, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Southampton (from which transmigrants left Britain). As maritime historian Francis Hyde has noted, 'The fear of the foreigner had been transferred from the purely political into that of an economic environment. In the field of shipping, foreign competition was at first a convenient scapegoat [for Britain's narrowing commercial lead over Europe]; but it later became an effective basis for pressure to be exerted on the Government to obtain reductions in the irksome passenger regulations.'¹⁴ With the emergence of anti-alien sentiment, as the Royal Commission was scrutinizing the business of migration and as Conservative

MPs looked certain to limit Britain's domination of transatlantic passenger shipping by restricting *all* aliens who arrived in Britain – no wonder that those engaged in the 'legitimate' business of transmigration leapt to its defence. Men like Charles Henry Wilson (Liberal MP for West Hull) and Christopher Furness (Liberal MP for Hartlepool), who had accrued substantial wealth through their shipping concerns, championed free trade – wishing, of course, to maintain their own lucrative businesses.

Interestingly, not all shipping moguls rejected the anti-alien cause. For example, Charles Wilson's nephew, Arthur Stanley Wilson (the Conservative MP for the East Riding of Yorkshire), voted against Furness and Charles Wilson in many of the debates on the Aliens Bill. It seems that for him, party loyalty was more important than the income he derived through this aspect of his family's business.¹⁵ Similarly, although he was a member of a prominent Anglo-Jewish family, Harry Samuel – who joined Evans-Gordon's campaign – preferred 'English' sentiments to sympathy with his co-religionists.

Medical evidence and the Royal Commission on alien immigration

The anti-alien Conservatives captured their opponents' seats by emphasizing the alien menace, the 'foreignness' infiltrating Britain's inner cities. The alien was depicted as dirty, inferior, a threat to British workers;¹⁶ but the most alarming feature was the notion of the alien as a carrier of pestilence. Indeed, for Evans-Gordon, the medical evidence presented to the Royal Commission was as crucial as evidence about East End working and living conditions.

As we have seen, the immigrant market had, by the end of the nineteenth century, become dominated by foreign companies.¹⁷ Nevertheless, despite fears expressed about the medical dangers associated with the conveyance of migrants on these foreign-owned vessels, the majority of immigrants arrived in a relatively good standard of ships. Foreign fleets were controlled in terms of sanitation, ship design, and passenger comfort by comparable merchant legislation as British-registered vessels; standards varied, but on the whole, the merchant fleets of Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Norway, and Sweden did not pose the medical threat of infiltrating the British capital with disease on a similar scale to that which had brought the Hanseatic port of Hamburg to near disaster in 1892.¹⁸

There was, however, one noticeable exception – those passengers carried under the Danish flag from Russia to Britain. Vessels of Det Forenede Dampskib Selskab (DFDS) had transported emigrants between the Baltic port of Libau and the British capital since 1893, enabling Denmark to retain a share of the 'Jewish market' by conveying emigrants from the Pale of Settlement direct to Hull or to London without calling in at a Danish port *en route*. When the Kiel Canal was opened in 1895, the number of vessels

destined for Britain via this Baltic route increased, as the journey was reduced from five to six days to three to four days. The passengers were transported in the 'tween decks of ships not designed for this purpose. Since the Danish-owned vessels did not enter Danish ports, the medical dangers associated with the trade never created concern within Denmark, the country under whose maritime laws the DFDS was regulated. Under a loophole in international law, flouting the standards with which British-registered vessels had to comply on a regular basis, the Danish vessels left passengers exposed to the evils associated with ocean travel in the early nineteenth century.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, it would be the vessels of the DFDS that would be selected by Evans-Gordon for closer scrutiny by the Royal Commission. Like his careful use of members of the British Brothers' League to answer questions on life in London's East End, Evans-Gordon provided the Royal Commission with exceptional, atypical evidence to gain maximum exposure. Here, for example, is the evidence presented to the Royal Commission by the Port of London's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. H. Williams:

On the 21st May [1902] the ss. 'Hengest,' of Aarhus, from Libau, arrived at Gravesend with 171 Russian immigrants. The vessel left Libau on the 17th May. The immigrants were carried in the after main 'tween decks in a space with a total capacity of 7,172.9 cubic feet, giving 50.16 cubic feet per head only. The total floor space measured 393.3 square feet, an area of 2.3 square feet only per head being available. The quarters occupied by the immigrants were in a filthy condition, the floors being strewn with all kinds of refuse, and offensive liquid from the horses carried on the same deck had leaked through into these quarters. No attempt had been made at cleansing this space since the vessel had left Libau. Two temporary closets were provided, and both were used indiscriminately by the sexes. The only ventilation provided was by means of the bunker hatchways, and by two 12-inch ventilators, one of which was without a cowl, and closed.²⁰

