

tween 1873 and 1887 more than 60,000 small holdings were confiscated by Italian authorities for nonpayment of taxes and between 1881 and 1901, the number of holdings lost by peasants rose to more than 200,000. Destitution reached rural areas, which became centers of emigration, and many Italians emigrated to Brazil. Italian immigrants adapted better to coffee cultivation in São Paulo than had the Swiss and Germans of the 1850s. One factor that contributed to the success of Italian immigration were the subsidies given by the government.³⁸

The authorities of the province of São Paulo, identifying themselves with the interests of the planters, sought to stimulate immigration by all possible means. As early as 1871, a law had been passed authorizing the government to issue bonds up to 600 *contos* to aid in the payment of immigrant passages. Each person would be assigned 20,000. By a contract with the imperial government, this sum was raised to 100,000. The period of subsidized immigration thus began. On 9 August 1871, the Association to Aid Colonization was established, bringing together important planters and entrepreneurs of São Paulo. In 1874, the association received 100 *contos* as a subsidy for the financing of immigrant passages. In the 1880s several special credits were granted by the provincial government to aid immigration. Between 1881 and 1891, the expenditures of São Paulo on immigration and colonization came to 9,244:226\$000. The planters concerned with immigration found means of moving the administration in the direction of their objectives.³⁹

The agencies interested in immigration grew. The naming of the baron of Paraíba, Antonio de Queiroz Telles—a coffee planter himself and one of the pioneers of immigration in the early eighties—as president of the province of São Paulo favored the movement considerably. More immigrants entered the province of São Paulo in the 1880s than during the previous twenty-five years. Between 1871 and 1886, slightly over 40,000 arrived. In the next two years the figure rose to 122,000.

Until then, work on most coffee plantations had continued to be carried out largely by slaves. There were about 400,000 slaves occupied in growing coffee and 800,000 employed in cultivating other crops and in raising livestock in the country as a whole. The participation of free workers was still small in coffee-growing areas, and only a few plantations employed them exclusively. But at this point slavery had come to be seen by many as one of the obstacles to the promotion of immigration. By 1875, João Elisário Carvalho Monte Negro, owner of the Nova Louzã and Nova Colômbia colonies—considered model ones in the period—said that as long as “this black stain called slavery” existed in Brazil, there could be no immigration. He remarked

that foreigners were reluctant to work side by side with slaves, and he claimed in addition that the maintenance of the slave system provided a pretext in Europe for spreading a series of notions discrediting Brazil. He concluded by affirming that the shortage of labor derived in part from slavery.⁴⁰ Gradually, the number of planters who thought as he did grew, particularly when slaves started abandoning the plantations, disrupting their economy. By then the landowners not only lost their interest in maintaining the slave system but set out to eliminate it.

The adherence of this group to the idea of free labor made the final victory of abolition possible in Parliament and explains in great part the relatively peaceful character of the movement. In general, however, planters in traditional large-scale agriculture—that is, the more backward or less productive sectors—continued to be hostile to abolition, sometimes even to the point of armed resistance. To the very end they opposed abolition, which implied not only modification of the labor system but also abandonment of a traditional world view and the relinquishing of a series of values related to it. For many, particularly those whose properties were mortgaged and whose slaves represented a great part of their collateral, abolition would represent the loss of economic and social status.⁴¹

Abolitionist ideas found greater support in urban areas, among the social groups least tied to slavery. But even in the cities there were supporters of slavery. These contradictory attitudes can be explained by the peculiarities of the Brazilian middle classes. In nineteenth-century Brazil there was no clear dividing line between the urban bourgeoisie and the rural aristocracy. Many of the lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, and government functionaries came directly from the rural oligarchies, and when they were not linked to it by family ties, their economic and financial interests operated within its clientele. Thus they too were often spokesmen for the interests of the agrarian groups. Among the urban middle class there were many, however, who were not directly dependent on slave labor and who could therefore be more receptive to abolitionist propaganda. Thus, in general, abolition was favored by these representatives of the urban classes, which were gaining importance because of economic changes taking place in Brazil, such as the development of the railroads, the appearance of the first industrial enterprises, insurance companies, and credit organizations, the increase in retail commerce, and the growing numbers of schools, newspapers, and magazines. Equally favorable to the liberation of the slaves were the free workers, Brazilian or foreign, whose number was growing in the cities. Their collaboration was decisive in the revolu-

