Racial Prejudice and the Performing Animals Controversy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain

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Abstract
This paper attempts to show how racial prejudice and selective, usually inarticulate, racial discrimination influenced attempts to conduct an objective examination of charges of cruelty in the training and exhibition of performing animals in Britain in the early twentieth century. As the debate intensified, and following the appointment of a parliamentary Select Committee, one explanation often given by both sides for shortcomings in the treatment of performing animals was the alleged cruelty particularly or exclusively attributable to the “alien enemy,” “foreigners,” and distinct racial groups. The Committee faced the problem of assessing attributions of real cruelty as opposed to unproven charges that may have resulted from irrational, emotive, or strategic prejudice. This paper examines the context in which such charges were made, and the degree to which they might have been introduced or resorted to in order to serve the prejudices or interests of each side in the controversy.

Keywords
racial prejudice, performing animals, controversy, legislation

Introduction
The controversy over performing animals became consolidated soon after the First World War, largely through the activities of the Performing Animals’ Defence League and the associated work of the Jack London Club, which was based on the appeal to take direct action against animal performances by Jack London in his Foreword to Michael, Brother of Jerry (London, 1917). There had been some protest against performing animal acts well before the First World War, and such protests continued in the 1930s and later, after the legislation of 1925 that many thought inadequate. Public concern about cruelty to performing animals (in capture, accommodation, transport, training, and performance) was only articulated for the first time when the Performing Animals’ Defence League was founded in 1914, and pressure increased upon the founding of the international Jack London Club in 1918, following the
The author's publication of his novel focusing on the alleged cruelty behind animal performances in the United States.

The performing animals controversy then took its place in the succession of public animal welfare issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that had so far centered on vivisection and then on the extravagant use of feathers in fashionable women's clothing. Kean (1998) has noted that the Humanitarian League, which concerned itself with human and animal interests alike, did not survive beyond 1919 because of the differences of opinion of its members on the recent war (p. 179). Instead, some of its membership began to concentrate on the development of new campaigns, and a case in point was Ernest Bell and the Performing Animals' Defence League. Meanwhile, Methodists and Nonconformists continued to oppose animal cruelty for frivolous purposes and took part in the criticism of animal performance in the 1920s (Kean, 1998, p. 191). The First World War itself encouraged sober attention to the condition of humanity and its capacity for destructiveness, when service animals were recognized as victims, too, but a specific result of the war was a tendency to blame cruelty to performing animals on foreigners, especially Germans, as partial justification for a trade policy to boycott “alien acts.”

Between 1921 and 1922, a parliamentary Select Committee provided a focus for the controversy and allegations about the treatment of animals in training, accommodation, transportation, and performance for the circus and music hall. The allegations concerned the presence or absence of cruelty, and witnesses summoned before the committee, as well as its political members, broadly reflected two sides with little common ground for agreement. During the Select Committee hearings, professional and vested interests attempted to maintain the status quo against reforms proposed by animal welfare groups and a range of individuals with a variety of motives and arguments (Wilson, in press). Because of the secret nature of professional animal training, problems faced by the committee included both the difficulty of acquiring hard evidence, and, correspondingly, the frequently unsubstantiated opinions of witnesses. The controversy was further affected by political maneuvering and by its treatment in the press, which was, except in the case of the specialist professional journals, largely critical of the training of animals for public performance (Wilson, 2008).

The Select Committee's brief was “to inquire into the conditions under which performing animals are trained and exhibited, and to consider whether legislation is desirable to prohibit or regulate such training and exhibition, and, if so, what lines such legislation should follow” (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1921)). Reports were made after two hearings. The committee
met seven times between July 19 and August 11 but did not manage to conclude its investigation before the end of the session. It was therefore reappointed early in the following parliamentary session and met twelve times between March 2 and May 9, 1922 (Report from the Select Committee on Performing Animals, together with the Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence (1921 and 1922)). The findings of the Select Committee were the basis of the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act, passed in 1925. In this paper, numerical references indicate the numbered paragraphs of the reports, those in italics referring to that of 1921 and those in roman to that of 1922.