Medical Officers in Hull had regularly complained about aliens being shipped in horrific standards; indeed, it was in Hull in 1882, and not in London, that the issue of diseased alien arrivals had first caused political concern.²¹ Yet in the lengthy published minutes from the Royal Commission, the obsession with matters affecting Thames-based arrivals implied that the problem centred on London, the Imperial metropolis.

Evidence from DFDS vessels was also employed by Evans-Gordon in his best-selling book *The Alien Immigrant*, which described, in alarmist terms, what was allegedly a typical journey of Jews from departure in a Baltic port to arrival in Britain. Although his description of the DFDS was contradicted by Albert Kinross in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, both writers perpetuated the

perceived links between Jewish passengers and the conditions from which disease would emanate.²²

In fact, the problems associated with diseased aliens arriving in Britain had been monitored since the passing of the 1872 and 1875 General Health Acts, long before the beginning of mass Jewish immigration.²³ Moreover, the conditions on board were as applicable to Slavs, Finns, Lithuanians, Rumanians, and Hungarians arriving in Britain as they were to Jewish immigrants.²⁴ No single vessel was known to have conveyed only Jewish immigrants, but, since the majority of their human cargo was increasingly of the Jewish faith, Jews were seen as the main carriers of disease.²⁵

Attempts to curtail immigration through using such medical evidence at the time of the Royal Commission did, however, serve some useful purpose.²⁶ After the findings on the poor state of Danish vessels were heard and subsequently published, the Danish government intervened and brought about much-needed improvements – most probably because the company was a source of national pride. Although the problems associated with the trade – overcrowding, the lack of adequate sanitary arrangements, and the carriage of horses in the same part of the vessels as passengers – were reduced, such conditions might have been eradicated far sooner had British government officials simply contacted their Danish counterparts with sufficient medical evidence.

The lack of intervention in the trade during the late 1890s surely raises questions about whether or not Presidents of the Board of Trade – who were preoccupied with profit derived from transmigrants conveyed to Britain – placed the interests of British trade ahead of those of the Home Office. Why did British diplomats not adequately intervene when the problem first surfaced? What was the reason for Britain not seeking to reduce the risks associated with maritime trade? Why was Britain unable to prohibit the arrival of high-risk vessels? The answer might lie in the difficulties of communication between government departments and the numerous layers of bureaucracy. But it is also arguable that action was only taken once the issue of the conditions in which passengers travelled to Britain had become a *commercial* threat. As George Harwood (MP for Bolton) noted during the reading of the Aliens Bill:

Within the last few months he had seen advertisements at railway stations in Russia and Germany warning emigrants that it would be very much better not to go through England, but to go direct by German lines, because they would have less trouble. Unless the conditions to which we subjected them were civilised the trade would be driven away. It was perfectly absurd for the Government to try to ride two horses. They were pretending to do something, but they would not pay the money to do it properly.²⁷

When the findings of the Royal Commission were published in 1903, it seemed to British ship-owners – and those engaged in the support industries

of victualling, shipbuilding, and railways – that Britain's commercial interests would be challenged not by the advancement of the American or Imperial German merchant fleets, but by anti-alien sentiment in the East End of London.

Yet despite such vocal consternation, measures designed to protect trade and not domestic interests took precedence in the three months prior to the passing of the Aliens Act. Powers to restrict, or at least police, passenger shipping were watered down by MPs keen to defend free trade. Charles Wilson, Christopher Furness, and Austin Taylor (MP for Bootle) each raised questions in the House designed to draw attention to the damaging effects of the anti-alien cause.²⁸ Despite Evans-Gordon's scare tactics, when the Aliens Act was finally passed in August 1905, it had been mitigated sufficiently for even the opposing Liberals to endorse it. While the Act forced companies involved in the trade to purchase Bonds ensuring the alien remain genuinely in transit, and restricted the trade to a limited number of ports, the business was not unduly hampered. On the passing of the final amendment affecting transmigration, in May 1905, Charles Wilson asserted that 'the Home Secretary is not likely to hurt our legitimate transmigrant trade'.²⁹ How true: having finally achieved what three Parliaments had failed to enact, Britain's first piece of alien legislation for sixty-nine years had been watered down sufficiently for Britain's commercial interests to triumph over domestic Conservative policy.

