

# Sir Michael Hicks Beach

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Abbreviations: CO Colonial Office HC High Commissioner

## Introduction

British South Africa at the time Lord Carnarvon had become Colonial Secretary in 1874 consisted of three colonies: the Cape of Good Hope, Griqualand West (annexed in 1871) and Natal, as well as borderlands such as Basutoland. There were two Boer colonies, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and a host of African societies whose exact political status was uncertain, but who were substantially autonomous.

But despite its ambiguous state and the apparent reluctance of European powers to colonise her, South Africa was of vital importance to the British. Before the opening of the Suez Canal the Cape had been a vital stop on the route to India, which was still at this time the mainstay of the Empire; and even in 1878 most of the traffic to India continued to go via South Africa. It was especially important to keep this route open due to the uncertainty of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, which potentially threatened British access to Suez. Other recent events had also slightly altered policy towards South Africa: the discovery of diamonds had upped the economic prestige of the colony, making the British keen to prevent incursion into their area of influence by other European powers; whilst blocking Boer efforts to reach the coast was another important aim since an alternative trading outlet would deny the British an important source of revenue and power.

Carnarvon had previously held the office of Colonial Secretary for a short time in 1866-7 and had managed during this brief tenure to oversee the passing of the important legislation that had brought about confederation in Canada. He had accepted the role again with his enthusiasm for confederation undiminished, and just as his predecessor Lord Kimberley had deemed the condition of South Africa ripe for a similar transformation, Carnarvon became committed to a policy designed to lead the separate units of Southern Africa into a united federation. Disraeli, although he shared the view of his minister that such a policy was appropriate, nonetheless took little interest in colonial affairs, leaving 'Tewiters' (his nickname for Carnarvon) to handle colonial matters with a relatively free hand.

South Africa became Carnarvon's chief passion despite other creditable achievements during his time in office such as the annexation of the Fiji Islands, extension of British dominion in the Malay Peninsula and stamping out the slave trade in West Africa. However, the fragmented nature of South Africa made a policy of confederation very difficult: the Cape was self-governing and reluctant to accept the additional cost of supporting other regions, the Transvaal and Free State still resented their exclusion from the diamond fields of Griqualand West and a near universal fear of the natives made the white minority fearful of continued African independence. But undeterred by the lack of headway made by Kimberley, Carnarvon continued to strive for confederation and in doing so had considerably changed the South African situation by the time he left office in 1878. Confederation, it was hoped, would greatly reduce the cost of maintaining imperial control in South Africa, since by establishing a formal political union and subduing African independence the expensive imperial troops could be withdrawn. It would also make the government of the region much tidier.

Despite the difficulties, Carnarvon persisted and wrought first the South Africa Act (1877) which allowed for confederation to take place and then a truly major change to the political situation: The annexation of the Transvaal in 1877. This move came about peacefully due to the weaknesses of the Republic under the administration of the inept President Burghers. Facing financial ruin (there was just 12s. 6d. in the treasury) and the threat of the hostile Zulus, Sir Theophilus Shepstone was able to enter Pretoria unchallenged. This increased British influence within South African politics but at the same time increased the resentment of the Afrikaner community in both of the Boer republics, thus failing to significantly increase the chances of confederation being successfully introduced in the near future.

Another and perhaps even more important impact upon South African affairs made by Carnarvon was his choice of Frere to fulfil his confederation dream. Frere had commanded great respect for his contribution to colonial administration, holding an impeccable reputation more

attuned to a member of the Aborigines Protection Society than a greedy expansionist ; it was believed, not least by Frere himself, that his South African mission would finally win him a peerage on his return to England. Carnarvon instilled Frere with his vision for the future of the colony and gave him powers and influence in his post as HC to guarantee that he would be able to push through the necessary legislation to achieve Carnarvon's dream. His commitment to this task was a commendable tribute to the faith and responsibility placed upon him, but there were elements to Frere's character, which also made his appointment a crucial factor in the build-up to war, since his conviction about the necessity of war with the Zulus was a vital element in its instigation.

By 1879 Frere had already overseen, whilst in South Africa, the war between the Cape and the local blacks and he anticipated in his correspondence with Chelmsford a quick resolution to a war with the Zulus, even if the Zulus were an African race to have won praise from the British for their martial qualities, in contrast to characterisation of many African races as lazy and cowardly. Such campaigns could be expensive - Britain alone spent £98 million between 1856 and 1899 on such "minor" conflicts - but there were few doubts about success since colonial "small wars" were a way of life within the British Empire, receiving little attention or interest at home in Britain. Between 1815 and 1914 only the French fought more colonial wars than the British and in relation to South Africa it is possible to see the Anglo-Zulu War in the context of the series of other native wars involving British troops which had occurred there since 1812; there had been six on the Cape frontier alone, along with other trouble in the Transvaal and Orange Free State.