tionary action unleashed in the 1880s with the creation of an "underground railroad system." The followers of Antonio Bento, who was active in São Paulo—inciting slaves to flee from the plantations, threatening the overseers, and beating the men sent out to catch runaway slaves—were recruited primarily among printers, coachmen, railroad workers, lawyers, journalists, doctors, and businessmen.⁴²

The rural population remained, in general, indifferent to the fate of the slaves. Joaquim Nabuco, the leader of the abolitionist movement in Parliament, bitterly criticized in 1884 the attitude of those classes which did not know their own interests: "It is not with us, who raise the cry of abolition, that these impassive victims of the monopoly of land by the few join, but with the others who raise the cry of slavery—slavery which oppresses them without their realizing it because it has crushed them from the cradle."⁴³ Among the rural groups immigrants seem to have been the most receptive to abolitionism. Many of them were caught indoctrinating slaves, inciting them to insurrection, holding forth on the injustices of captivity. With the exception of some Portuguese merchants and a small number of North Americans (Confederate exiles) in São Paulo, the greater part of the foreigners living in Brazil favored abolition.

Free blacks also played an important role in the abolitionist movement. Despite the indifference of many former slaves toward the fate of those still in bondage, many were attracted to the movement, particularly those who like Luiz Gama, a lawyer in São Paulo, José do Patrocínio, a journalist in Rio, and André Rebouças, an engineer also in Rio, had climbed the social ladder. But even among those there were many like Machado de Assis, the famous novelist, who kept a much more discreet attitude in regard to abolition and a few would go as far as to oppose it. If there was sometimes ambivalence on the part of the free blacks, slaves were not ambivalent. They were ready to fight for their own emancipation. Rebellion in the slave quarters during the last years of slavery was a decisive factor in the final disintegration of the system.⁴⁴

Abolitionist propaganda and the prospect of liberation made captivity more difficult to endure. The existence of free labor alongside slavery only served to emphasize the injustice of the institution. The abolitionist campaign supplied the slaves with arguments to justify their rebellion while at the same time it generated among other social groups more sympathy for the plight of the slave. Travelers in the provinces of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 1883 often had the impression that a social revolution was imminent. There were signs of unrest everywhere; escapes, revolts, and crimes committed by slaves increased

the tension. Slaves were refusing to obey orders and were frequently finding aid and sympathy among the free population.

As the economic bases of the slave system weakened, the abolitionists' arguments gained influence and as their arguments gained influence the economic basis of the slave system was undermined even further.⁴⁵ Contrary to what happened in the United States, no one dared to make an outright doctrinaire defense of slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century. But in Brazil as in the U.S., the slaveowners' spokesmen insisted that the slaves' living conditions were superior to those of European laborers. They also made a point of stressing that in Brazil slavery was milder than in other countries, masters were more benevolent, and relations between masters and slaves were paternal in tone. Proslavery spokesmen even argued that the slaves had been happy up to the moment that subversive ideas spread by the abolitionists had created discontent. Theoretically, planters were all in favor of gradual emancipation—provided that property rights were safeguarded. But whenever any measure aiming at emancipation was suggested, slaveowners invoked the right of property and accused the abolitionists of being "communists" and agitators who had nothing to lose and who by their actions jeopardized public security and national prosperity. In Parliament representatives of the slaveowners argued that abolitionism had no support from the public, that it was a campaign promoted by "anarchists" preaching illegal and subversive doctrines, threatening the highest national interests, which had been created and maintained under the protection of the law. And they always considered premature any emancipatory measure, which had not been prepared for by prior studies, statistics, and far-reaching reforms, such as immigration, the construction of railroads and canals, and the development of the credit system.