The Aliens Act and increased racial scrutiny

From a shipping perspective, the Aliens Act was not seen as a source of concern. Memoranda had to be re-sent to various shipping lines and their port-side agents during 1906 to remind them that they had to register and comply with the terms introduced under the Act. However, with the status of an immigrant ship varying according to which Home Secretary was in power, the main effect of the Act was the accumulation of more reliable data at Britain's registered ports of entry. Finally beginning to record the true picture of alien migration – demonstrating that the majority of aliens were actually transmigrants – the new statistical returns made under the Aliens Act also showed the declining importance of London in transatlantic passenger shipping.

But the Act had another, more disturbing, effect: the growing awareness of Jewish identity in the eyes of medical and commercial agents. Anti-Jewish and anti-alien racial sentiments were exacerbated, propelled by the Royal Commission to the forefront of contemporary opinion. The application of the regulations laid out in the 1906 Merchant Shipping Act – which required the documentation of aliens passing through Britain's ports – revealed an increasing level of racial scrutiny in some ports (though not in all). For example, at the Scottish port of Glasgow, the so-called 'second city of

Empire', alien transmigrants and non-transmigrants (alien emigrants who had been residing in Britain) were now labelled in both ethnic *and* national terms, rather than just the latter. Such classification was not the result of the inconsistent application of government policy by government employees, but rather the work of clerks of those companies that shipped aliens across the Atlantic. The agents taking bookings tended more and more to label Scottish-born and English-born Jewish emigrants who had immigrant parents as alien Jews or Hebrews.

This racial tagging was relatively new, a by-product of increased racial awareness which was also found in the Annual Reports of the Operations of the Sanitary Department for Glasgow.³⁰ Although large numbers of Russians (mainly Jews and Finns) had passed through the port of Glasgow as early as the 1840s, they were never then labelled as Jews or Hebrews.³¹ The Chief Sanitary Inspector referred to such migrants as 'persons coming from Russian ports'.³² But this changed after 1899: diseases such as typhus, trachoma, and cholera arriving with immigrants via the port of London would be linked with Jews leaving Scottish ports. Those isolated, as the following entry demonstrates, were identified by race and not just nationality: 'The fumigation by the Shipping Companies of emigrants' baggage from the Continent has again been resorted to, but only in the case of luggage from foreign ports where Russian Jews embarked.'³³ These tendencies were reinforced after 1906 and became more widespread throughout other British ports.

Such racial labelling was also imposed by commercial agencies.³⁴ Jewish passengers would be the only group identified by race rather than nationality.³⁵ Although the Allan Line would be the first company to record racial status, they were followed a year later by their Clydeside competitor, the Anchor Line.³⁶ In 1906 such labelling allows us to identify that Jewish emigrants represented 16 per cent (370 out of 2,274 passengers) of the Allan Line's third-class transmigrant contingent, while for the Anchor Line Jews represented 24 per cent (2,937 out of 12,336 passengers) of their transmigrant customers.³⁷ Though the number of Jews migrating through Scotland had declined to 678 by 1908, they still formed 22 per cent of the continental transmigrant business undertaken by both companies.³⁸

By 1909 the racial labelling had apparently ceased to be of importance to the Glasgow Sanitary Department, as the trade in Russian transmigrants had declined significantly.³⁹ Yet on the Board of Trade's passenger lists, such ethnic labelling continued.⁴⁰ What had begun as an occasional reference to 'Hebrew', 'Jewish' or 'Jew' in the years preceding the Aliens Act developed between 1908 and 1914 into a constant feature of the ethnicity recorded of aliens leaving Scotland's premier ports (Glasgow and Greenock).⁴¹ In 1910, 288 transmigrants and 199 non-transmigrant aliens were identified in the passenger lists as being Jewish (see Table 4.1):⁴² the lists, more detailed in this year than for other years, described 14 types of Jews or Hebrews – often prefixed with their nationality.