The Anglo-Zulu War, however, was to be slightly different from other colonial wars because of the heavy defeat at the outset and the wide criticism of policy, directed particularly at Frere, which followed Isandlwana.

## 1. Origins

The resignation of Lord Carnarvon in January 1878 opened the door for Sir Michael Hicks Beach to take his first senior departmental position, as Colonial Secretary in Lord Beaconsfield's Government. Hicks Beach, forty-one years of age, was an admirer and protégé of Beaconsfield despite being completely unlike him in personality. He had been rapidly promoted through the ranks having gained previous experience in Ireland and his record proved him to be an able, if uninspiring, politician; but he had poor public speaking skills and an unfortunately tactless and sour manner which later to won him the nickname 'Black Michael', and probably hindered his career.

Hicks Beach does, however, have many admirers and his political abilities have won him much praise, although despite later holding the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer he is a virtual unknown today. Roy Jenkins sees him as a gruff but handsome figure, dutiful and austere, intimidating to those who did not know him (and occasionally to those who did), but with a high sense of public service, perhaps a little self-righteous, but with a genuine modesty and kindness.

R. C. K. Ensor considered his qualities sufficient for him to have been Prime Minister because he had "certainly more capacity for that or any high office than many whose luck has carried them to the summit". Contemporaries also recognised his ability as a politician. When Hicks Beach finally left the Treasury in 1902 after nineteen years he was highly praised by civil servant Edward Hamilton as "one of the very ablest men I have ever served".

Within the Colonial Office his appointment broke up the 'happy family', which had existed since 1874, and even if there is no evidence of bad relations, his reputation was one of "an overbearing and forcibly-spoken man". There was also a difference in his handling of Sir Bartle Frere that was to be very significant during the course of events in South Africa over the next two years. Frere, twenty-two years Hicks Beach's senior, was a revered elder statesman of the Empire, but perhaps due to inexperience the new Secretary of State did not work with Frere in the same way that Carnarvon had. He even waited five weeks after entering office to begin a private correspondence, and then only diffidently offered his views to Frere. South Africa may have been an area of especial interest for Lord Carnarvon, but Hicks Beach did not share his passion for the region.

The burning issue of the day was the dispute between the Zulus and the Transvaal, which the British had inherited, over a portion of land on the Blood River, which was threatening to embroil them in a conflict with King Cetshwayo. A Boundary Commission had been established in April 1878 to consider the claims to the area, composed of two members of the Natal Government and two British Army officers stationed in South Africa. This issue formed the substance of Hicks Beach's early correspondence with Frere, although no policy decisions could be made on

confederation since the result of the Commissioners' investigation would have a large bearing on future relations with both the Transvaal Boers and the Zulu Kingdom. Hicks Beach's attention was instead focussed, in relation to South Africa, upon three rather minor issues during his first months in charge: an effort to stop the arms trade with independent African tribes; negotiations with the Portuguese over establishing a commercial relationship with Delagoa Bay (situated to the North of Zululand), similar to the relationship between British India and Goa; and an initiative to have the law on marriage in Natal altered so as to bring it into line with the rest of South Africa for when confederation was accomplished.

By July 1878 the decision of the Boundary Commission on the disputed territory had been made and was a surprise to both Sir Bartle Frere and Hicks Beach who had expected the decision to favour the Transvaal rather than the Zulus. Hicks Beach feared a possible outbreak of war as a result, since he felt that it "may encourage Cetywayo to war, from the natural belief of a savage that we only yield from weakness"; but he advised Frere, as arbiter, that the decision must be upheld due to the fact that there was no other authority on the matter than the Commissioners' report. Hicks Beach was keen to see that the Zulus were 'kept in order' and that territory violations were punished but he also made it clear that he wanted to avoid conflict, even suggesting that the land could be purchased to keep all parties happy.

This thinking seems to stand at odds with the theme running through most of Frere's letters at this time. The HC was keen for the CO to maintain their forces in South Africa, warning that it would be "unsafe" to withdraw them at the current time due to the threat of further disturbances. He presents a picture of continual threat being posed by the tribes in Africa, where the "war spirit is abroad" and he is particularly fearful of the Zulus who, he believes, "mean mischief". On the Boundary Commission, Frere's attitude is negative and he seems to believe that there *will* be trouble; he therefore counsels the Colonial Secretary rather ominously that the award will not be assented to by either party "unless we have the means at hand to enforce its observance". But despite these references and Frere's strong opinions on native affairs, there is no explicit statement before the latter part of 1878 of his belief that war with the Zulus is either inevitable or strictly necessary. To a busy Secretary of State still settling into his new role and preoccupied with matters elsewhere the signs of coming warfare are not obvious.

