

# No Emancipation without Compensation

Slave Owners' Petitions and the End of Slavery in the Netherlands,  
c. 1833-1873

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This article analyses how Dutch slave owners and shareholders used petitions to influence how slavery was abolished in Suriname, Curaçao and the Antilles. They have been characterised as defenders of slavery. Throughout this article it will become clear that slave owners and shareholders did not aim for the continuation of slavery in the Dutch Atlantic after the 1840s. Instead, they successfully lobbied to postpone abolition until the most favourable conditions for them – rather than the enslaved people – had been agreed in Parliament. British legislation and colonial practices inspired their advocacy for financial compensation and labour immigration, showing the transnational nature of this approach. Referring to legislation adopted by the States General also proved an effective tactic to legitimise their claims. The resulting Emancipation Act became part of the Dutch State's transformation into an anti-slavery empire, because the Act expanded the state's power over the formerly enslaved people in Suriname and the use of coerced labour under the guise of abolition.

Dit artikel analyseert hoe Nederlandse slaveneigenaren en aandeelhouders petitie gebruikten om invloed uit te oefenen op de manier waarop slavernij werd afgeschaft in Suriname, Curaçao en Nederland. Het maakt duidelijk dat de slaveneigenaren en aandeelhouders na de jaren 1840 niet de voortzetting van slavernij in het Nederlands Atlantisch gebied voor ogen hadden. In plaats daarvan lobbyden zij succesvol voor het uitstellen van de afschaffing totdat het parlement de gunstigste voorwaarden voor henzelf – en niet voor de slaafgemaakten – had goedgekeurd. Britse wetgeving en koloniale praktijken inspireerden hun pleidooien

voor financiële compensatie en arbeidsmigratie, waaruit blijkt dat hun aanpak transnationaal was. Het verwijzen naar oude besluiten van de Staten-Generaal bleek ook een succesvolle tactiek om hun claims te legitimeren. De uiteindelijke Emancipatiewet maakte deel uit van de transformatie van de Nederlandse staat in een koloniaal rijk zonder slavernij, omdat deze wet onder de noemer van emancipatie de macht van de staat over de voormalig slaafgemaakten in Suriname vergrootte evenals het gebruik van contractarbeid.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Two old hands from the late-stadtholder William v, Willem Carel Hendrik baron van Lynden van Blitterswijk and Joan Cornelis van der Hoop, were not impressed by his son's move to abolish the Dutch transatlantic slave trade in 1814. Apparently, the younger William of Orange had forgotten the core principles supporting the plantation economy in the era of the Dutch West India Company (1621-1792). '[T]he trade to the West Indies is of the utmost importance', Van Lynden reminded Van der Hoop, and 'this trade could not be performed successfully without the annual shipment of negroes, who are supposed to be imported by our own ships from our establishments at the coast of Africa'.<sup>2</sup>

In the Company era, Van Lynden had advocated for the States General's support for the slave trade and saw no reason to change course now that colonial rule had become a matter for the Dutch State. In 1814, therefore, he cited the resolution the States General had adopted in 1788 stating 'that beyond all doubt the well-being of the colonies depends on the superfluous import of negroes'.<sup>3</sup> Although buying people in Africa and transporting them across the Atlantic hardly complied with Christianity, Van Lynden stated, 'wild people' populated West Africa, and constant warfare led to their enslavement. As a former secretary of the Suriname Company, Van der Hoop also believed

1 I would like to thank the Royal Netherlands Historical Society for the publication grant received in 2021, and Camilla de Koning and Sakina Mouami for their assistance during the research for this article.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. 'dat den handel op de West-Indiën van het grootste belang is [...] dat dezelve met geen succes kan gedreven worden zonder jaarlijksen aanvoer van negers, die met onse eigene schepen moeten afgehaald worden van onze etablissementen op de kust van Africa'. Het Nationaal Archief in Den Haag (The National

Archives in The Hague, hereafter NL-HANA), Staatssecretarie, 2.02.01, inv. no. 6555, Brieven aan en consideraties en aantekeningen van Willem Carel Hendrik baron van Lijnden van Blitterswijk; Gerrit Jan Schutte, *De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën: Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden, 1770-1800* (H.D. Tjeen Willink 1974) 55-57.

3 'dat de voorspoed der Koloniën buiten allen twijfel van den overvloedigen aanvoer van negers afhangt'. NL-HANA, Staatssecretarie, 2.02.01, inv. no. 6555, 'Consideratien omtrent de slavenhandel, augustus 1814'.

that ‘Africans can only be ruled by the force of ownership’.<sup>4</sup> According to Van der Hoop, British ‘philanthropy’ had abolished the slave trade, whereas it should have been aimed at the treatment of enslaved Africans rather than against transporting and owning them. These two old hands show how at the turn of the nineteenth century, Dutch pro-slavery circles had adopted abolitionist rhetoric in an attempt to prolong slavery.<sup>5</sup>

This article deals with the petitions sent by Dutch slave owners and investors to postpone abolition until the most favourable conditions for them – rather than the enslaved people – had been agreed. The political lobbying by slave owners and investors based in Amsterdam and Suriname figured most prominently in Joseph Siwipersad’s classical study on the Dutch government and abolition in Suriname.<sup>6</sup> Siwipersad’s meticulous archival research makes his work indispensable for putting the lobbyists’ activities under closer scrutiny. Other older studies by Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, Johanna van Winter and Riemer Reinsma also acknowledge the influence of the petitions sent by the owners on the eventual Emancipation Act. What unites these studies is that they used the petitions of the owners to contextualise the actions of the Dutch government or abolitionists, but these documents have not been studied as instruments of political lobbying in their own right.<sup>7</sup> Doing so matters, because, as Maartje Janse argued, ‘Dutch abolitionists did not have to battle the well-organized pro-slavery interests that their British and American counterparts faced, an opposition that

- 4 ‘Africaanen [...] niet geregeert kunnen worden dan door de kracht van eigendom’. NL-HANA, Staatssecretarie, 2.02.01, inv. no. 6555, Van der Hoop to Van Lynden, 13 February 1815.
- 5 Paula Dumas, *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition* (Palgrave MacMillan 2016) 45-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137558589>; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (University of Chicago Press 2002) 108-109, 217; Pepijn Brandon, ‘“Shrewd Sirens of Humanity”: the changing shape of pro-slavery arguments in the Netherlands (1789-1814)’, *Almanack* 14 (2016) 3-26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320161402>.
- 6 Joseph Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij (1833-1863)* (Bouma’s Boekhuis 1979).
- 7 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, ‘De Nederlandse afschaffing van de slavernij in vergelijkend perspectief’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical*

*Review* (hereafter *BMGN – LCHR*) 93:1 (1978) 69-100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.2018>; Johanna M. van Winter, ‘De openbare mening in Nederland over de afschaffing van slavernij’, *De West-Indische Gids* 34 (1953) 61-90; Riemer Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie, 1863-1963* (Van Goor Zonen 1963) 30-33, 53, 58. See also: Sakina Mouami, ‘De Amsterdamse ijver om een “billijke” vergoeding: Hoe een Amsterdamse lobby van belanghebbenden heeft getracht de Haagse politiek te beïnvloeden omtrent de emancipatie van de slaafgemaakte bevolking in de kolonie Suriname in de periode 1830-1863’ (Bachelor thesis, Leiden University 2022); Jasmijn Doppert, ‘De Heimelijke Tegenstanders. Een onderzoek naar de politieke invloed van Amsterdamse belanghebbenden in de negentiende eeuw omtrent de afschaffing van de slavernij, 1840-1863’ (Bachelor thesis, Leiden University 2021).

mobilized and radicalized abolitionists there'.<sup>8</sup> Yet the lack of organisation on the part of Dutch slave owners and shareholders did not render their lobbying efforts ineffective. Pepijn Brandon and Karen Lurvink, for example, studied the activities of the Amsterdam firm Insinger & Co, which started a lobby separate from the larger groups sending requests from Amsterdam and the colonies in the Atlantic. Their lobby was successful because the company's representatives were actively involved in day-to-day plantation management, modernising their enterprise, and they were prominent figures of the Dutch ruling class.<sup>9</sup> It is important to study the various lobbying efforts from Amsterdam in tandem to fully grasp their impact.