In 1871 the bill designed to free the children born of slave mothers was labeled a crime, robbery, theft, and a communist plot. One deputy affirmed—in a style much to the taste of the period—that the proposal "unfurled its sails on an ocean also navigated by the pirate ship International."⁴⁶ The government was accused of seriously compromising the future of the nation by permitting the question to be debated in Parliament. Some politicians in Parliament talked of the social agitation and the economic disaster that would result if slavery were abolished.

The abolitionists were no less vehement. They said that slavery created obstacles to the economic development of the country, impeded immigration, inhibited the mechanization of agriculture, and generated a false wealth well described by the proverb "Rich father, noble

courts, some ruled in favor of the slaves. This generated panic among slaveholders. The specter of the 1831 law terrified the defenders of the status quo who feared that if this principle was accepted by the courts, the majority of their slaves would be freed.

The Free Birth Law was voted under this climate of apprehension on the part of the landowning groups. Despite the reluctance of many politicians to discuss the slavery question in Parliament, it could not be avoided. It had become a widely debated public issue and since 1869 the Liberal party—then in the opposition—included gradual abolition in its platform. Politicians had turned the idea of emancipation into an instrument of political action, and each party tried to make the best of it. Abolitionist ideas had come from the streets to Parliament and would return reinforced by the heat of the parliamentary debates. The public followed with great interest the debates in the press. The law was finally approved after an intense campaign that profoundly stirred public opinion and contributed to the radicalization of both sides.

The slavery question transcended partisan interests. In Parliament, Conservatives and Liberals, forgetting partisan rivalries, often joined in opposing the bill. The opposition to the bill was led largely by the representatives of those coffee-growing regions where slaveholding interests still prevailed.⁴⁹

Despite the vehemence of those opposing the 1871 bill, it represented merely a delaying tactic, a concession to more radical demands. The measure provided that the children of slave mothers born in the empire after the date of the law were to be free. It further stipulated that the owner had to raise such children until they were eight years old, at which time he could either turn them over to the government and receive a compensation of 600\$000, or keep them until they were twenty-one, using their services as payment for the cost of their upkeep. Thus the principle of indemnification was established and slave status maintained for all those born before the date of the law.

Most slaveholders chose to make use of the labor of the children of their slaves, who, though legally free, continued to live as slaves until they were twenty-one. An emancipation fund created by the law with the purpose of liberating a certain number of slaves annually in each province did not have much effect. Up to 1885 slightly more than 23,000 had been freed in the entire empire, while spontaneous manumission during the same period had reached more than 170,000. And these numbers tended to increase while the slaves emancipated by the manumission fund in 1888 amounted to not many more than 32,000—obviously a very disappointing result when compared to the

son, poor grandson." Abolitionists of the 1870s and 1880s repeated the arguments that had been heard so many times since independence: Slavery corrupted society and the family, encouraged laziness and wastefulness, degraded the masters, debased the slaves, corrupted the language, religion, and mores, and violated natural law. To the traditional arguments provided by the Enlightenment and by the doctrines of romanticism and classical economics, arguments derived from positivism were now added. Slavery, said the positivists, was an anachronistic and transitory state which was destined to be eliminated.

Ideology, however, often bowed to personal interests. The positivist group, for example, was divided. There were some like Miguel Lemos, who favored abolition with indemnification, while others like Pereira Barreto and Ribeiro de Mendonça, who were tied to agrarian interests, urged gradual emancipation. All of them invoked the fathers of positivism to justify their positions.⁴⁷