Both John Martineau and Basil Worsfold in their biographies of Frere have argued that he has been unfairly judged for his part in commencing hostilities with the Zulu nation. Martineau wrote in 1895 that in late 1878 "everywhere the outlook was stormy, yet everywhere those in charge were disposed to let matters drift rather than incur the responsibility of taking or even of recommending decisive action". Both men have also accused Hicks Beach of failing to make the wishes of the government to avoid war clear enough to Frere prior to his initiation of the proceedings leading up to conflict; Martineau claimed, for example, that Hicks Beach had not issued "a hint or a word" which would have indicated "any disagreement with Frere's views, which had been expressed as fully and as candidly as ever". Worsfold, despite having access to private correspondence, which Martineau did not, reached a similar conclusion about Frere's inculpability.

However, there is not clear evidence within the correspondence to prove that either Frere had made his intentions entirely obvious or that Hicks Beach had failed to make Frere aware of the Government's desire to avoid unnecessary conflict. Despite the result of the Boundary Commission, which was perceived as potentially harmful to the situation, Hicks Beach continually tries to make it clear to Frere that he hopes that peace can be maintained. In a telegram to Frere on 5<sup>th</sup> October he states, for example, that: "I am led to think from the information before me, that there should be still a good chance of avoiding war with the Zulus". Unfortunately, his clearest statement to Frere about the need to avoid war, in a private letter dated 7<sup>th</sup> November, was not received in South Africa until 13<sup>th</sup> December, two days after Frere had issued the *Ultimatum* to King Cetshwayo's envoys. In this letter Hicks Beach had made explicit the views of the Cabinet about the need to avoid war:

The fact is, that with matters in Eastern Europe & India, of which you have by this time heard, wear so serious an aspect that we cannot now have a Zulu War in addition to other greater and too possible troubles. When the intelligence of these difficulties reached you, I have no doubt that you will at once divine the situation - and will redouble the exertions which I am sure you have already employed to avoid the outbreak of any such war, as from your despatch of Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> I fear you thought too probable at the date at which it was written.

This may have been the first clear expression of the Government's desire not to enter into a war, but added to previous warnings which had accompanied his despatches in response to Frere's numerous requests for additional forces there is a considerable body of correspondence expressing

opinions opposed to conflict. There is also evidence that Frere knew the Government's wishes but had wilfully ignored them. In his *Notes* in defence of his conduct Frere claimed that he could not have delayed his action even "knowing the anxiety of Her Majesty's Government to avert a Zulu War". It may perhaps be fair to criticise Hicks Beach for not making his and the Cabinet's views more explicit and forceful at an earlier stage, but Frere knew that in issuing his *Ultimatum* he would probably start a war that the Government did not want.

An essential problem with Hicks Beach's handling of the situation may lie in his relationship with Frere itself. In other early correspondence the Colonial Secretary is keen to give Frere much individual responsibility in handling South African affairs, commenting on a letter of 25<sup>th</sup> July that: "I leave you, as you see, very wide discretion!" Yet at the same time as Frere was being given so much autonomy, Hicks Beach complained in his letters to Lord Beaconsfield that he was unable to control the HC. He insists in a letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> November that he has impressed upon Frere the need to avoid war but that he "cannot really control him without a telegraph - (I don't know that I could with one)". It therefore seems apparent that there is a communication problem between the two men of which Hicks Beach is aware but is unable to overcome. Hicks Beach's praise of Frere's work and hints at the possible use of force seem to give the impression to the HC that he is able to choose the Government's course of action in handling the Zulu problem.

Through the course of 1878, therefore, Hicks Beach was not able to make any significant impact upon Frere's policy, with the Colonial Secretary eventually forced to concede that war was inevitable by the later stages of 1878. He had suspected two months too early in November that war may have already been underway, telling Beaconsfield that "I feel it is likely as not that he is at war with the Zulus" - the use of "he" rather than "we" an indication of Frere's role - and foreseeing in part the controversy in Britain over Isandlwana by stating that "if his forces should prove inadequate... he will be in a great Difficulty, and we shall be blamed for not supporting him". Hicks Beach was also relieved at the Cabinet decision to send out further troops since he thought "Frere had made up his mind not to be stopped by the want of them".

Unfortunately, as Hicks Beach had realised himself, the distance of 6,000 miles and between three and six weeks for letters and despatches to pass between the two countries made controlling Frere's designs very difficult and therefore even though he may have suspected warmongering there was not much that really could be done about it. The situation was also complicated by Frere's position in South Africa. According to Regulation thirty-five of the Colonial Service, Frere was not permitted 'to declare or make war against any foreign state, or against the subjects of any foreign state'. Yet Frere's powers were ambiguous since he had been chosen by Carnarvon for the special task of bringing about confederation, giving him the powers for "preventing the recurrence of any irruption into Her Majesty's possessions of the tribes... and for promoting as far as possible the good order, civilization and moral and religious instruction of the tribes, and, with that view, for placing them under some form of settled government." Thus the conditions included in the *Ultimatum* were not outside of his jurisdiction as High Commissioner.