The conversation between Van Lynden and Van der Hoop highlights two elements in the petitions' argumentation that are further explored in this article. First, British precedents played a role in Dutch resistance to the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands by way of its legislation and colonial practice. British influence on Dutch abolitionist ideas and practices has received due attention. Seymour Drescher and Maarten Kuitenbrouwer compared the British and Dutch paths to emancipation from economic and political perspectives, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Historian of political culture Maartje Janse coined the phrase 'invert transfer' to argue that the relatively small scale and subdued style of the Dutch abolition movement was a conscious rejection of sustained attempts to export a British style of abolitionism.<sup>11</sup> In line with international scholarship on American and British pro-slavery thinkers, René Koekkoek has shown that Dutch proponents of slavery or gradual abolitionists could be original and immersed in global currents of thought, as opposed to reactionary and inward-looking.<sup>12</sup> Pepijn

8 Maartje Janse, "'Holland as a Little England'? British Anti-Slavery Missionaries and Continental Abolitionist Movements in the Mid Nineteenth Century', *Past & Present* 229:1 (2015) 149. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtv037>.

9 Pepijn Brandon and Karin Lurvink, "'With the Power of Language and the Force of Reason": An Amsterdam Banker's Fight for Slave Owners' Compensation', in: Pepijn Brandon, Sabine Go and Wybren Versteegen (eds.), *Navigating History: Economy, Society, Knowledge, and Nature. Essays in honour of Prof. Dr. C.A. Davids* (Brill 2018) 228-248. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004381568\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004381568_012).

10 Seymour Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective', *The American Historical Review* 99:1 (1994) 44-69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2166162>; Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing'.

11 Janse, "'Holland as a Little England'?", 125.

12 René Koekkoek, 'Liberty, Death, and Slavery in the Age of Atlantic Revolutions', in: Hannah Dawson and Annelien De Dijn (eds.), *Rethinking Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge University Press 2022) 134-154. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108951722.010>; Jeffrey Young, 'Introduction: A Transatlantic Perspective on the Problem of Proslavery Thought', in: *ibid.* (ed.), *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740-1829: An Anthology* (University of South Carolina Press 2006) 1-67, 2-10; Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, 5-6; Nick Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge University Press 2010) chapter 2; David Lambert, 'The Counter-Revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian Petitions and Proslavery Networks', *Social & Cultural Geography* 6:3 (2005) 405-420, 408. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360500111345>.

Brandon also argued that growing international resistance to slavery and the abolition of the slave trade (1807) caused Dutch proponents of slavery to adopt their argumentation in support of this form of colonial labour.<sup>13</sup> Analysing British influence on Dutch *anti*-abolitionist petitions therefore adds to the scholarship on the international dimension of abolition in the Netherlands.

The second element in the petitions' argumentation underlines the focus of this special issue on reassessing the arguments used in Dutch support of colonial slavery. The petitions referred to legislation issued by the States General – legalising colonial slavery – to legitimise their claim as property holders vis-à-vis the colonial State in the nineteenth century. Historians Jur van Goor and Alicia Schrikker have already argued that referring to the past was common to bring about the colonial transition occurring in Java between 1780 and 1830.<sup>14</sup> Here, the petitions show how this tactic also affected political debates in the metropole about a transition in the Atlantic part of the Dutch empire. Petitioners were well aware that times had changed since the dissolution of the chartered Companies in the late eighteenth century, and they did not refer to old legislation to broker for a return to that period. Rather, this article suggests that the owners of enslaved people and plantation shares in the Atlantic used the *legacy* of the States General's decision-making to protect their property in the age of abolition.

The main sources for this current study are (copies of) sixteen petitions known to have been sent by Amsterdam-based owners and investors to the King, ministers of Colonial Affairs and Parliament between 1833 and 1862. Most of their slavery-related property was based in Suriname, the major plantation colony in the Dutch empire.<sup>15</sup> The number of signatures on each petition varied between 30 and 48, and the total of 563 signatures belonged to 112 individuals or firms with a financial stake in Dutch slavery. Insinger & Co sent three petitions signed by the firm and a maximum of five other shareholders. Among the Amsterdam-based signatories figured prominent absentee owners, such as G.C. Bosch Reitz and P.C. Gülcher. Widows also signed, confirming that in the Netherlands, as in Great Britain, slave ownership was not strictly reserved to men.<sup>16</sup> But since the late eighteenth-century shift to mortgaging plantations, most owners owned shares in plantation loans rather than in plantations or slaves proper. Consequently, merchant bankers also figured prominently among the owners. The social-economic composition of the group varied too much

13 Brandon, "Shrewd Sirens" and the introduction to this special issue; Karwan Fatah-Black and Lauren Lauret, 'Repentance and Reappraisal: Historicising the Defenders of Slavery in the Netherlands', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12843>.

14 Jur van Goor, 'From Company to State', in: idem, *Prelude to Colonialism, the Dutch in Asia* (Verloren

2004) 83-98; Alicia Schrikker, 'Restoration in Java 1815-1830', *BMGN – LCHR* 130:4 (2015) 132-144, see 135-143. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10150>.

15 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie, 1750-1863* (KITLV Uitgeverij 1993).

16 Hall, *Legacies*, 21.

for it to reach the political and financial power of the West India interest in Britain.<sup>17</sup> Yet the Dutch political elite proved willing to listen to the arguments put forward in these petitions.

The article deals with the petitions in chronological order, as it discerns three distinct phases of petitioning. Changes in the political context forced owners and investors to adapt their arguments to the stage of their cause and to the recipient of their petitions. The arguments presented in the petitions moved from protecting slavery and delaying abolition towards claiming their entitlement to financial compensation, and finally to lobbying for the ‘just’ amount of compensation and securing control over plantation labour post-emancipation. It is important to read these petitions with the aims of the signatories in mind. For, as stated in one of the petitions, ‘[t]hese here are not after all questions of theoretical nature, these are not constitutional thoughts for which the petitioners argue: these are firm, practical, immediate, and certain interests that were harmed’.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, presenting the petitions as building blocks of coherent Dutch pro-slavery and anti-abolitionist political thought would be a misrepresentation of the arguments.