Until the 1860s antislavery ideas had had little influence on public opinion. Bills introduced in Parliament seeking to improve the living conditions of slaves had aroused strong opposition. But gradually the situation changed. Writers who had presented a conventional picture of the black man, rather than of the slave, slowly became more aware of the problems created by slavery. Among the poets, Castro Alves best exemplifies this new tendency. In prose, Macedo in *Vítimas e Algozes* is the best example of militant literature during the period. Beginning with the Paraguayan War (1864-70), the number of works in this genre increased; short stories, novels, plays, feuilletons, and pamphlets were written with the purpose of fighting slavery. The number of abolitionist newspapers also grew. The press prepared public opinion to accept abolitionist ideas. It chastised slaveowners and praised those who were emancipating their slaves. Predictably, manumissions increased in number. Masters freed slaves at baptisms, weddings, graduations, and other celebratory events. All over the country abolitionists organized clubs with the purpose of promoting manumission and campaigning for abolition. Citing the 1831 law that had prohibited the importation of blacks, the abolitionists argued that most of the slaves were kept illegally and on this ground mounted an intense campaign in favor of slave emancipation. In São Paulo, the ex-slave Luíz Gama became famous for his legal battles on behalf of abolition and his defense of the cause of the illegally enslaved Africans.⁴⁸

Unearthing this law, whose effects had been annulled by custom, threatened slaveownership, since most of the slave population was composed of people who either had entered Brazil after 1831 or were the descendants of those who had. When the cases were brought to the

total slave population, which at the time of final abolition was around 750,000.

After the approval of the Free Birth law, slaveowners hoped that the parliamentary campaign for abolition would end. They argued that nothing else needed to be done on that matter since with the passage of years slavery would eventually end. Thus, as soon as the Free Birth law was passed, its most bitter opponents became its most ardent defenders and opposed any new measures to further abolition. The antislavery forces, however, were far from satisfied. Ruy Barbosa, one of the most enthusiastic defenders of abolition in the Chamber, soon raised his voice to declare that if the country were to await the effects of the law, slavery would end only in the middle of the twentieth century. Something had to be done to accelerate the process.

For a while, however, abolitionism seems to have lost its drive in Parliament. Politicians seemed to be more concerned with the economic crisis which had reached the country in 1875 and with electoral reform. But the abolitionist campaign continued in the streets and at the beginning of the eighties, after the approval of a new electoral law, the abolitionist campaign found resonance in Parliament again. From this period onward a conflict clearly developed in the Chamber between the majority of representatives from the Northeastern provinces, who favored discussion of the slavery question, and the representatives of the coffee-growing provinces, the majority of whom favored the maintenance of the status quo.

Outside Parliament the abolitionist campaign continued to gain strength. Abolitionists organized conferences, bazaars, fund-raising parties, and public meetings. More violent and effective were the activities of groups of abolitionists who promoted the escape of the slaves. Helped by abolitionists, an increasing number of slaves ran away from plantations, causing serious losses to their owners.⁵⁰

Although abolitionists were more active in the coffee-growing provinces, particularly in the urban centers, it was in the provinces of the North and Northeast, least dependent on slave labor, that emancipation advanced most rapidly. In 1883-84 slavery was abolished in Amazonas, a province which had very few slaves, and Ceará, where small farming was the usual form of agriculture. Abolitionists in Rio celebrated with great alacrity these two events. And in 1884 because of abolitionist pressure the question of emancipation was brought back to Parliament. Opinion among abolitionists was divided. Some still believed gradual emancipation to be the most advisable course, others wanted immediate and total abolition. For some such as Nabuco, the cause had to be won in Parliament; for others such as Patrocínio, a

mulatto journalist, and Lopes Trovão, one of the few socialists in Brazil at the time, it had to be fought in the streets and in the slave quarters. In spite of their divergence, the activities of the agitators prepared for and strengthened the action of Parliament.

In the areas of greatest concentration of slaves, such as the sugar-growing region of Campos and the coffee-growing parts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, tension between slaveowners and abolitionists led to harsh confrontations. Plantation owners, with weapons in their hands, sought to defend their threatened property and attacked the abolitionists. They established secret clubs and created private militias. In the small towns of the backland, judges and functionaries who favored the slaves were threatened and abolitionists were persecuted and expelled. Parliament was flooded with petitions against the abolitionist movement. And representatives of the landowners spoke in favor of repressive measures:

This group of agitators who have now gotten together in this country to propagandize in favor of the abolition of slavery are the same who make up the nihilist party in Russia, the socialist party in Germany, and the communist party elsewhere in Europe. Let us therefore be forewarned against this rabble who prefer sanguinary struggles and rivers of blood to having the question regularly channeled and peacefully resolved,

said one representative, and his words were supported by others who blamed the government for not restraining the abolitionists.⁵¹

In this atmosphere of agitation, a new cabinet was called to form a government. The head of the cabinet, Manuel Pinto de Souza Dantas, presented himself to Parliament as firmly committed to raising the question of slavery once more. The cabinet's program was moderate and could be summed up in a single phrase, which Dantas used in Parliament: "Neither retreat, nor halt, nor undue haste." His program, however, provoked an immediate reaction both within the Chamber and outside it. The climate of tension created in the capital spread to the countryside.

The bill presented to the Chamber of Deputies by the government merely proposed the emancipation of slaves over sixty years of age. The only aspect that could be considered revolutionary was that freedom was granted without compensation. The bill required newly freed slaves who chose to remain on the plantations to work in accordance with their abilities. It established a progressive tax on the transfer of slaves, increased the emancipation fund, and provided for new registration of all slaves. Those freed under the terms of the bill were re-

quired to live for five years after emancipation in the county in which they had previously resided.

Rui Barbosa defended the bill and prophetically warned those who opposed it: "Your apparent victories will turn against you. After each one, the spirit of freedom becomes more powerful, more demanding, more audacious, and reemerges on a wider scale. The moderate concessions which you refuse today will tomorrow satisfy no one." His warning had no effect. The cabinet received a vote of confidence by a small margin. Once again it became clear that the slavery question transcended parties. The delegations from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, three coffee-growing provinces, voted almost en masse against the new cabinet, with the Liberals among them voting against their own party. Of the representatives of these three provinces, only seven voted in favor.⁵²

Protests against the bill grew. The coffee, agricultural, and commercial associations all were firmly opposed. And all the rhetorical devices of the period were mobilized in the declamation of impassioned and vacuous speeches for or against the bill. The newspapers in the pay of the slaveholders assailed the bill and the abolitionists. The opponents of the law argued that since the Free Birth law would lead naturally to an end of slavery, nothing else needed to be done in that direction. And their slogan was "No concession without compensation."

The opposition was such that the cabinet was finally defeated. The bill was reformulated by the cabinet that followed and was approved only after another Liberal cabinet fell and was replaced by a Conservative one. By that time one important change had been introduced in the bill: the period for the freeing of slaves was extended and severe penalties were imposed on those who aided runaway slaves, a measure conceived to placate slaveowners. Among the supporters of the law there had been many who, afraid of agitation, intended to make a concession which, without going very far, would deter the march of subversion.

The discussion of the bill made clear the existence of a new division within the coffee-growing group. The representatives of the western São Paulo region, the most productive, voted in favor of the bill. This shift in their earlier position provoked discontent among the others who were still tied to slavery and trusted that the government could free slaves only by means of compensation.⁵³

Slavery, however, was doomed. From this point onward the disintegration of the slave system proceeded rapidly. An important factor in this process was the mass escape of slaves from the plantations—often observed with indifference by the troops called to recapture them.

Clashes increased whenever the authorities tried to guarantee order and capture runaways. The plantation owners, unable to prevent the slaves from running away, granted them freedom on the condition that they continue working on the plantations for a number of years. Even so, many were still unable to retain their workers. The slaves, encouraged and led by abolitionists, continued to leave their work and go to other plantations where they were hired as salaried laborers. Even the most reluctant plantation owners were forced to accept these arrangements, which had been imposed upon them by the tumult that had spread through the rural areas. In São Paulo, the Republican party—largely made up of coffee plantation owners from the western part of the province—which since its foundation in 1870 had not committed itself on the slavery question, ended up by approving in 1887 a report deciding that the Republicans would free their slaves by 14 July 1889.⁵⁴

The abolitionist campaign had never been so intense and so successful. In Parliament in 1887, Nabuco urged the army to refuse to catch runaway slaves. Shortly thereafter the military decided to request of Princess Isabel that they be relieved of such dishonorable tasks. Slavery was losing its last basis of support. Unrest had reached such a point that the São Paulo provincial assembly requested Parliament to carry out abolition. Disorder and turmoil had created a dangerous and unbearable situation.