With respect to the *Ultimatum* itself, aside from its wholly inopportune timing, the Government only had problems with a few of the seven conditions it made. The points relating to King Cetshwayo's coronation promises to Shepstone, requiring the disbandment of the Zulu army and the end of indiscriminate killing and the acceptance of missionaries in Zululand (even though the Zulus were hostile to them) were the most controversial. Those in London did not see this as part of the duty of Great Britain and it was obvious that King Cetshwayo would not comply with them, making the war inevitable.

## **Conclusion**

The Anglo-Zulu War proved to be an expensive and controversial adventure for the Beaconsfield Government, making the war an important topic of Cabinet discussion and decision. Sir Michael Hicks Beach as the Minister responsible for the Colonies was obviously one of the most important figures in group discussion and policy initiation. Although, once war was commenced there were financial and military considerations for which Hicks Beach was not entirely responsible, there are many aspects of the policy and its instigation in Zululand for which he was, such as conveying policy to those in South Africa. He was also the Minister held to account in Parliament for the policy by virtue of his position in the Government, even if Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord Beaconsfield himself, amongst others, played a role in relaying events to the two Houses. An

assessment of Hicks Beach's role in the War therefore involves an assessment of his success in various elements of the position he held.

In respect of the correspondence with South Africa, he probably could not have done much more to make his views known. Faced with the obstreperous Frere, the Anglo-Zulu War demonstrates the helpless situation in which the CO and its chief minister could sometimes find themselves. Blakely has concluded that even as telegraph communication grew, the CO could never enforce the control over its foreign representatives it would have liked, especially those in the mould of Frere, who frequently took action before seeking home approval. Hicks Beach's commitment cannot be questioned, but although he turned down the India Office soon after his appointment, he did not have the same leaning towards colonial matters as his predecessor and showed little interest after his tenure was over.

With Frere personally set on instigating a war that he believed to be necessary, Hicks Beach had little chance or opportunity to change Frere's mind. Although there are signs that Frere's mind was set prior to the firm news of the *Ultimatum*, these hints are much clearer with the benefit of hindsight and therefore Hicks Beach can be little blamed for failing to notice them earlier or change Frere's course of action.

On the matter of the censure, most members of the Cabinet were opposed to maintaining the HC in his role after he had been criticised for his actions. Feeling against Frere was almost universal and it was thought by some Conservatives that his removal would perhaps have made a clearer statement of his complicity and the Government's innocence in the matter. This certainly provided a point of attack for the Opposition who grasped it during the debate on Dilke's and during Gladstone's Midlothian tour, where he accused the Government of driving policy with "infinite skill" so that Frere was a ready scapegoat if things ended ill. Yet although in hindsight this may again appear to have been a bad policy for Hicks Beach to support, his reasoning is clear. The Colonial Secretary, perhaps influenced in this by the CO and individuals such as Sir Robert Herbert who corresponded privately with Frere, appears to have held a genuine opinion that Frere was the best man available to carry through the long-term policy of confederation to which the Government were committed. Maintaining Frere in place was therefore the best way of keeping the policy on track, although the censure was necessary to make the High Commissioner aware of the way in which the Government disapproved of his independent action. The influence of the Queen, though sometimes overplayed, may also have been important since Beaconsfield was known to have a desire to keep Her Majesty happy and she also became the god mother of Hicks Beach's first child. There is, however, evidence of friction within the Cabinet with Hicks Beach, for example, aggressively warning the Secretary of State for War about the conduct of his department towards the CO.

The appointment of Wolseley and his instruction on constructing a settlement were the final large general policy decisions to be taken by the Cabinet over South Africa, and appear to have been a sensible one. Even Frere, whose own authority he felt to be slighted, agreed that the unity of civil and military powers was prudent, but there were problems with Wolseley's commission for which some criticism can be levelled at the Cabinet. Frere and Chelmsford's positions entered an ambiguity that was never properly resolved, for example. However, despite the problems of the relationship between Frere and Wolseley and their distance from London, Hicks Beach succeeded in keeping Frere in place to work on confederation and Wolseley produced a settlement that was acceptable to the Government in avoiding annexation.

Overall, whilst Hicks Beach's first taste of a department cannot be said to have been a happy experience, it would be unfair to castigate him as a failure too. Hicks Beach faced the difficulties of corresponding over a vast distance without the aid of a telegraph until the final few months of office, the distraction of a war in Afghanistan and the difficulties of handling an experienced and independent proconsul in Sir Bartle Frere.

The role of Sir Michael Hicks Beach in the Zulu War shows the difficulties the CO faced in attempting to run distant colonies, especially since the role of the Colonial Secretary was often held for a short period of time, even though the department was an increasingly important one. The Anglo-Zulu War may have been a further disaster for the Government's reputation, destroying their confederation policy and contributing to the 1880 election result, but this was not the fault of Sir Michael Hicks Beach, who helped to guide colonial policy through the various problems to a successful (if not long-lasting) solution.