### 1833-1845: Protecting slavery and delaying abolition

Dutch interest in British colonial policy was partly due to the exchange of colonies in 1814. British delegates at the Conference of Vienna (1814-1815) had forced other countries to follow their example and abolish the transatlantic slave trade. In exchange for the Dutch retreat from this slave trade, Britain agreed to return colonies in the East Indies and the Atlantic they had controlled since the Batavian Revolution of 1795.<sup>19</sup> Britain kept sugar colonies Demerara and Essequibo under control, but there remained Dutch owners in what became British Guiana. Conversely, in the Suriname districts of Nickerie and Coronie, British planters owned most of the

17 Jan van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720-1795: financiën en handel* (De Witte 1973) 101; Keith McClelland, ‘Redefining the West India interest’, in: Hall, *Legacies*, 130; Draper, *The Price*, 139-151.

18 ‘Het zijn immers hier geene vraagpunten van theoretischen aard, het zijn geene staatkundige bespiegelingen, waarvoor de adressanten ijveren: het zijn stellig, praktische, dadelijke, zekere belangen, die gekwest en gekrenkt zijn.’ *Verzameling van stukken aangaande de Surinaamsche aangelegenheden*, deel II (Den

Haag 1846) 52; Gustaaf van Nifterik, ‘Arguments related to slavery in seventeenth century Dutch legal theory’, *Tijdschrift voor rechtsgeschiedenis* 89:1-2 (2021) 158-191, 161. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718190-12340005>.

19 Marcel van der Linden, ‘Zur Logik einer Nicht-Entscheidung. Der Wiener Kongress und der Sklavenhandel’, in: Thomas Just, Wolfgang Maderthaler and Helene Maimann (eds.), *Der Wiener Kongress. Die Erfindung Europas* (Carl Gerold’s Sohn Verlagsbuchhandlung KG 2014) 354-374.

plantations. Apparently, nothing stood in the way of the restored son of the late-stadtholder, King William I, to base the new State's economy on the integration of production, trade and consumption of colonial goods. The plantation economy in the Dutch Atlantic relied on slave labour and could continue to do so, since abolishing the slave trade had no repercussions for the institution of slavery. However, after the Congress of Vienna, Britain pressed on and also abolished the institution of slavery in its empire in 1833. This decision again had serious repercussions for the Dutch political debate about slavery.<sup>20</sup>

Anticipating the end of slavery in the British colonies, absentee Dutch slave owners and investors anxiously followed decision-making in The Hague. In 1828, William I sanctioned a major policy change with regard to the legal status of the enslaved people in the West Indies. His decision updated the *plantaadjeregelement* ('plantation regulations') that had been in place since 1784, regulating the jurisdiction of the plantation manager and that of the Governing Council in Paramaribo.<sup>21</sup> From now on, the enslaved people should be treated as people rather than property. Like guardians, slave owners and overseers did have the right to 'paternally correct' enslaved persons, but at the same time they could face prosecution in case of abuse. Improving the legal status and treatment of the enslaved people gave the slave owners reason to suspect that slavery in the Atlantic was coming to an end. The policy change did not go down well with the Dutch planters. They wanted to restore full ownership over people – a fundamental principle of slavery. After receiving a petition, the Colonial Office removed the revolutionary article from the plantation regulations in 1833. As a result, owners could again treat their enslaved people as commodities. Restoring the enslaved persons' legal status as property would have significant repercussions in the political debate over financial compensation for the slave owners.<sup>22</sup>

The abolition of slavery by the British government surprised many in the Netherlands, even though rumours of emancipation in Berbice and Demerara had sparked slave uprisings in Suriname in 1832.<sup>23</sup> Dutch

20 Bram Hoonhout, *Borderless Empire: Dutch Guiana in the Atlantic World, 1750-1800* (University of Georgia Press 2020) 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfxvb8n>; David Alston, 'Scottish Slave-owners in Suriname: 1651-1863', *Northern Scotland* 9:1 (2018) 17-43, 22-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3366/nor.2018.0143>; Gert Oostindie, 'De koning en de Caraïben', in: Ido de Haan Haan, Paul den Hoed and Henk te Velde (eds.), *Een nieuwe staat. Het begin van het koninkrijk der Nederlanden* (Boom 2013) 173-182.

21 Karwan Fatah-Black, 'The usurpation of legal roles by Suriname's Governing Council,

1669-1816', *Comparative legal history* 5:2 (2017) 243-261, 256-257. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2049677X.2017.1385266>; Angelie Sens, *De kolonieman: Johannes van den Bosch (1780-1844), volksverheffer in naam van de koning* (Uitgeverij Balans 2019) 222-226.

22 *Eerste rapport der Staatscommissie*, 262; Siwpersad, *De afschaffing*, 200; cf. Catherine Hall, 'Gendering Property, Racing Capital', *History workshop journal* 78:1 (2014) 22-38, 27-28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbuo24>.

newspapers had judged the abolition of slavery in British colonies ‘most important for all plantation owners in the East and West Indies’.<sup>24</sup> Testimony to this is the petition William I received soon after the English House of Commons adopted the Abolition Act.<sup>25</sup> Worried owners from Amsterdam asked for 2,000 extra troops to be sent to Suriname to prevent violence and escapes. Due to the King’s expensive decision to keep the army mobilised in reaction to the Belgian secession (1830), this demand from the slave owners was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, this illustrates that initially the Dutch owners reacted to the British abolition by calling on their government for a costly protection of slavery. In the aftermath of not only the Belgian Revolution but also the Java War (1825-1830), a major colonial reform such as abolition was untimely.

The abdication of William I (1840) offered the prospect of colonial reform. British abolitionists urged their Dutch counterparts to seize the moment by petitioning the new King William II to ask for his support for their committee in favour of abolition.<sup>26</sup> Yet the absentee owners also wanted to enlist royal support for their interest. In December 1841, the owners addressed the King in a petition after hearing rumours about the abolitionist committee (see Figure 1).<sup>27</sup> The shareholders were well attuned to the new King’s desire for popularity as well as power.<sup>28</sup> William II proved sensitive to the petition’s overarching argument: a matter as crucial as this for the well-being of the colonies concerned the highest government level rather than some abolitionist committee. Like British anti-abolitionists, they questioned whether abolition was necessary at all. If so, and only if abolition were deemed necessary in the Dutch context, the State should compensate the owners for the loss of their property. It is important to note that from the moment abolition emerged on the Dutch political agenda, financial compensation for dispossessed property figured in the owners’ argumentation. The signatures of seven bankers and firms that had already received substantial amounts of British compensation explain why the Amsterdam lobby focused on this demand from the outset (see Figure 2).<sup>29</sup> By appealing to the King’s prerogative in colonial affairs, the shareholders achieved one objective:

23 Miles Taylor, ‘Empire and Parliamentary Reform’, in: Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge University Press 2003) 295-311, 306-309.

24 As quoted in Janse, ‘“Holland as little England”’, 136.

25 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.0007.58, inv. no. 509.