**Blame, Discrimination, and Boycott**

Those critical of animal performances complained that existing laws failed to control cruelty, which was considered especially characteristic of foreign trainers and their acts (whether presented by the foreigners themselves or by British showmen who had purchased their ready-trained animals). Meanwhile, the British professionals attempted to deflect criticism of their own methods by attributing almost innate cruelty to certain foreign nations, races, and individuals, and by emphasizing their wish—especially through the Variety Artistes’ Federation (VAF)—to bar foreign animal performances in the British circus and music hall. In sympathy with this, Mr. Frank Somers, a veterinary surgeon in Leeds of thirty-five years’ experience, told the *Yorkshire Evening Post* that when odd cases of cruelty occurred, “almost invariably the offender [was] a foreigner, and a vicious foreigner at that” (cited in the *Éra*, March 16, 1921, p. 16). George Lockhart, elephant trainer and equestrian director of the Tower Circus, Blackpool, said to the Select Committee: “It seems to me that the very fact that the great majority of the convictions [for cruelty to performing animals] are against foreigners must of itself be some sort of defence of the English trainer” (1487). Captain O’Grady, a Select Committee member sympathetic to the professionals’ cause, addressing the critical witness Mrs. Lily Grahame (described as a ring girl/lady groom, pianist, and chorus mistress) about her experiences at the London Hippodrome between 1900 and 1909, reminded her that there had been proportionately very few convictions and these had been against “alien enemies” (2753-2759). George Henry Harrop, general manager of the Blackpool Tower Company, told the committee that, before the war, most of the animal acts had been foreign, principally German. VAF members would not now work with such ex-enemy continental turns, the main prewar source of animal acts: since the war, he said, the VAF had
prohibited German and enemy alien acts because cases of cruelty had involved foreigners (1164, 1167-1168, 1254-1256).

Foreign, especially German, involvement in British animal acts had been considerable before the war, but during hostilities, and in the 1920s, “enemy aliens” were usually ostracized, only to reappear in greater numbers in the 1930s. At the same time, however, ready-trained animals continued to be imported, giving strength to opponents’ calls for the prohibition of all animal acts because of the impossibility of regulating foreign training methods. Jack Russell Vokes, guardian of “Don the Drunken Dog,” advised the committee that cruelty could be prevented in Britain by “eliminating” some of the foreign trainers, because they were out of reach in a foreign country (2086). Two years after the passage of the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act in 1925, a letter to the *Times* from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’ (RSPCA) Jermyn Street address, signed by John Galsworthy, Lord Lambourne, P. Chalmers Mitchell, Winifred Portland, A. Maude Royden, Constance Shaftesbury, George Bernard Shaw, Wilfred H. Sugden, and Sybil Thorndike, pointed out that many performing animals were still trained abroad with no legislation and with more general cruelty; and further cruelty resulted from confinement and traveling. They therefore asked: “Will the public help to abolish this painful form of amusement by refraining from patronizing exhibitions in which performing animals have a part?” (*Times*, 1927) Also dissatisfied with the effect of the Act, Mrs. H. M. Lennox later wrote that discouragement of animal performances was necessary because many animals were foreign-trained (*Times*, 1928). The RSPCA continued to call for a ban on foreign-trained animals and demanded that, in the meantime, their exemption from quarantine should be abolished (RSPCA, Policy and Publications Committee, minutes, November 6, 1931). Its Performing and Captive Animals Special Committee decided in 1937 (minutes, September 30) to support the current Performing Animals (Regulation) Act Amendment Bill, and discussed the need to acquire evidence of cruelty to performing animals abroad, if necessary by sending at great expense special investigators who were familiar with the countries concerned and spoke their various languages.

Whether or not the prejudice against foreign and especially “enemy alien” acts on the part of the professionals was justified on grounds of cruelty, underlying it was, without doubt, a concern about domestic employment levels, about public perception of the nature of their own livelihood, and a fear that their activity might be curtailed by new legislation unless public concern was strategically deflected and concentrated in this way. The “alien enemy” became an easy scapegoat, vulnerable because of the aftermath of the war, and foreigners, and other races generally, became victims of xenophobia, racism, and
beliefs about British moral superiority. For example, Charles Butler, the music-
hall singer, declared: “I know some very fine men in the circus world—England-
lishmen—and I would like to add that most of those trainers I have been
speaking about [critically] are foreigners” (515). O’Grady said of ex-enemy
Continents: “They have ideas that are not altogether in accordance with our
British ideas.” George Henry Harrop replied:

I do not know whether it is correct or not, but it has always been understood in the
profession that the Continental people have been the greatest trainers in the world,
especially Germans . . . I have been in the habit of going to Germany for almost thirty
years, but I do not think I shall ever take the trouble of going again—not to book any
animal turns. (1257-1258)

George Lockhart thought that only since the war had very few trained animals
come from abroad, and that any resumption would depend on VAF policy.
There was no restriction before the war because “we lived together in amity,”
and he admitted that the profession had not barred German-trained animals
on grounds of suspected cruelty (1435-1440). Frederick Trussell, ex-manager
of the London Hippodrome, explained to the Select Committee that lion acts
were currently not so much in evidence because most of them belonged to
German houses (3047).