## 2. War

*The Times* had first reported to the British public on the expectation of a war in Zululand on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1879 based upon intelligence from South Africa of 6<sup>th</sup> January. Although the border was not due to be crossed until 11<sup>th</sup> January it was already considered that war would be the outcome: "The question of peace or war is practically settled, and before these lines are in print the Zulu expedition will have been fairly commenced". But before this knowledge had been properly assimilated news of Isandlwana reached British shores. It appeared in *The Times* on 11<sup>th</sup> February under the heading *DEFEAT OF THE BRITISH* based on news from Cape Town (via Madeira) dated 27<sup>th</sup> January. The exact details are ambiguously reported but the message was clear: "On the 21<sup>st</sup> inst. a British column, consisting of a portion of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and 600 natives with one battery, was defeated with terrible loss by an overwhelming force of Zulus, who numbered 20,000". The newspaper was also in no doubt that at the re-opening of Parliament on 13<sup>th</sup> February that the key issue to dominate it would be events in Zululand:

Colonial policy, which rarely rises to more than a secondary place in Royal Speeches and Ministerial statements will thus claim to-day, for painfully conclusive reasons, an incontestable pre-eminence in interest. The South African question is the question of the hour, and the country is looking forward with keen anxiety for what the Ministers of the Crown have to say concerning it.

The Government refused to be drawn into a debate until more information had been received about events at Isandlwana and Frere's motives in commencing the invasion of Zululand. Even on 5<sup>th</sup> March when Sir Charles Dilke gave notice of his motion for debate (which would later take place on 27<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> March) Hicks Beach refused to allow it to be introduced since "further important despatches bearing on the issue had just arrived, and more might yet be on the way". In the mean time, however, it was agreed in response to the pressing nature of the situation to immediately send out further reinforcements: six regiments of infantry, two each of cavalry and artillery and engineers.

In fact the dangers facing Natal were not as pressing as reports in England suggested. The first news of Isandlwana had given the mistaken impression that Chelmsford had been forced to retreat back to Natal, which was not the case. It was also not appreciated that for the Zulus the events of that infamous day had produced a pyrrhic victory. In spite of the way that the British forces had been ultimately crushed, the camp ransacked and their bodies symbolically mutilated, to leave a sickening impression upon the soldiers who first discovered the remains on the battlefield, Isandlwana could easily have gone the other way. Although the British may not have realised it, Isandlwana contributed as much to Zulu defeat as Ulundi. The heroics of Rorke's Drift on the evening following the battle were also significant, not only in inflicting further losses upon the Zulus but in halting their march on Chelmsford's column to the south east. And perhaps more importantly it helped to soften the intense horror felt by the British public at news of Isandlwana by offering an irresistible tale of courage under fire and British resilience against impossible odds. This helped to restore faith in the military forces in South Africa, boosting morale both in the forces and at home and the slow distribution of Victoria Crosses over the course of the year maximised its impact.

In the meantime, Hicks Beach and the Cabinet were occupied with determining what action was to be taken against Frere, who was seen almost universally as the man responsible. The decision was eventually taken from all of the available evidence that Frere should be censured but not removed; a decision which seems to have rested upon the convictions of Hicks Beach and the Queen against those of the rest of the Cabinet. The combined crime of presenting an unfit *Ultimatum* and without Government permission resulted in Frere's censure, although he was perhaps fortunate to maintain his post at all since the majority of the Cabinet favoured his removal. The despatch to Frere was made public on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1879 as the Government's final response after the consideration of all the evidence:

It is with great regret that they feel constrained to adopt the view which I have expressed of your omission to follow a course which appears to them... to have been particularly incumbent upon you in this instance. They cannot, however, doubt that your future action will be such as to prevent a recurrence of any cause for complaint on this score; and they have no desire to withdraw, in the present crisis of affairs, the confidence hitherto reposed in you, the continuation of which is now, more than ever needed to conduct our difficulties in South Africa to a successful termination.

With the relevant correspondence now considered and made public the Government were in a position to be able to face the questions awaiting them in Parliament. The debate was very important for the Colonial Secretary since it reflected upon his own actions during the build-up to war, as well as Frere's, and the decision to censure but not recall Frere.

Originally Dilke's motion was presented in the House of Lords by Lord Lansdowne. It tackled Government policy in three main ways. The motion itself expressed regret for the *Ultimatum* made by Frere which had provoked war; and further regret "that after the censure passed upon the High Commissioner by Her Majesty's Government in the Despatch of the 19<sup>th</sup> day of March 1879, the conduct of affairs in South Africa should be retained in his hands". Lansdowne's speech, however, was so "calm and colourless" that it posed the Government no problems and was comfortably defeated by 156 votes to 61. However, Dilke presented the same motion in the Commons two days later, with an amendment added to it by Colonel Mure who expressed the idea that the Government had recklessly embarked upon a "war of invasion" with insufficient troops "notwithstanding the full information in the possession of Her Majesty's Government of the strength of the Zulu Army".