26 Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers: publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840-1880* (Wereldbibliotheek 2007) 56; Karwan Fatah-Black, Lauren Lauret and Joris van den Tol, *Serving*

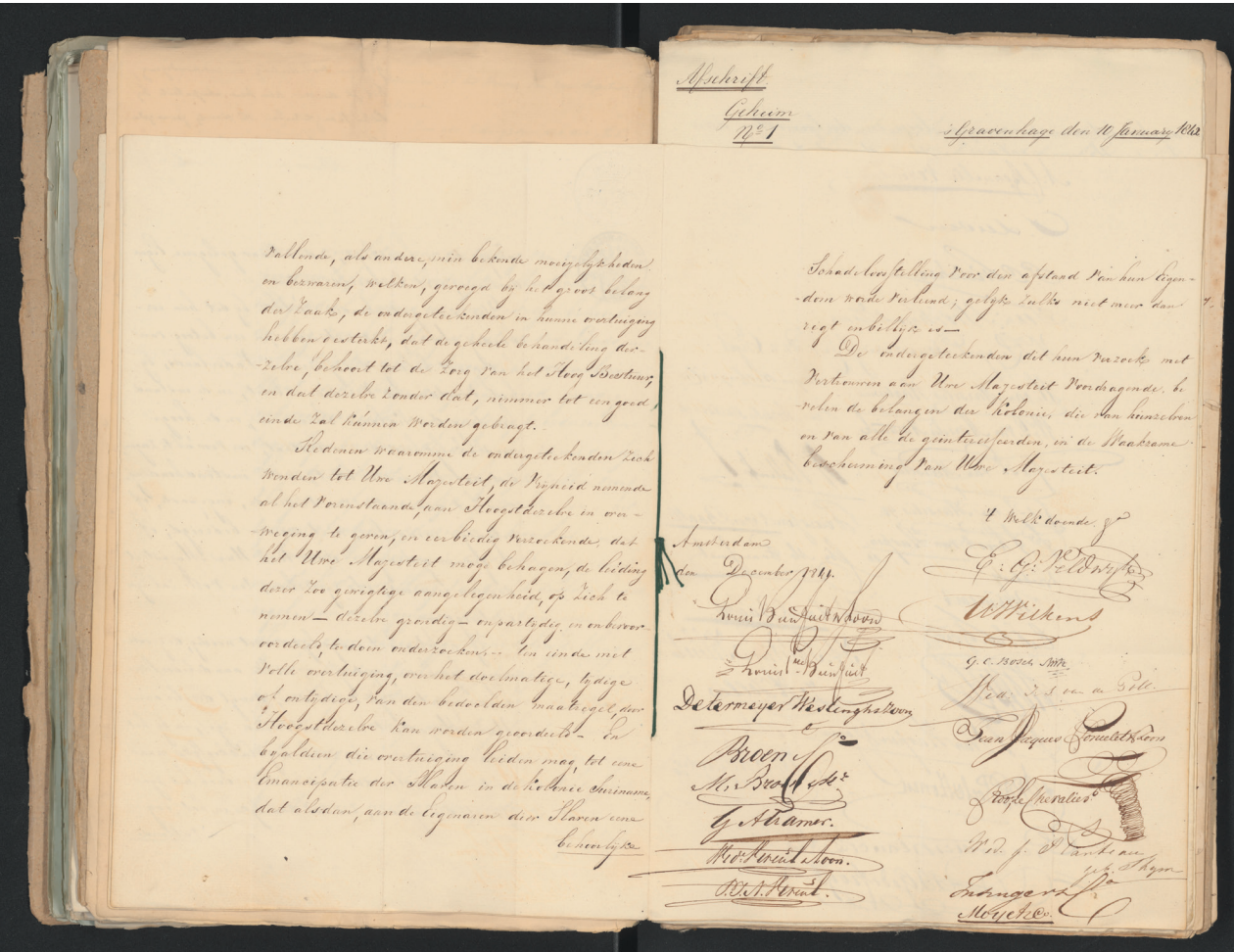
*the Chain? De Nederlandsche Bank and the Last Decades of Slavery, 1814-1863* (Leiden University Press 2023) 102-110.

27 NL-HANA, Koloniën, 1814-1849, 2.10.01, inv. no. 4277, exh 11 January 1842 La F1 secret.

28 Jeroen van Zanten, *Koning Willem II: 1792-1849* (Boom 2013).

29 The LBS database has been checked for all signatories of the 16 petitions under discussion here: G. Blancke en Zoon (£12,061.10), Charbon en Zoon (£16,799.12), Geb. Heemskerck (£52.291.20),





▲  
**Figure 1.** Second page of signatures on the anti-abolitionist petition of December 1841. © National Archives, The Hague, 2.10.01, inv. nr. 4277, exh 11 January 1842.

William II refused to grant the anti-slavery committee his seal of approval. But the King also instructed his Minister of Colonial Affairs, Jean Chrétien Baud, to explore abolition.<sup>30</sup>

Baud, a former Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies and slave owner, considered abolition a long-term reform project.<sup>31</sup> The deplorable state of the treasury – caused by mismanagement by William I and the military campaigns in Belgium and Java – dominated the political agenda. A new government loan and the State debt's conversion to a lower rate (1844) made room for substantial political reforms such as abolition. Although Baud never replied to shareholders' petitions or mentioned them in his weekly meetings with William II, the clarity of their demands merits our attention because Baud's successors did act on them. First, the Dutch government should consult the shareholders *prior* to changing colonial policy. Any failure to do so meant government interference with slavery, and this violated property rights – the second pillar supporting anti-abolitionist thinking. The government could not infringe on this right 'without sufficient compensation', regardless of the judgement by the 'philanthropic strand of this Century'.<sup>32</sup> Finally, no general decree or law could possibly meet its objective in Suriname because of the diversity in the state and type of plantations, which depended on the products cultivated on a plantation. Clearly, shareholders expected the government to design policy with a well-informed eye for the needs of the owners, rather than the enslaved people.

Meanwhile, absentee owners kept a close eye on their plantations. On behalf of British owners, Amsterdam-based Insinger & Co oversaw the plantation management of *Zeezicht*, Suriname's largest cotton plantation.<sup>33</sup> Heiresses Catherine and Johanna Cooke wanted Insinger to sell *Zeezicht* in parts by separating the sale of the land from that of the machines and enslaved people. Selling a plantation this way required permission from the governor, Burchard Joan Elias. Insinger & Co tried to obtain this by sending a private letter to the Minister of Colonial Affairs.<sup>34</sup> Baud told Elias he did not have any

A. Voomborgh (£11,783.14), J. Luden (£10,508.13), P. Portielje (£32,738.40) and J.H. Rente Linsen (£3,895) received compensation from the British government.

30 Wouter Hugenoltz, *Het geheim van Paleis Kneuterdijk. De wekelijkse gesprekken van koning Willem II met zijn minister J.C. Baud over het koloniale beleid en de herziening van de grondwet, 1841-1848* (Brill 2008) 42, 57-60, 67. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004253933>.

31 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Gerrit Drost, 'Verkoopakte van de tot slaaf gemaakte Leon van

Guinea', 1812-1820. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.787409>.

32 'zonder voldoende schadeloosstelling [...] philanthropische strekking der Eeuw'. *Verzameling*, deel I, 90-92.

33 Joost Jonker, "'Roeien tegen de stroom"', 1813-1860. De geschiedenis van Insinger & Co, deel 2', *Jaarboek Amstelodamum* 96 (2004) 135-155.

34 Stadsarchief Amsterdam (hereafter NL-ASDSA), 1455, Inventaris van het Archief van de Bank Insinger & Co (hereafter Insinger), inv. no. 1445, 12 May 1843.