Table 4.1 Jewish Emigrants appearing in the passenger lists of ships leaving Glasgow and Greenock in 1910 for non-European destinations

Label	Non-Transmigrant	Transmigrant
Russian Jew	138	222
Russian Hebrew	15	24
Austrian Jew	1	23
Austrian Hebrew	0	6
British Jew	1	0
British Jew (born in Scotland)	10	0
Russian Jew (born in Scotland)	12	0
Russian Jew (born in England)	7	0
Russian Hebrew (born in Scotland)	5	0
Russian Hebrew (born in England)	0	0
Polish Jew	1	0
Hungarian Hebrew	0	9
Hebrew	0	2
German Jew	0	2
Total	190	288

Source: Digital photographs of original passenger lists held at The National Archives, BT/27/646–649.

These images have been sampled by the author as part of a project to examine out-migration from Scotland between 1890 and 1960 at the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen.

Such ethnic labelling, supplied by the commercial agents of the Anchor and Allan Lines, was not a requirement of the Board of Trade. Glasgow's shipping companies participated in this form of racialized demography because of the increased awareness of the financial costs associated with shipping passengers back to the European port of embarkation (at the shipping company's expense) if the immigrants were rejected by the U.S. Immigration Service as medically unfit. As medical historian Kenneth Collins has demonstrated, the port of Glasgow was the main source of those rejected due to trachoma.⁴³ Yet it can also be argued that for the Edwardian shipping companies, the label 'Jew' in general was equated with commercial hazard because of the perceived greater risks of disease.

Ethnic labelling was not the only way of identifying such hazardous passengers. In a printed advertisement dated 1910, the Canadian Pacific Railway stated 'NO FOREIGNERS EXCEPT SCANDINAVIANS CARRIED THIRD CLASS FROM LIVERPOOL'.⁴⁴ Scandinavian emigrants – always regarded in Parliamentary debates and the Royal Commission as being of a healthier, 'more acceptable class' – were to be conveyed without difficulty. Yet Jews,

and Russian Jews in particular, were not to be carried on at least Canadian ships. While advertisements for the Canadian Pacific's ocean liners may have been openly racist, few companies promoted their Jewish credentials.⁴⁵

It is possible that this evidence from medical and other official records at Glasgow represents a personal or localized response to the alien immigrants. After all, while sectarianism was the by-product of the mass Irish immigration into Liverpool and Glasgow during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, Jewry in Scotland as a whole did not seem to experience antisemitic prejudice at first hand.⁴⁶ What is certain, however, is that attitudes varied throughout cognate parts of Britain – as they did throughout Britain's Empire.

The alien menace and Britain's Empire

Concerns about the alien problem were not limited to Britain. In the United States, Germany, France, and many parts of the British Empire the problem of race had caused widespread alarm. During the 1880s prejudice over coloured immigrants, particularly Chinese, led the United States to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882). It was followed by similar acts in Canada, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand.⁴⁷ In the late 1890s this anti-alienism was increasingly directed towards East Europeans of non-Teutonic origin.

In the British Empire, responses to the 'non-colour' race question varied. Australia passed the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901, and New Zealand passed a revised Aliens Act in 1908. Both have been seen as colonial racism against the non-whites via policies designed to retain such colonial outposts as 'British'.⁴⁸ In Canada, the 1906 and 1910 Immigration Acts were intended to prevent the immigration of political, moral, physical, or criminally undesirable aliens – bringing the country in line with the 1891 U.S. Immigration Act. In South Africa, home to a large number of Litvak Jewish migrants, the authorities responded in a similar manner to Britain, seeking to limit Jewish immigration, particularly during the political crisis of the Boer War. By contrasting the South African response to Jewish migration with Canadian attitudes, the final section of this chapter will consider the interplay between liberal trading policies and conservative immigration policies in the imperial context.

Between 1880 and 1900, the Jewish population in South Africa grew from 4,000 to approximately 10,000.⁴⁹ While the immigrant Jewish community was scattered throughout the Cape and Natal provinces, concentrated pockets of Jewish settlement emerged in Johannesburg, where they began to present a visible ethnic enclave. In Cape Town, South Africa's major point of entry for immigrants, the community intermingled successfully with other aliens in the District 6 region; but the continued influx of Jews throughout the late 1890s began to cause alarm within some sectors of Cape society,

especially after the Jewish population had reached a critical mass in excess of 10,000. During the Boer War, the complexities of racial tensions within the war-torn colony meant that resentment against the foreign-born population – especially the Jewish community, but also Indians – became more vocal and virulent than in any other part of the British Empire.