Dilke's speech presented to the House of Commons a long retrospect of relations between Natal and the Zulus before attacking Sir Bartle Frere as the man who had precipitated war. Dilke cited passages in the despatches to show that the HC "had endeavoured to mislead the Government; that he was not a man of the temper and judgement required for his position; and...that the Home Government ought to have foreseen in the course of last year that he was preparing for hostilities and was determined on annexation".

Alfred Marten was the first to respond to the motion from the Conservative side. He argued that the speeches of Dilke and Mure were mutually destructive since they accused the Government of offences diametrically opposed to one another. He also defended the conduct of the Colonial Secretary since his despatches throughout insisted on a non-aggressive, defensive policy. Hicks Beach afterwards spoke himself, complimenting Dilke on the "industry and research" of his speech, but criticising it for a want of fairness since it had ignored Frere's previous career and character and the serious menace Cetshwayo had posed to Natal. He defended the censure and decision not to recall Frere on the grounds that his dismissal would "weaken the hands of the Government in the future settlement of the colony". However, the debate was soon afterwards adjourned until the following day due to the lateness of the hour.

*The Times* praised both Dilke and Hicks Beach on the quality of their speeches, proclaiming that within them the substance of the debate lay, on which both the House and public must decide. Since both Opposition and Government were agreed on the censure of Sir Bartle Frere, the key issue at stake was whether Frere should have been recalled or not. The debate was resumed the following evening, 28<sup>th</sup> March, but again forced into adjournment until 29<sup>th</sup> March when it was raucously carried through to a division. The first principal speaker of the second resumption, Leonard Courtney<sup>1</sup> drew cheers from the Opposition for his sprightly contribution. Courtney attacked the Colonial Secretary for his "extraordinary" despatch of 23<sup>rd</sup> January in which he had supported Frere on the basis that he did not yet have the information available by which to judge the HC's decision to go to war, requesting an explanation from Hicks Beach of the reasoning behind it. He also accused Hicks Beach of employing a simplistic argument in comparing the situation of Boer settlers with Irish tenants.

Lord Sandon, replying for the Government, was equally committed and forceful. He reviewed previous Liberal failures to pass a vote of censure against Her Majesty's Government and mocked the Opposition for pledging their support to the Government to defend British possessions in South Africa, since he saw this as an embarrassing admittance by them that their foreign policy was looked upon suspiciously in the country. He defended the decision not to recall Frere by highlighting the fact that the HC had been backed by both the Governor of Natal, Sir Henry Bulwer and Bishop Colenso of Natal, quoting their words as evidence and thereby showing that Frere had not been unsupported. He pointed out that the censure was simply a result of Frere's "over-great zeal" for his role and involved "no incapacity, no weakness, no moral turpitude" which would have made his recall necessary and on a practical note, Sandon argued that Frere's recall would probably result in Chelmsford's resignation, leaving the Government without its two principal authorities in South Africa just when they were needed.

These speeches had set the parameters of the debate, picking up from its introduction by Dilke, but other speakers brought up further criticisms of the Government's, and more specifically, the Colonial Secretary's, handling of the situation in South Africa. Sir George Balfour, who had sympathy with Sir Bartle Frere's position, attacked Hicks Beach for his criticism of Frere's insistence on the presence of missionaries in Zululand. Balfour agreed with Carnarvon that missionaries were one of "the great means of civilising people". He also attacked the CO as an

institution that had frequently changed its policy, made mistakes and driven colonies to rebellion. Others were less personal with their criticism but still harangued Government ministers for both their policies and management of the affair. Edmond Synan accused them of following an ambiguous policy, gambling on Frere being successful; Sir William Harcourt charged the Government with legitimising the retention of public servants who had received the severest of censures and Hicks Beach for having ignored or failed to notice Frere's references to an ultimatum; whilst the Marquis of Hartington speculated upon Cabinet debate, concluding that the Government had found a response which did not force them to comment on policy, and could thus reap credit and honour if it turned out well.

The debate was closed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Stafford Northcote. Northcote proclaimed that the Government alone was responsible for the policy they followed, refusing to accept that they had attempted to shift blame onto their proconsul; this echoed Beaconsfield's speech in the Lords that "It is a very easy thing for a Government to make a scapegoat; but that is conduct which I hope no gentleman on this side... would easily adopt". Northcote also returned the debate to its origins in Dilke's speech by defending Hicks Beach from the accusation that he was like Phaeton, unable to hold his horses:

Well, the hon. and learned gentleman [Dilke] seemed to be snatching at the reins as though thinking that he could manage them: (Cheers and laughter:) But the hon. and learned gentleman did not give us the slightest indication of the direction in which he would drive. (Hear, hear).