Upon reopening in 1888, Parliament was faced with a *de facto* situation: João Alfredo, who had organized a new cabinet at the request of the princess regent, proposed the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery.⁵⁵

Only nine deputies voted against the bill, eight of whom represented the province of Rio de Janeiro. This was the last protest by the agricultural interests of that province, which would be the most affected by abolition. The law of 13 May 1888 abolishing slavery without compensation was the death blow to an area already in crisis and meant the loss of status for many coffee plantation owners from this region as well as for a large number of northeastern sugar growers who were operating with a small margin of profit.

With abolition came a shift in political power. The collapse of the traditional oligarchies that had held power during the empire and had identified themselves with the monarchy was accelerated. In the following year the monarchy was overthrown and the republic proclaimed. Political power shifted from the sugar cane areas to the new coffee-growing areas. In western São Paulo coffee grown in the *terras roxas* produced harvests never equalled before. A new oligarchy emerged which would rule the country during the first republic (1889–1930).

After abolition, the dreary prophecies of national catastrophe were not fulfilled. Despite the temporary disorganization of labor, the rapid decline of some areas, and the impoverishment of some planters, the pace of economic development in Brazil accelerated. Immigrants flowed in large numbers to the coffee areas. They served the needs of an expanding agriculture and made possible the organization of plantations along more modern and rational lines. However, the living conditions of the rural workers did not change substantially. And many of the prejudices developed during the period of slavery remained unchanged.

In spite of these limitations, new possibilities for upward social mobility were opened. The beginning of the urbanization process and the attempts to develop industry, the construction of the railroads, the organization of credit institutions, and the increase in commerce had all opened up new horizons. The expansion of coffee plantations and the westward movement of the frontier also favored social mobility.

Immigrants took advantage of these new opportunities. The former slaves, because of racial discrimination, were, with few exceptions, unable to compete with foreigners. The majority continued at their hoes, in a style of life not different from the one they had had before abolition. Some, attracted by the mirage of the cities, gathered in the urban centers, where they came to live by their wits, taking on the lowest tasks. Others left the plantations and went into subsistence agriculture.⁵⁶

Since abolition had been the result more of a desire to free Brazil from the problems of slavery than of a wish to emancipate the slaves, the dominant classes did not concern themselves with the black man and his integration into a class society. The ex-slave was left to his own devices. His difficulties in adjusting to new conditions were taken by the elites as proof of his racial inferiority. Many ex-slaveholders went as far as to say that the blacks had been happier as slaves than they were as free men since they were incapable of leading their own lives.⁵⁷

Contemporaries differed in interpreting abolition. Some identified with the abolitionist movement and considered it the result of the actions of a handful of idealists. Others, more identified with the rural classes, saw abolition as the will of the emperor and of Princess Isabel. Some said that the 1888 law had been wise and opportune, others that it had driven the rural classes into bankruptcy. Those subjective impressions interfered with the evaluation of the process. Basing their studies on the testimony of contemporaries and relying primarily on parliamentary evidence, historians of the first generation after abolition saw it mainly as a political phenomenon. The ties between the disintegration of the slave system and the economic and social changes at

work in Brazil during the second half of the century passed unnoticed. It was only later, when starting from viewpoints less compromised by the seigneurial view of the world, that historians and social scientists began revising the myths that society had elaborated to justify the slave system. Only then was it possible to analyze slavery and the abolitionist movement in a new light.

Abolition represented a stage in the process of the liquidation of Brazil's colonial structures, involving an extensive revision of the lifestyles and values of Brazilian society. It did not, however, mean a definitive break with the past. Rationalization of production methods, the improvement in the living standards of rural workers, and the struggle against racial discrimination are all parts of a process still under way.