The restriction of Jewish immigration was seen both as a political and economic defensive measure. The Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, Sir Gordon Sprigg, sought to achieve this through a number of measures: in September 1901 he asked London for martial law to be extended to South Africa's ports of entry, and – once this was approved, not without 'difference of opinion'⁵⁰ – he requested further powers to restrict dangerous races, namely, Jews and Indians. The British authorities, however, were not thrilled. In response to this request, the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, wrote to the High Commissioner, Alfred Milner:

You should inform your Ministers that it does not appear to be possible to differentiate against nationality or colour under the permit regulations but that their views have been communicated to the India Office who have been requested to acquaint the Government of India that it is desirable that due circumspection should be exercised in furnishing permits to Indians about whose means to maintaining themselves any doubt may exist as presence in Cape Colony in existing circumstances is deprecated by the authorities there. His Majesty's Consul, Riga, has been communicated with in a similar sense with regard to Polish Jews in view of your telegram of 6th December, No.1.⁵¹

On the other hand, when the British Foreign Secretary, the Marquess of Lansdowne, advocated the temporary cessation of *all* migration to the Cape in 1902, this was not deemed necessary by the Cape authorities: 'The Cape Government evidently wish that no difficulty should be placed in the way of the immigration to the Colony of a certain class. Viz: – British working men, clerks and shepherds. For whom there is great demand'.⁵²

Such views on the need for British immigrants, who were seen as loyal to the British crown, stood in stark contrast to those concerning Polish Jews – the so-called Peruvians. When Europeans, particularly Jewish immigrants, continued to arrive in Cape Town after the introduction of a visa requirement (and possession of £100) in 1902, Chamberlain was asked to intervene. His actions showed that Britain wielded little control over officials representing the State in Europe, and particularly in Russia. Despite the apparent need for documentation and possession of funds to prevent them becoming a fiscal burden, migrants were rarely checked by British consular representatives before embarkation. Too many were still arriving: when the *Goth* landed in Cape Town with 32 impoverished Jews onboard, the Cape authorities heavily criticized the British administration.⁵³ Although martial law came to an

end in September 1902, the British authorities had shown an inability to control the issuance of permits or flow of aliens from British ports, and similar disregard for the Cape authority's desire to control her own ports during the Boer War. While British politicians sought to restrict immigrants from entering Britain, transmigration to South Africa was seen as a by-product of free trade in which British participation was to be encouraged.

The Cape Colony was not the only part of the Empire whose complaints over domestic immigration matters were ignored by Britain during the period. Britain, as the Imperial nation, showed similar disregard for the interests of other dominions - perhaps a reason why many sought to legislate on the topic of immigration as soon as they had reached sufficient maturity to be granted self-governing status and thus control their own immigrant policy. Overall it would be Britain's liberal attitude to the conservatism expressed in parts of the Empire that continued to cause the greatest resentment. Indeed, far from being confined to Colonial Parliamentarians or to political correspondence, hostile attitudes to foreigners arriving *en masse* became increasingly visible in newspapers and popular publications. As Marjory Harper noted,

Basil Stewart's pamphlet, published in 1909 and entitled *No English Need Apply: Or, Canada, as a Field for the Emigrant...* pulled no punches in his vilification of the immigration authorities for 'frightening away the better and well-conducted classes of Englishmen and women, and attracting only the hewer of wood and drawer of water of other nations', thereby causing Canada to lose 'that cultured and refining influence of which she stands much in need'. 'Russian and Galician Jews, Greeks, Germans, Dutch, Poles, Hungarians, Italians... Syrians and Turks... are not the kind of material from which the British Empire has been made, nor of which it should be built in the future'.⁵⁴

Canada, however, did not show the degree of anti-Jewish sentiment expressed in South Africa, perhaps because the small Jewish community was dispersed throughout the country. As the *Jewish Yearbook* showed in 1896, the country's 3,711 Jews were spread out accordingly: Quebec (2,703), Ontario (2,501), Manitoba (743), British Columbia (277), North West Territories (85), New Brunswick (73), Nova Scotia (31) and Prince Edward Island (just 1).⁵⁵ This confirmed what the Canadian Prime Minister had originally conceived when he had authorized immigration officials to allocate land for Jewish agricultural settlers: a 'sprinkling of Jews in the Northwest would be good' for they would 'at once go in for peddling and politicking, and be of much use in the new country as cheap jacks and chapmen'.⁵⁶