The VAF’s policy reflected a combination of postwar prejudice and protec-
tionism rather than a concern for the welfare of animals, although such a
concern was now often newly given as a reason for the boycott of foreign acts,
when the characteristics of German trainers were stereotyped and criticized.
O’Grady claimed that while English artistes abhorred cruelty, they left it to
the courage of the VAF to boycott the foreign acts responsible for it (2760-
2764, 3098). Bertram Mills, the circus proprietor, and music hall managers
like Sir Oswald Stoll, would seek VAF approval before engaging foreign acts,
because it had more opportunities for knowing about the artistes (2194-2195).
The artiste, journalist (lead writer of the Performer), and salaried chairman of
the VAF, Albert Voyce, confirmed that his members had been boycotting
enemy alien acts: “We kept them out; we refused to work with them,” even at
the risk of artistes losing their employment if they refused to appear on the
same bill. Before the war, he said, the country was overrun with very cheap
German and Austrian acts, which he had witnessed as undesirable. One such
act was “Zertho’s Dogs,” but it appeared before 1907, and before the VAF had
been founded.

In those days [Germans and Austrians] were brought over here by a man called
Barrasford, who came into our business. He flooded the country with German and
Austrian acts, and a lot of these acts came over—perhaps a little terrier is made to stand on one foot or two feet on the palm of a man’s hand, which was not a very nice thing, and I think myself it was painful to the dog. There were other acts, which I cannot remember now. We are going back 20 years now, and it is difficult for me to remember. But there came a time when the German act died out, and was not wanted.

Voyce added that these German and Austrian turns were, generally, unquestionably cruel (2434, 2461-2470). Soon after, the World’s Fair reported a statement by Monte Bayly (VAF organizer) to the Westminster Gazette that in 1914 (well before the parliamentary interest) the VAF had itself suggested licensing, registration, and more severe penalties: “The majority of objectionable exhibitors are foreigners, and they are not allowed here” (World’s Fair, 10 June 1922, front page).

Behavior, Morality, and Human Worth: Pejorative Comparisons

Comparisons between British and foreign values in this area had begun in the late nineteenth century:

For the most part foreigners are the purchasers of animal troupes, and the majority of them are idle, vicious and cruel . . . Although we hunt foxes, hares, and rats, and shoot pigeons from traps, we are, perhaps, the best-hearted nation on the earth—ready to kill everything, but reluctant to torture anything. (Bensusan, 1913, pp. 110 and 114)

Some of those on the Select Committee who aimed at legislation to eliminate or control animal performances were themselves enthusiastic hunters, notably Kenworthy (1933, pp. 244 and 247). Writing in 1919 in support of the aims and methods of the emergent Jack London Club, Captain E. G. Fairholme, chief secretary of the RSPCA, charged alien owners with earning a dishonest living by forcing animals to perform unnatural and degrading antics: “If we had strong laws to keep the aliens from our shores we should also, to an enormous extent, purge our public entertainments of these degrading spectacles” (Fairholme, 1919, p. 28).

Compounding a supposed moral inferiority among foreigners might be a variation in their intelligence, which could even be paralleled in performing animals themselves: “From India, it may be said, all the clever elephants come; the difference between the brains of the Teuton and the Negro is not greater than between those of the Indian and African elephants” (Dolman, 1899, p. 526). James Sanger of Sanger’s Circus described why lions could bite a trainer:
Some of these trainers, mostly these black chaps that for appearance have been put in for training lions, sometimes get a little bit too much treated in some of these villages and get over the mark, and instead of their knowing the place to walk back, they have a collision with the lion. If the man can only keep his head and know his position, a lion never thinks about attacking him. (812)

Fred Ginnett, circus proprietor, referred appreciatively to a lion casualty in his circus as a “good-looking fine nigger,” when drink had not apparently played a part in the accident (738).

Black labor in Britain had been encouraged during the First World War. At its end, twenty thousand were in general employment, but then demand ceased, and union opposition set in. Much racial harassment, resulting largely from bitter economic competition with white workers and encouraged by a hostile press, led to riots in major sea ports and the beginning of systematic repatriation. Blacks continued to be negatively stereotyped, and fear of them was exacerbated by stories such as that of the alleged rapaciousness of black French troops in the war in Germany (Fryer, 1984).