The vote was ultimately won comfortably by the Government by 306 votes to 216, but this did not entirely dispel the sense that Frere had been sacrificed in order to preserve their reputation especially since as the war dragged on (mainly due to adverse conditions for transport in South Africa) the campaign created a messy and uncomfortable public picture. Had victory quickly followed Isandlwana, all involved might have emerged with more credit than they did, but as the campaign reached into the summer, the need for a change became more evident. The further disastrous and embarrassing loss of Prince Louis Napoleon simply added to the pressure upon the Government, who had never totally shaken off the stigma that Frere had been used to allow Disraeli and Hicks Beach to save face.

### **3. Settlement**

Reuter's Telegram Madeira Via London, May 26, 7.20pm.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has stated that, after full consideration of Cape affairs, the British Government had decided to appoint Sir Garnet Wolseley to the supreme military and civil command in Natal, Transvaal, and adjoining districts, including the seat of war, as Sir Bartle Frere was sufficiently occupied in Cape Town.

This was how Sir Bartle Frere received the news of his partial supersession as High Commissioner in South Africa in June 1879. The Cabinet had taken the decision at the end of May against the wishes of Queen Victoria and soon afterwards Hicks Beach had sent a despatch detailing the reasons for his appointment to Frere, which was unlucky to be beaten to Cape Town by the announcement of the news by Reuter's. In this despatch, agreed upon by the Cabinet, Frere was informed that the purpose of the appointment was to unite the civil and military commands in the area of operations.

Frere's response, perhaps predictably after the petulant reaction to his censure, was not an altogether happy one. He claimed to support the idea of uniting the civil and military authority in the figure of one man, but Frere warned Hicks Beach that he regarded its long-term adoption as "dangerous as well as retrogressive". In private, Frere was even more negative. Although he praised Wolseley's suitability for the role, Frere was slightly despondent about what the appointment meant for him: "I cannot see why you could not have carried it out [appointing Wolseley] without putting any slight on me?" And in response to his own question he suggests that it could only be that "you wished to express either disappointment of what I have done in the past or distrust of what I may do in the future". Hicks Beach tried to console Frere that this was not intended as a slight against him by telling him that he believed Wolseley's appointment to be necessary and hoped that Frere "will take the same view, even though that change affects to some extent your own position". He also on

a practical note pointed out to Frere that the role was necessary but that it was not really possible for Sir Garnet Wolseley to have been made subject to local control.

Apart from some reservations from Frere himself, the Queen was quite vehement in her opposition to the appointment of Sir Garnet Wolseley. In a letter of 28<sup>th</sup> May 1879 Queen Victoria informed Hicks Beach that she has to some extent been reassured by his recent letters but that she has been "very anxious and annoyed about this re-arrangement in South Africa".

Wolseley's purpose in going to South Africa was to conclude the war and bring a settlement of peace to Zululand which would be lasting, summed up in Hicks Beach's closing despatch to Wolseley before he left for South Africa: "Bring peace about as soon as you can: but let it be made on such terms as you believe will last". But the Government was also keen to ensure that the costs were split with the South African Colonies, who, it was felt, had a tendency to charge excess expenditure to Great Britain. They were also keen to find an alternative to the obvious option of annexation, which was expected by most, particularly those in South Africa. Hicks Beach was hopeful that Wolseley was capable of reaching such a settlement, informing him in a private letter: "All this I feel confident you will be able to work out in a way which without annexing Zulu-land or taking the cattle or land of the people will satisfy all reasonable men".

Wolseley arrived in Natal just three days after the decisive battle at Ulundi, which effectively finished the war. He did, however, oversee the capture of King Cetshwayo in August 1879 before setting about the organisation of a plan to settle Zululand, which he had completed drawing up in rough by September. Wolseley's initiative involved the segregation of the Zulu territory into thirteen smaller provinces each headed by a chief selected by the British. A British Resident was also appointed, but exercised diplomatic duties only. Wolseley was very positive about the potential success his plan would have in bringing peace to South Africa: "I believe the settlement to be a most satisfactory one & to be one that will bear the great test of time". He was also aware, however, that not everyone would welcome it since the colonists had wanted annexation, the Transvaal had not been given the land it wanted and the Natalians did not want the involvement of John Dunn whom they despised. As a middle course, Wolseley expected opposition to it from both sides.

Wolseley saw his settlement as imposing upon the Zulus "gradations of civilisation beginning with Natal, then John Dunn's province, and then the districts bordering upon it, the people of which would necessarily be infected with feelings and views entertained by Dunn's people, and lastly the real barbarians on the north of the Pongolo River".