Canada's positive response towards Jewish immigrants could be traced back to 1882, when the Canadian High Commissioner Alexander Galt

attended a London Mansion House meeting to discuss the plight of Russian Jews under the Tsarist regime and how the settlement of refugees in Manitoba could assist those who had fled state-sponsored persecution. Recognizing the benefits that Canada could gain from being a haven to the oppressed, he decided – unlike his South African counterparts – to accept a number of the migrants. Consequently, many of those arriving in Canada after 1882 did so under schemes organized by the London Mansion House Committee or Baron de Hirsch's schemes which provided for the needs of aliens before and after they had arrived in their place of settlement.⁵⁷

Instead of the Jewish alien being perceived as a menace, as Valerie Knowles has noted, it was the influx of Europeans Slavs (particularly Hungarians) from eastern and central Europe which had a profound impact upon the Canadian labour markets and which consequently became the cause of popular resentment. It was something about which the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress grew increasingly alarmed, echoing concerns similar to those expressed by British Trade Unions about the Jewish influx into Britain: 'As far as the congress was concerned, only rigorous enforcement of the [Alien Labour Act] would prevent Canada from being inundated with "ignorant, unfortunate...non-English speaking aliens," who do irreparable damage to the community.'⁵⁸ Canada, in short, showed wider concern for protectionism based upon ethnicity, than upon antisemitism.

Conclusion

Although the Aliens Act did not decrease the number of alien migrants travelling to Britain, it ultimately defined the numbers, nationality, and destination of those arriving at and departing British ports each year. What the medical evidence – presented to the Royal Commission, and reproduced in contemporary newspapers and journals – failed to highlight was that far more aliens arrived through ports outside London than ever arrived via the Thames. However it was precisely by drawing attention to politically-concentrated zones, such as the East End of London, that anti-alienists were able to challenge Britain's national policy of free trade.

Nevertheless, the intervention of MPs with vested interests in passenger shipping protected the transmigrant trade as the immigrant trade became increasingly restricted by Edwardian legislation. Charles Wilson described the trade as being that of Scandinavians and Russians, without reference to religion or ethnicity; he protected the market by championing trade rather than race. To be sure, unlike William Evans-Gordon, Wilson benefited greatly from the alien market; but his rhetorical stance on immigration is as important to the understanding of attitudes towards aliens as the more noted impact of Evans-Gordon. Indeed, even when anti-alienism was at its height, Britain would always place her commercial well-being at the forefront of government policy.

Attitudes towards immigration in the late-Victorian period were characterized, in other words, by a political balancing act: both sides of the political divide failed to control the issue of aliens confidently. On the one hand, the Liberals delayed Conservatism within the Empire, yet could not stop it once countries such as New Zealand and Australia had gained self-government. On the other hand, the Conservatives' policy on immigration (demonstrated at the time of the Royal Commission) was watered down due to the business interests of Liberal MPs. The Conservative administration introduced a piece of legislation that would be immediately enforced by a new Liberal Government in 1906. Once in power, the Liberals oscillated over what was deemed an immigrant ship; at times they appeared more conservative than their political opponents, and even considered, in 1910, the introduction of a London version of an Ellis Island.⁵⁹ For lawmakers on both sides of the political fence, balancing Britain's interests – commercial, domestic and foreign – was thus a difficult prospect, anticipating a century of similar difficulties.

Notes

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1. Winston Churchill, MP, stated during the debates on the Aliens Bill that it was only in these districts 'that the alien question had produced a problem of a grave and complex character'. *The Parliamentary Debates (Authorised Edition)*, Fourth Series, CVLVII (London: Wyman & Sons, 1905), 858.
2. British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), *Royal Commission on Alien Immigration (RCAI)* (London: HMSO, 1903), Vols I–V.
3. The original Bill was revised in 1814, 1815, 1816, 1826, and 1836.
4. BPP, Board of Trade (Alien Immigration), *Reports on the Volume and Effects of Recent Immigration from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom* (London: HMSO, 1894), 2.
5. The conclusions of this Committee were later summarized in the Board of Trade's *Reports on the Volume*, 2. The report of the 1888 Committee, by Sir William Thackeray Marriott, was published in 1889; see *Select Committee on Emigration and Immigration (Foreigners)* XI.419. The findings of this investigation caused the re-enforcement of the 1836 Act in 1890. See *RCAI*, Minutes of Evidence, Vol. II, M.28 (London: HMSO, 1903).
6. The operation of the previous Aliens Act was altered slightly by Orders issued by the Board of Trade in 1890 and 1894. See Nicholas J. Evans, 'Indirect Passage'.
7. *Copy of the Statistical Tables Relating to Emigration and Immigration from and into the United Kingdom in the year 1891, and the Report to the Board of Trade Thereon by Henry G. Calcraft* (London: HMSO, 1892), 12.