**Figure 2.** Portrait of Johannes Luden, a Dutch recipient of British compensation after the abolition of slavery. Painter August Allebé, 1867. © RKD, The Hague, Private collection, 1975, <https://rkd.nl/images/146157>.

objections to the proposed sale, but the governor disagreed. Elias believed the enslaved people could not be moved to an inland plantation without force, health issues and severing family ties with neighbouring plantations. The larger group of shareholders also claimed that Elias displayed contempt for the lawful rights and authority masters possessed over ‘their’ enslaved people.<sup>35</sup> Elias frustrated absentee owners, and this threatened his position among the political elite in The Hague. By such ‘reckless dealings with the slaves’, Elias turned ‘the Amsterdam scrooges’ into ‘a hornet’s nest’, a political ally informed Baud.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Baud’s loyalty to Suriname’s governor forced the shareholders to expand their repertoire of arguments, and the anti-abolitionist campaign gained momentum as a result (see Figure 3). Baud denied the owners’ reliance on the old assurances used to protect slavery, and they understood all too well that he referred to the *plantaadjereglement*.<sup>37</sup> Hence legislation issued by the States General, ensuring plantation owners ‘domestic jurisdiction’ over their property for more than eight decades, entered the anti-abolitionist rationale. The owners answered – in a petition – extensively explaining why the regulations adopted in 1784 provided *them* with the legal basis for their complaints about the governor. Rather than protecting their property, Elias had installed an ‘espionage system’ to check that plantation overseers refrained from abusing the enslaved people.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the increased pressure the signatories had created through a series of petitions between 1843 and 1844, it did not lead to formal organisations mirroring the local abolitionist committees. Quite the contrary: at this point in time the ad hoc and even fragmented nature of the slave owners’ lobbying became most apparent. Baud received a letter – presumably written by Van der Gon Netscher, a former Dutch planter in British Guiana – discrediting the signatories so critical of the Dutch government. Apparently some had signed petitions as a mere act of favour, whereas others had signed even though they depended on deals with the Department of Colonial Affairs to load their ships.<sup>39</sup> Baud used this intelligence on the questionable social-economic position of the petitioners to disarm any stakeholder approaching William II in Amsterdam. Multiple requests for an audience at court indeed confirm that shareholders were again actively looking for royal support. According to Baud, William II should know these lobbyists ‘moved heaven

35 *Verzameling*, deel I, 100-102.

36 ‘met de onvoorzigtige handelingen ten opzichte van den slaven onder de Amsterdamsche duitendieven (bracht Elias, LL) ‘a hornet’s nest about his ears’. NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Rijk to Baud, 19 October 1844.

37 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Baud to Bosch Reitz cs, 8 November 1843; Imran Canfijn

and Karwan Fatah-Black, ‘The Power of Procedure: Punishment of Slaves and the Administration of Justice in Suriname, 1669-1869’, *Journal of Global Slavery* 7:1-2 (2022) 19-47, 33-34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/2405836X-00701004>.

38 *Verzameling*, deel I, 110.

39 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, G.N. to Baud, 19 February 1844.



▲  
**Figure 3.** Portrait of Jean Chrétien Baud, Minister of Colonial Affairs. Designed by Johan Hendrik Hoffmeister, c. 1850-1874. © RKD, The Hague, Collectie Iconografisch Bureau, <https://rkd.nl/images/166071>.

and earth' to convince Parliament to violate the royal prerogative in all matters colonial.<sup>40</sup>

Preparations for a petition to Parliament have been well documented by Baud's informants. The government tried to dissuade prominent merchant houses from signing, indicating their signatures would give the petition authority in the eyes of Members of Parliament. A rumour that Parliament would declare itself incompetent to deal with the matter gave one reputable shareholder 'all the more reason to not waste his powder in vain'.<sup>41</sup> Some of the remaining signatories did not have substantial or even any possessions in the West Indies.<sup>42</sup> '[M]any signatories of the petition must have been swept by the tide, others completely dependent on the whims of their administrators in Suriname'.<sup>43</sup> The diversity of the petitioners may have reflected the heterogeneous structure of slave ownership in Britain, as shown by Nick Draper, but it could weaken their cause in a political culture where the quality of signatories mattered more than quantity.<sup>44</sup> Baud received a note saying: 'Aside from the oppositional rascals, and with the exception of a few merchant houses, most signatories of the petitions are not of the finest calibre, and some even are *very scruffy* [...] who would gladly fish in troubled waters under these circumstances'.<sup>45</sup> According to Maartje Janse, the abolitionists refrained from organising mass petitions, fearing public scorn for slavery's shareholders, and here we see that some of the owners themselves proved hesitant to plead their cause in public.<sup>46</sup>

For Parliament, however, the diverse and even questionable status of the signatories mattered little when the owners presented their case in a petition in February 1845. Similar to tailoring their first petition (1841) to William II's desire for popularity and power, the shareholders knew how to attune their message to influential liberal MPs. And they did so in a way that openly showed their interest in how the British government developed

40 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, ongedateerde notitie.

41 '[...] reden te meer om zijn kruut niet nutteloos te verschieten'. NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Tuesday [8 March 1845].

42 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Note 26 February 1845.

43 '[V]eele der ondertekenaren van het adres moeten met den stroom zijn medegesleept, andere geheel afhangig van de capricen hunner administrateurs te Suriname'. NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Van Rauzow to Baud, 1 March 1845.

44 Janse, "'Holland as little England'?", 142; *Ibid.*, "'What Value Should We Attach to All These

Petitions?": Petition Campaigns and the Problem of Legitimacy in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands', *Social science history* 43:3 (2019) 509-530, 519-522. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2019.18>; cf. Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*, chapter 4.

45 'Buiten de raddraaijers der oppositie in deze, en met uitzondering van eenige handelshuizen zijn het groote gedeelte der ondertekenaren van het adres juist niet van de puik puikste en zijn er zelfs *zeer schurftige bij (Amsterdamsche uitdrukking)* welke bij deze omstandigheden gaarne in troubel water zouden visschen.' NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, Note Monday 7 March 1845.

46 Janse, "'Holland as Little England'?", 142.

colonial policy. In their petition the shareholders quoted *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, for this publication had ‘reason to believe that, although no *overt* measure has yet been taken on the subject, the government is seriously directing its attention to the extinction of slavery in the Dutch Colonies’.<sup>47</sup> Whereas the British Parliament received voluminous paperwork from the government to formulate an opinion on colonial affairs, the Dutch government secretly prepared for abolition while withholding information on the topic from Parliament.

The petitioners submitted two volumes as proof, accompanied by an example of what had already gone wrong due to Dutch MPs’ knowledge gap. In 1844, Elias had decided to replace the members of the Colonial Council and Court in Suriname, even though they had been appointed for life as per the original colonial charter granted by the States General. Elias’s act was therefore a violation of the current constitution, since it explicitly stated that the ‘*formal* guarantees’ in the original charter still applied.<sup>48</sup> Referring to the colonial charter’s embedment in the constitution strengthened the owners’ case, as it underlined the fact that the States General’s protection of their property had become part of the colonial State. This tactic allowed the owners’ argumentation to touch on the principle underlying the contract between every individual and the State: the protection of person and property.