But there were several problems in the relations between those in South Africa, and with the home Government. Wolseley complained to Hicks Beach about an obstructionist attitude from Frere which was hindering Wolseley's work in South Africa and he suggested to Hicks Beach that he viewed Frere as a potential danger in the future administration of South Africa since he was a member of the "dangerous men" in the "Anti-black" party: "Unless his warlike tendencies be restrained and his wings somewhat clipped there is no saying what future troubles he may not lay the seed of in his anxiety to effect Confederation". Part of the animosity between the two men may have been in Wolseley's criticism of Frere and Chelmsford for their instigation of the Anglo-Zulu War and management of it once commenced. Wolseley suggested to Hicks Beach that a more careful military plan might have allowed victory to be attained with just the troops in Natal on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1879. He also in another letter blamed Frere for the "disastrously expensive" conflict. Bizarrely, Wolseley also displayed an anxiousness to leave South Africa right from the start. Even in September he was hoping to be on his way back to England by the end of November, although this drew no sympathy from the Government at home who had sent him to fulfil a task that they expected him to complete professionally. Beaconsfield was blunt as to that issue: "... there can be no question that Wolseley must remain there... he never would give us a moment's peace till we sent him there & there he must remain until all is settled".

Despite his initial agreement with Wolseley's appointment, Frere also became increasingly critical of the new Governor of Natal, especially over his handling of the Boers. Wolseley himself reported to Hicks Beach that Frere had stopped corresponding with him in August and Wolseley was aware that Frere regarded him as an "impediment" to confederation. Frere criticised the settlement, concluding that it was "feeble", as Wolseley had expected him to, but he also called his judgement into question: "Wolseley's judgement in matters of civil administration, is not equal to his ability as a military commander in the field". These petty disagreements demonstrated the difficulties the Home Government had in imposing its will on South Africa and how government of the colonies was so dependent upon the policies and attitudes of those in the field rather than the efforts to drive policy from London.

The Government did, however, still have to hold responsibility for affairs in South Africa and as the war ended the issue of finance became a crucial one. This had been a concern from the very

outset of the war and one of the Government's most important reasons for wishing to postpone a conflict. In fact, ever since the war had begun the issue had been hanging over the Government.

In his instructions to Wolseley in a private letter, Hicks Beach had mentioned the need to gain a contribution to the costs from the Natal Government:

When you are in a position to do so, of course I shall be anxious for any suggestion you can send me as to what might be charged on Natal and how it should be obtained... They ought not to pay less than £700,000 towards the Imperial expenditure on the war.

But the Government had to gain a vote of expenditure of their own to cover the costs of the war from Parliament at home. During the debate prior to entry into Committees of Supply the Colonial Secretary was faced with awkward questions relating to guarantees for the reduction of future expenditure and the extraction of a contribution to the current campaign from the South African colonies. The debate was opened by Peter Rylands, who introduced an amendment to the motion to take the House into Committees of Supply that "as long as this country should pay for a British force in the colonies, wars would be entered into". He proposed therefore "That in view of the large and increasing expenditure for military purposes in South Africa, this House is of the opinion that the colonies of the Cape of Good Hope and Natal ought to be required to contribute to a due proportion of the military expenditure incurred in the interests of those colonies." The motion was seconded by Dilke.

In response Hicks Beach refused to enter into the issue of future policy in the South African colonies and he corrected the statement made by Rylands in presenting his amendment in which he had stated that the colonies made a profit out of war and were thus better able to pay for wars than the British Parliament. The Cape had in fact incurred heavy expenses in the Transkei War, for example, and in any event the Zulu War was a different case from which the Cape had made no profit since it did not adjoin Zululand. But this was the only exception he took to Rylands' case and otherwise he "could re-echo almost every word the hon. gentleman had said, and he begged to tender the hon. gentleman his thanks and those of the Government for the manner in which he had brought the question before the House". The amendment failed and the house passed into Committee of Supply. But here again the Government's policy came into question. Courtney accused the Government of following the "fatal policy" which they had inherited from Carnarvon of confederation and predicted that it would have to be abandoned:

If the Government do not reject it as immoral, they would have to reject it as too costly, for the three millions now asked for would be but a small instalment of the expenditure which such a policy would involve. (Hear, hear).

Charles Dalrymple, however, pointed out that the debate was not an issue of colonial policy but of fiscal necessity and attempted to return the attention of the Committee to the grant of money for the expenditure on the war. However, views on colonial policy continued to be expressed by members of Parliament. Sir Wilfred Lawson pointed out that this was the first war in history fought by a British Government, which acknowledged it to be unjust; whilst both Hartington and Charles Stewart Parnell enquired after the orders that had been given to Wolseley and the Government's plans for settlement of Zululand.

Both the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Colonial Secretary were able to deflect these advances into the area of colonial policy to bring the Committee to a vote which saw the Government granted the money for the war expenditure.

However, it was clear that great controversy continued to surround the Government's policy.