8. Part of 12 pages of anonymous comments written in 1910 and contained within the inside cover of a copy of W. H. Wilkins, *The Alien Invasion* (London: Methuen, 1892), later deposited in the University of Aberdeen's library. The same commentator also disliked the influence of the Catholic Church.
9. J. L. Bashford, 'The German Mercantile Marine', *Fortnightly Review*, 73 (1903), 288.
10. *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Establishment of a Receiving-House for Alien Immigrants at the Port of London: Volume I, Report and Appendix* (1911, X.87), 103; Nicholas J. Evans, 'Aliens en Route'.
11. During the debates on restricting alien immigration, Christopher Furness (MP for Hartlepool and a ship-owner) noted that the government had awarded the Cunard Steamship Company £2,000,000 as a subsidy for maintaining the large emigration trade between Britain and the United States See *Parliamentary Debates*, CVLVII, 870.
12. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Secret of the Machines (Modern Machinery)', in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse, Inclusive Edition, 1885-1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), 766-767. The verse was first published in 1911, five years after the launch of *Mauretania* and a year after she had won the Blue Riband.
13. Lee, *The Blue Riband*, 231-235.
14. Hyde, *Cunard*, 95.
15. It is telling that Charles Henry Wilson and his brother Arthur considered their sons ill equipped to manage the family firm when they retired. Instead, they appointed a Managing Director (Oswald Sanderson) over the company from 1902.
16. Cf. Joseph O'Brien, 'Some Types of Russian Aliens, Drawn from the Life in the East End of London', *English Illustrated Magazine*, 33 (1905), 585.
17. An opinion confirmed by Newcastle MP, George Renwick, during the Committee meetings discussing the Aliens Bill. See *Parliamentary Debates*, CVLVII, 346.
18. Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg*.
19. Coleman, *Passage to America*, 100-118.
20. *RCAI*, Minutes of Evidence, Volume II, M.6, 176.
21. The issue was raised in the House of Commons, but the subsequent report that was published by Parliament placed Britain's commercial interests ahead of the needs of the alien passengers. *Reports by the Board of Trade and Local Government Board relating to the Transit of Scandinavian Emigrants through Port of Hull* (1882), LXII.87
22. A. Kinross, 'At Sea with the Alien Immigrant', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 (1898), 19-26.
23. These Acts had established Port Sanitary Authorities at each of the main ports in England and Wales with each authority employing suitably qualified Port Medical Officers of Health to police Britain's ports.
24. *Parliamentary Debates*, CVLVI, 1230.
25. For coverage of the Hamburg cholera see 'The Cholera', *The Times*, 31 August 1892, 3; 'The Shadow of the Great Death', *The Times*, 17 September 1892, 8.
26. *RCAI*, Minutes of Evidence, Volume II, M.6, 970-977, 156.
27. *Parliamentary Debates*, CVLVII, 436.
28. The DFDS was in the process of signing a pooling agreement with the Wilson Line at the time of the Royal Commission. A few years afterwards, the company noted the increasing importance that passenger revenues from the Russia-to-London route generated in its financial reports. It is worth noting that the income

derived from passengers on the 'Russian trades' represented only 1 per cent of the company's earnings (in 1909) and 2 per cent (in 1910) on the 'homeward' voyages. Passenger Money Outward (between London and the Baltic) grew from £1,436 (in 1909) to £2,162 (in 1910). Passenger Money Inward (between the Baltic ports and London) grew from £1,707 (in 1909) to £3,019 (in 1910) due to the increased use of the Wilson Line to convey transmigrants destined for South Africa via the ships of the Union Castle Shipping Company. Of greater importance to the company was the ability to negotiate a pooling agreement with DFDS for freight - a deal negotiated because the Wilson Line challenged DFDS's dominant role in conveying migrants to Britain. University of Hull Archives and Special Collections, Ellerman Wilson Line Archives, DEW (2)/3/99.