In turn, this allowed MPs to take notice of the anti-abolitionist petition according to liberal norms of good government: citizens with colonial possessions had a financial stake in the kingdom’s well-being, and thus a legitimate voice in the political debate.<sup>49</sup> Although Baud defended Elias in what was perceived by MPs as the fiercest of political speeches because of the words used to condemn the slave owners, Baud failed to convince Parliament outright.<sup>50</sup> As noted by Siwipersad, liberal MPs had picked up on the owners’ wish to be consulted by the government *during* the legislative process – a principle fully in line with *their* critique of the royal prerogative in colonial affairs.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, ‘Baud had taken his skates to the ice too soon’, according to liberal MP Johan Rudolph Thorbecke.<sup>52</sup> For despite lacking formal organisation, owners had sent another petition refuting Baud’s accusations before Parliament decided on their initial lobbying attempt. Yet, upon realising that the liberal opposition had indeed turned shareholders’ defence of colonial property ‘into arrows ready to fire at the constitutional revision’, prominent merchant bankers such as Insinger & Co refrained from

47 Verzameling, deel II, 5-6.

48 Verzameling, deel II, 9-11.

49 Jouke Turpijn, *Mannen van gezag. De uitvinding van de Tweede Kamer 1848-1888* (Boom 2008) chapter 1; cf. Hall, *Emancipation*, 4.

50 NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007:58, inv. no. 767, Van Rauzow to Baud, 29 March 1845.

51 Siwipersad, *De afschaffing*, 152.

52 ‘Baud kwam met de schaatsen te vroeg op ‘t ijs.’ *Briefwisseling van J.R. Thorbecke 1830-1872*, part 4 (1840-1845) 295. J.R. Thorbecke to L.C. Luzac, 13 April 1845.

petitioning.<sup>53</sup> A liberal revision could well accelerate the abolition and put an end to the current status quo. Henceforth, slave owners adopted a more constructive approach away from the public political arena, indicating an end to the first lobbying phase. Multiple shareholders approached officials from the Colonial Office, offering to rally support for abolition plans in Amsterdam.<sup>54</sup>

### 1848-1852: Entitlement to compensation and labour force

The constitutional revision of 1848 indeed presented a second opportunity to abolish slavery. Doing so without some form of compensation for the owners was unlikely, especially after France had compensated its slave owners in the same year. Facing the prospect of this expensive move, Dutch ministers decided to leave the matter unresolved. Furthermore, Baud left office after William II had sidelined him during the constitutional revision, depriving the government of the key figure in its preparation of an Emancipation Bill. Former Governor of Suriname, Julius Constantijn Rijk, temporarily replaced Baud. In May 1848, Rijk invited owners to react confidentially and unofficially to a new emancipation plan *before* sending it to Parliament, answering a demand from the owners his predecessor had ignored.<sup>55</sup> A group of six owners took almost 70 hand-written pages to explain why they did not support the plan, again making optimal use of the revised constitution, jurisprudence from the States General and international precedent (see Figure 4).<sup>56</sup>

The revised constitution neatly suited the shareholders' purpose, since Article 14 heralded the protection of person and property. Dispossession could only occur if it served the public interest and owners received compensation. Therefore, the report's historical-juridical arguments started with a simple question: how could the Dutch government abolish a right it had protected and encouraged for so long? Since 1682, the Dutch West India Company had been obliged to transport a set number of enslaved people across the Atlantic each year for a fixed price. Shareholders needed this kind of historical documentation to legitimise their property rights. Rather than actively acquiring plantations and enslaved people, owners had inherited their colonial property assets from their ancestors.<sup>57</sup> With their rightful ownership

53 'ettelijken vermeenen te bespeuren dat hetgeen zij dachten alleen hunne koloniale eigendommen te concerneeren, eene vuurpijl moet worden om [...] op de grondwetsherziening te worden losgeschoten'. NL-HANA, Baud, 2.21.007.58, inv. no. 767, 26 January 1846, Brugmans to Baud (citation); 25 January 1845, P. Huidekoper to F.A. van Hall.

54 NL-HANA, Koloniën, 2.20.01, inv. no. 4356, no. 361, De Veer to Baud, 3 September 1846.

55 NL-HANA, Koloniën, 2.20.01, inv. no. 4345, no. 313 secret, 3 August 1848.

56 NL-HANA, Koloniën, 2.20.01, inv. no. 4344, no. 287/E Bijlage, 18 July 1848.

57 Siwpersad, *De afschaffing*, 182-183; Draper, *The Price*, 155; McClland, 'Redefining', 146.





▲  
**Figure 4.** Portrait of Pieter Constantijn Gülcher, who signed all anti-abolitionist petitions and co-wrote the report in 1848. Photographer Wegner & Mottu, c. 1855-1870. © RKD, The Hague, Collectie Iconografisch Bureau, <https://rkd.nl/images/214953>.

historically verified, it was only a small step to the next major criticism of the proposed dispossession: the absence of any form of compensation.

Financial compensation should keep the plantation economy going. Emancipated people could not be expected to work as regularly as enslaved people, leading to unproductive and uncontrollable plantations.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps anticipating this anti-abolitionist trope used in British debates, the emancipation plan had foreseen a system of patronage, which would help the former enslaved people to become free labourers. Shareholders, however, refused patronage by echoing a paternalistic argument often used by their British counterparts. If the emancipated were to receive such generous help, a day labourer in the Netherlands would justly hold a grudge. The government should deal with deplorable Dutch subjects first, before emancipation came about.<sup>59</sup> Judging by the marginalia, Rijk read the exposé of historical, juridical and other internationally inspired arguments but left the plan unchanged before Parliament eventually rejected it. Rijk did, however, strictly forbid Suriname's governor to even use the word 'emancipation', since it would oblige the government 'to award compensation to the owners', suggesting the owners' claim to compensation could no longer be denied.<sup>60</sup>

Stressing that abolition reduced plantation productivity proved an effective rhetorical strategy for the owners. By 1852, they did not desire the eternity of slavery, indicating shareholders' reluctance to prompt abolition, as noted by Siwpsad.<sup>61</sup> I want to stress here that according to the owners, abolishing slavery increased the demand for extra labourers. For although the shareholders preferred to work with free labourers over enslaved people, it would take time for them to become accustomed to regular work without coercion. Therefore, measures should be put in place to protect production levels *after* emancipation. This tactic proved effective. Parliament did not even discuss the latest proposal for emancipation, as it would be unfair to shareholders and enslaved people alike.<sup>62</sup> In short, in this second phase, shareholders convinced the Dutch ruling elite of their entitlement to compensation *and* the need to enlarge and control the plantation workforce after emancipation.

### 1853-1862: Compensation and immigration arrangements

The arrangements for compensation and immigration would dominate the third and final phase when the lobby reacted to Emancipation Bills. Parliament installed a State Committee in November 1853. The first

58 cf. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, 18-20.

59 cf. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain*, 36-38.

60 NL-HANA, Koloniën, 2.20.01, inv. no. 4345, no. 313  
secret, 3 August 1848.

61 NL-HANA, 2.02.22, Tweede Kamer der Staten-  
Generaal, inv. no. 1054, stuk 53; Siwpsad, *De  
afschaffing*, 186-187, 204-209.

62 Canfijn, 'The Power', 35.

Bill contained financial compensation for the owners and followed the Committee's advice to diversify the enslaved people's 'value' by plantation type. In essence this classification was an answer to what the anti-abolitionists had demanded in petitions unanswered by Baud in the 1840s: no general law could do justice to the diversity of plantations in Suriname. All six Emancipation Bills presented to Parliament between 1857 and 1862 are known for the humanitarian criticism articulated by MPs about ministers 'leaning in' too much to listen to the shareholders.<sup>63</sup> Yet, now that the Dutch government acknowledged slave owners' property rights, the owners' sense of entitlement to compensation had grown stronger.<sup>64</sup>

The lobbying efforts of Insinger & Co present a clear example of this sense of entitlement to compensation among the shareholders. The firm realised that its investments in cotton would pay the price for shareholders' initial attempt to postpone abolition: the firm objected to the classification of the plantations, which ranked enslaved people working on cotton plantations in the lowest class in terms of financial compensation. Even before the first Bill had reached Parliament, Insinger & Co lobbied for higher compensation for cotton plantations.<sup>65</sup> The new Minister of Colonial Affairs, Pieter Mijer, should follow the example of the British Abolition Act, just like the French had done. Both countries had paid restitution to the owners 'without making a classification, so that a cotton planter in Demerara received as many pounds sterling for his emancipated slaves as a sugar or coffee planter'.<sup>66</sup> Insinger & Co also explained to MPs that the 458 enslaved people working at *Zeezicht* had regularly been hired to work at sugar plantation *Wederzorg*, proving they should be taxed accordingly.<sup>67</sup> Yet Mijer's emancipation plan left Insinger & Co disappointed, as the minister retained the classification, including the lowest calculation for cotton plantations. Insinger & Co's shift from stressing the diversity of Suriname's plantations to the uniformity of the enslaved people's capabilities suggests that receiving the maximum amount of compensation prevailed over pursuing a consistent line of argumentation.

Fair compensation needed to take three things into account, according to the wider Amsterdam lobby. First, compensation should benefit the dispossessed rather than the buyer in case of enforced dispossession by law. The amount paid per enslaved person must exceed the market price. Second, classification neglected the ability of 'cotton negroes' to work on a different,

63 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing', 84.

64 Cf. Draper, *The Price*, 225.

65 NL-ASDSAA, 1455, Insinger, inv. no. 1445, 20 November 1855.

66 'per hoofd, zonder enig verschil van classificering, zoodat b.v. een Demerarisch Katoenplanter

even veel ponden sterling per hoofd voor zijne

geëmancipeerde slaven heeft ontvangen als een

suiker- of koffieplanter voor de zijnen'. NL-ASDSAA, 1455, Insinger, inv. no. 1445, 1 September 1857.

67 NL-HANA, 2.02.22, inv. no. 5895, submap 120-129, stuk 127.

more profitable plantation during periods when cotton rendered little profit.<sup>68</sup> And finally, the owners of shares in plantation loans should also be considered. Whereas owners of plantations and enslaved people should receive enough money to continue their operation using free labour and machines, shareholders must be able to settle the unpaid claims in plantation loans weighing on the Amsterdam merchant banks. Otherwise, slave owners and shareholders alike could not survive the transition from slave labour to free labour without losing production capacity.<sup>69</sup> In short, owners demanded a higher amount of compensation that took into account the diversity of the *owners* of lawful property rather than the diversity of those enslaved. What was at stake for all petitioners was to receive compensation enabling them to stop using slave labour without incurring financial losses.

A parliamentary report agreed with the shareholders on the point of taxation of the value of the enslaved people, yet the next Emancipation Bill adhered to the classification of plantation types and the enslaved people working on them. Albrecht Frederik Insinger, director at Insinger & Co, went as far as using his seat in the Senate to put pressure on the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Jan Jacob Rochussen. As his firm had told former ministers, Rochussen should arrange for adequate compensation and follow the example of England and France rather than the classifications designed by his predecessors. Even though the Senate discussed the abolition of slavery in the East Indies during that meeting, Rochussen proved eager to listen to shareholders in slavery in the West Indies.<sup>70</sup> Insinger & Co was content to see the amount reserved for enslaved people at cotton plantations raised to *f*300, whereas historians usually recall MPs complaining that Rochussen's second Bill was a step backwards, precisely because of this rise in compensation to be awarded to the slave owners.<sup>71</sup> Much to the dismay of Insinger & Co, however, Rochussen reduced this amount to *f*260 in his third Bill. But since resistance to the notion of compensating the owners still reigned strong in Parliament, the third Bill also failed to reach a majority. Bringing the changing demands of the owners into focus shows more clearly why ministers of Colonial Affairs struggled to reposition the plantation economy amid hostility towards both slavery and proposals for abolition.

The political deadlock arising in the Netherlands coincided with an upsurge of pro-slavery factions in England and caught the eye of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>72</sup> In 1859, the Society sent an impressively

68 NL-HANA, 2.02.22, inv. no. 1075, submap 130-139, stuk 138.

69 Cf. Alan Lester and Nikita Vanderbyl, 'The Restructuring of the British Empire and the Colonization of Australia, 1832-8', *History Workshop Journal* 90 (2020) 165-188, 168. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbaa017>.

70 HEK 1858-1859, 6 May 1859, 189-190.

71 NL-ASDSAA, 1455, Insinger, inv. no. 1445, 18 December 1860; Siwpersad, *De afschaffing*, 252-253; Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing', 85.

72 Hall, *Civilising subjects*, 358-363.

large letter to King William III, presumably after the Dutch Parliament received a petition from British citizens with property in the Surinamese district of Nickery.<sup>73</sup> British owners had also complained about the proposed amount of compensation, committing the formerly enslaved people to the plantations, and the number of immigrants arriving in the Dutch West Indies. They expected much from a system of apprenticeship to teach the emancipated how to become free labourers. According to the Society, however, the Dutch government should not be misled by British petitioners:

The picture they have drawn of the advantages the Negro would enjoy under the system of Apprenticeship advocated by them [is] purely imaginary. A similar one was painted by the opponents of Emancipation in this Country, but their anticipations of the benefits of the system would confer proved utterly delusive.<sup>74</sup>

Here we clearly see how British slave owners in Dutch colonies had reused anti-abolitionists' arguments deployed by their British counterparts resisting the Abolition Bill in the 1830s. The new Minister of Colonial Affairs, Jean Pierre Cornets de Groot, recruited a former planter in British Guiana, Van der Gon Netscher, as one of three specialists to help him draft a Bill, which suggests the Minister had taken an interest in the British letter. Cornets de Groot's successor James Loudon submitted the Bill to Parliament. Besides f300 compensation per enslaved person regardless of plantation type and apprenticeship, one of its main points was state supervision of labour immigration. Van der Gon Netscher had advocated for this in public, after witnessing plantation production plummet when immigration was left to private initiative in British Guiana.<sup>75</sup> After closely studying the situation in Demerara, Loudon also wanted the Dutch State to take responsibility for immigration, to prevent the corruption and abuse characterising the trade in Chinese 'coolies'.<sup>76</sup>

In what would be the final petition, the owners made one last attempt to receive the highest amount of compensation, using both precedents from Britain and the States General. Since state supervision of immigration was already in the proposal, the shareholders translated their *need* for adequate and sufficient labourers into their *wish* for higher compensation: one only had to look at Demerara to see immigration was useless without sufficient capital to put the indentured labourers to work.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, they stressed how drastic the shift of the Dutch legislature seemed in comparison to legislation adopted by the previous generation of politicians:

73 Koninklijk Huis Archief A 45, Xb, inv. no. 17, Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society to Willem III, 6 April 1859.

74 Ibid.

75 Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing', 86.

76 Henk Boels, Janny de Jong and Coen Tamse (eds.), *Eer en fortuin: leven in Nederland en Indië 1824-1900: autobiografie van gouverneur-generaal James Loudon* (De Bataafsche Leeuw 2003) 192-194.