29. Reference contained within a letter sent from the Wilson Line's Managing Director (Oswald Sanderson) to Charles Henry Wilson, 26 May 1905, in response to a telegram sent by Wilson to Sanderson on 25 May 1905. University of Hull Archives and Special Collections, Ellerman Wilson Line Archives, DEW 4/10.
30. Data from these sanitary reports has been discussed by Collins, 'Scottish Transmigration', 49–52; and Collins, *Second City Jewry*.
31. Passengers embarking from the Scottish ports of Glasgow and Greenock were not recorded until 1908 (The National Archives, BT 27/560) and continued until 1914 (based on research for the author's AHRB project based at the University of Aberdeen.)
32. Mitchell Library, Glasgow (MLG), E1/34/2, Peter Fyfe, *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report on the Operations of the Sanitary Department of the City of Glasgow for the year ending 31st December 1897* (Glasgow: Robert Anderson, 1897), 5.
33. MLG, E1/34/4, Peter Fyfe, *Thirtieth Annual Report... 1899*, 14.
34. MLG, D-TC/23, Peter Fyfe, *Thirty-Third Annual Report... 1902*, 12.
35. The continental passengers travelling via the Allan Line were described as 'Scandinavians, Icelanders, Finlanders and Continentals (Russians, Austrians, Hungarians, Poles, & c., principally of the Jewish persuasion)'. Fyfe, *Thirty-Third Annual Report*, 12.
36. MLG, D-TC/23, Peter Fyfe, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report... 1903*, 10.
37. MLG, C2/1/7, Peter Fyfe, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report... 1906*, 13. Those by the Allan Line were described as 'Continental (Russians, Austrians, Hungarians, Poles, & c., principally Jews)'.
38. MLG, C2/1/9, Peter Fyfe, *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report... 1908*, 13.
39. MLG, C2/1/9, Peter Fyfe, *Fortieth Annual Report... 1909*, 16.
40. Based upon detailed analysis of the outward-bound passenger manifests created by the Board of Trade for the port of Glasgow in 1910. The National Archives, BT/27/645–649. This project was part of the Diaspora Programme based at the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen. (See <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/emigration>.)
41. Such labelling did not take place in any regular manner at Britain's other important passenger ports (Bristol, Liverpool, London or Southampton).
42. References to the ethnic origin of the aliens were always described by the Anchor Line and rarely by the Allan Line. Most of the Jews were destined for New York. The Jewish transmigrants often arrived in Scotland via the services of the Gibson Line to Leith. Other nationalities described included Japanese, Austrian, Croatian, Bulgarian, Finnish, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian Slovak, Galician and Russian Pole.
43. Collins, *Be Well!*, 97–114.

44. National Maritime Museum (Greenwich), Ephemera Collection, P 29, Advertisement for the Canadian Pacific Railway dated 21 February 1910.
45. For example, most Edwardian companies offered Kosher services to potential passengers. Unfortunately, advertisements for Kosher food have not survived in the extensive ephemera collections of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich nor the archives of the Allan Shipping Company held at the University of Glasgow. The only example known to promote such Kosher facilities are advertisements, dating from 1887, held in the private collections of David Jacobs.
46. Kenefick, 'Jewish and Catholic', 216–217.
47. Wilkins, *The Alien Invasion*, 36–146.
48. Docker and Fischer, *Race, Colour, and Identity*, 24.
49. Kaplan and Robertson, *Founders and Followers*, 22.
50. Cape Town Archives (CPA), PMO 81, Letter from the Prime Minister's Office, 24 September 1901.
51. CPA, PMO 83, Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Governor, 30 January 1902.
52. CPA, PMO 84, Letter from the Prime Minister's Office, 6 June 1902.
53. CPA, PMO 858, Letter from Major Sir Henry H. Settle to the High Commissioner of South Africa, Johannesburg, 4 July 1902.
54. Harper, 'Settling in Saskatchewan', 97–98.
55. *The Jewish Yearbook* (London: Greenberg & Co., 1896), 28–30.
56. Irving Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* (1990), quoted in Kelly and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 75.
57. Knowles, *Strangers*, 55.
58. Knowles, *Strangers*, 78.
59. BPP, *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Establishment of a Receiving-House for Alien Immigrants at the Port of London: Volume I, Report and Appendix* (1911, X.87), 103.