77 NL-HANA, Brugmans, 1.10.13, inv. no. 140, Copie-Adres aan de Tweede Kamer, 26 June 1862.

When we talk about the abolition of slavery, your assembly cannot forget how it is not a lifetime ago that not only slavery, but even the slave trade was regarded as an element of the prosperity of the colonies, and that by the States General's resolution of 29 November 1789, the shipment of slaves and the purchase of such labourers was still protected and encouraged by the Dutch sovereign power at the time. [...] The signatories will not recall how the soil in the colony Suriname had been chartered to the original owners or cultivators in exchange for the obligation to place upon it a proportionate number of slaves from Africa's west coast.<sup>78</sup>

Referring to both the dire state of Demerara and old legislation failed to convince MPs to increase compensation for the owners. Parliament accepted the article on compensation in the Emancipation Bill, meaning the shareholders received f300 for (shares in) each enslaved person they owned in Suriname, f200 on Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saint Eustasius and Saba, and f100 on Saint Martin. As a result of the lobbying by shareholders, the Dutch State paid f9,864,360 in compensation, amounting to one third of the country's total annual budget for 1863. However, MPs substantially amended the Bill's immigration plan. By making immigration dependent on private initiative, the Dutch Act became more similar to the British Abolition Act, against the wishes of the government as well as the plantation owners.<sup>79</sup>

The Suriname Immigration Company (1865) was a private initiative partly relying on public funds for organising labour migration from Hong Kong. The Company's director and future Prime Minister, Nicolaas Pierson, believed in immigration 'because Suriname – even if all negroes work – still needs labourers' and '[s]upplying Suriname with labourers should be the goal of anyone who wants to contribute to the blooming of the colony'.<sup>80</sup>

78 'Wanneer er sprake is van de opheffing der Slavernij, dan kan en mag Uwe Vergadering niet vergeten, hoe het nog geen menselijke leeftijd is geleden, dat niet slechts de Slavernij, maar zelfs de Slavenhandel, als een element van de welvaart der Koloniën werd aangemerkt, en dat nog bij resolutie van de Staten-Generaal van den 29 November 1789 het aanvoeren van Slaven en het aankopen van zoodanige arbeiders, door den toenmaligen Souverein werd beschermd en bevorderd. [...] De ondergetekenden zullen er niet op terugkomen, hoe de gronden in de Kolonie Suriname aan de oorspronkelijke eigenaars of ontginners niet zijn geoctroijeerd geworden dan onder de verplichting, om daarop

een geevenredigd aantal Slaven van de Westkust van Afrika te plaatsen.' NL-HANA, Brugmans, 1.10.13, inv. no. 140, Copie-Adres aan de Tweede Kamer, 26 June 1862.

79 NL-HANA, Brugmans, 1.10.13, inv. no. 138, Minuut-Memorie van Brugmans, 1862.

80 'want Suriname – al werken alle negers – heeft nog werkkrachten nodig. [...] Werkkrachten aan Suriname te verschaffen, behoort dus het doel te zijn van allen, die tot den bloei der kolonie willen bijdragen.' J.G.S.J. van Maarseveen, *Briefwisseling van Nicolaas Gerard Pierson 1839-1909* (Amsterdam 1993) 84. Pierson to Van Houten, 20 January 1865; Pierson, 'Open brief aan zijne excellentie den minister', 409.

Insinger recorded in his private notes the mental steps that plantation owners had made in selecting suitable migrants to work on plantations in the Atlantic post-emancipation: ‘Africans are always the best [workers] one can wish for. After that Coolies, especially if they want to stay’.<sup>81</sup> Poor treatment of the immigrants led to grave concerns. One of the first voyages had cost 94 people their lives, which, according to one commentator several years later, ‘brings to mind the horrible truth of Wilberforce’s words: “Never can so much misery be found condensed into so small a space as in a slave ship during the middle passage”’.<sup>82</sup> Amid worrying contemporary reports about the immigration process, political support for government-controlled immigration grew stronger, and the Suriname Immigration Company defaulted in 1870.<sup>83</sup>

MPS favouring government support labelled former enslaved people as too ‘inconsistent’ and ‘lazy’ to work without ‘free’ labourers to teach them discipline and a work ethic, as shown by Rosemarijn Hoefte.<sup>84</sup> Minister of Colonial Affairs, Pieter Philip van Bosse, even proclaimed government support for recruiting labourers from West Africa. In Suriname he believed ‘members of their race formed the native [*sic*] population’, making it easier for new arrivals to integrate.<sup>85</sup> Experiences in the British Caribbean, however, showed that the British government had decided that British India was the most convenient source of labourers for the plantations. The Dutch government successfully pursued an agreement with its British counterpart on the emigration of British-Indian Hindus to Suriname. This U-turn on immigration in the Netherlands – again inspired by Britain – caused a Dutch commentator to complain about ‘people in Suriname treating the British colony too much as an example, and could not depart from the view that what the government arranged *there* could not be done so by private initiatives on this side of the Courantyne river’.<sup>86</sup> So with only a few years’ delay, the preference of Dutch plantation owners for government support, expressed in their petitions prior to the Emancipation Act, had become colonial policy and would continue to be so until 1930.

81 ‘Africanen zijn altijd de beste die men wenschen kan. Daarna Coolies, vooral zoo ze willen blijven.’ NL-ASDSAA, 1455, Insinger, inv. no. 1458, f. 9.

82 ‘in herinnering brengt de vreesselijke waarheid der woorden van Wilberforce’. *Weekblad van het regt*, 24 August 1876.

83 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 16 January 1867; *Handelingen der Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal* 1866-1867, 8 December 1866.

84 As quoted in Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In Place of Slavery: A Social History of British Indian and*

*Javanese Laborers in Suriname* (University Press of Florida 1998) 26-28.

85 As quoted in *Ibid.*, 27.

86 ‘Dat men zich in Suriname wat al te veel aan het voorbeeld der Britsche kolonie laat gelegen liggen, en zich niet los kan maken van het denkbeeld dat, wat dáar van gouvernementswege geschiedt aan deze zijde van de Corentijn niet door particuliere krachten geschieden kan [...]’. *Het Vaderland*, 15 February 1870.

## Conclusion: no emancipation without compensation

This article has shown how British legislation and colonial practices helped Dutch slave owners and shareholders influence the conditions for Atlantic slavery set out in the Dutch Emancipation Act (1862). Petitioning slave owners and shareholders managed to postpone the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Atlantic colonies until the government agreed to compensate them for their loss of property in such a way that the plantation economy could continue without slave labour. The owners' lobbying was rather loosely organised, because apart from petitioning they did not organise themselves in committees as their abolitionist counterparts did. After the 1840s, slave owners and shareholders did not aim for the continuation of slavery – especially after 1848, when the prospect of financial compensation loomed large. It is safe to say that without the British precedent Dutch advocates for financial compensation as a condition for abolition could never have been so effective in delaying abolition, due to its staggering price tag. British examples should therefore also be considered crucial factors on the owners' side of the legislative process of abolishing slavery in the Dutch Atlantic. At the same time, legislation from the States General helped shareholders to convincingly make their case for entitlement to financial compensation as well as immigration of labourers to Suriname. Since the Dutch government also prioritised profit over the well-being of its colonial subjects, politicians were willing to listen to shareholders' demands. The result was an Emancipation Act which repositioned the Dutch plantation economy in the Atlantic colonies in an international political culture hostile to slavery, yet supportive of colonial exploitation in its legislation.

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