Green (1998) describes the importance of black performers in Edwardian Britain’s entertainment industry, and the enthusiastic reviews given by the professional journals. But after the war and into the 1920s, the situation changed. Writing in 1923, Marcus Garvey complained that in England “they look upon it as an imposition for Negroes to go into their midst, not to exploit, but to seek employment” (Garvey, 1967, pp. 44-46). He quoted from a *Daily Graphic* article of March 6, 1923, “Nigger problem brought to London—Black not wanted in England,” which described the strong opposition of Albert Voyce and Monte Bayly of the VAF to the licensing of a black cabaret by London County Council: “We think it would be a disgrace to both theatrical and music-hall performers if permission were granted to exploit imported black men and women in this way, while hundreds of talented British artistes are on the verge of want through lack of engagements.” They added that they had no objection to white American artistes coming to England, 90% of whom joined the Federation. Although most “Negro turns” would “behave themselves and keep their place,” they viewed “with the greatest apprehension a cabaret where black artists actually mix with white folks at tables.” The VAF was implementing a policy of “British theatres for the British,” and Albert Voyce did not feel that his organization had a part to play in defending any black members’ interests, even though their acts were popular with audiences and therefore commercially successful. However, the revue and musicals were their primary performing context in the 1920s and 1930s (Osborne, 2006, pp. 19-20), rather than animal performance.
Assumptions were also clearly made that Germans, Slavs, blacks, and Asians were particularly susceptible to cruelty. For example, Joseph Kenworthy, who had originally introduced the performing animals issue to Parliament via the unsuccessful Performing Animals (Prohibition) Bill of 1921, asked James Sanger: “If you found one of your men—a negro or any of your men—being harsh and cruel to an animal, you would sack him?” (1014) When asked if he knew that the German animal dealer and trainer, Carl Hagenbeck, had been convicted for allowing an Indian mahout to goad an elephant so that the animal bled down his or her legs, Ginnett said that Hagenbeck was the greatest dealer in animals in the world but could not be responsible for 500 staff all over it, “niggers, Africans, Indians and all sorts.” While the mahout was considered “next door to a monkey,” Hagenbeck was described as a nice old gentleman, even though a German, and had not been convicted of cruelty personally (819-827).3 As to the question of the close confinement of wild animals, the witness Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake, owner of Garrard’s Circus and secretary of Ringlands Zoo Company, later wrote:

Take the case of a primitive native. I venture to think that if he was offered freedom with its attendant hunt for food and family worries against confinement in an enclosure with warm sleeping quarters, one or two wives and plenty of good food and drink, and no worries, he would choose comparative confinement rather than freedom and its accompanying struggle for existence, and still more so it is with an animal. (1936, pp. 76-77)

The critical author Helen Trevelyan (founder of the Fellowship of Faithful Friends) wrote in her book Laugh, clown, laugh! (1936, pp. 95-99) of an anonymous former circus hand who had given a sworn statement to a well-known league (probably the Performing Animals’ Defence League shortly after the First World War) that as a rule lion trainers in Britain had been foreign and used brutally cruel methods; and that the breaking-in of ring and school horses for equestrian work was also cruelly carried out by foreigners. Throughout the 1920s, and only after the performing animals issue had come under discussion in Parliament, the attribution by the specialist trade press of problems of cruelty was consistently aimed at foreigners. The only cruelty might be from “recently arrived alien trainers, who we can do without anyway” (Encore, May 5, 1921, p. 3). The horse trainer Arthur Aitchley had seen only one example of cruelty, and that by a “vicious foreigner,” in his just-completed 17 years in the United States (Era, March 23, 1921, p. 18). “Captain” Joseph Woodward, the famous sea lion trainer and an active organizer of defense against any new legislation harming the interests of his profession, said that
problems of cruelty belonged to the past, or with foreigners with unpronounceable names (Era, August 17, 1921, p. 12).

Specific instances of cruelty were given by witnesses to the Select Committee. Mrs. Albert Bradshaw, who “went on the halls for the purpose of investigating” had seen “a foreigner, a little stumpy woman with very big fat hands” beat performing cats (214, 224). In 1911, Basil Tozer, a former theatrical publicity agent, had infiltrated a place where dogs were being trained by a foreigner who hung them by their back legs and used a spiked collar to train them to balance on their front legs (2409, 2420). John Oscar Mansley, a journalist, who had been encouraged to offer himself as a witness by the Performing Animals’ Defence League, spoke of a fearsome Russian keeper who in 1911 beat an eight-year-old chimpanzee, Consul, daily with an iron bar at his theatrical lodgings, where the animal’s cage was so small he could not lie down (843, 864). Harold Laurence Hilliard, the manager-handler acting for the “owner” of Consul, explained that this charge was untrue, and that the trainer was no Russian, but a Swiss named Derwoski (964). Jack Thompson, a composer and musical performer, described how a trainer thrashed another chimpanzee in a dressing room at the Palace Theatre, Oldham in 1919: “of course he was a foreigner” (1470-1491). Sidney Davis, a stage carpenter, reported that Lipinski (“I do not suppose you ever will see the show again, because he was an Austrian”) achieved “drunken” dogs with neck weights and fear of the whip (1257).

The World’s Fair reported that the Select Committee had been offered much evidence of cruel practices happening within a recent period, and that the committee was convinced that there were still cases of ill-treatment and wanton cruelty in the training and performances of animals, but that there was a growth of the humanitarian spirit in England. The World’s Fair (June 10, 1922, p. 10) cited the comment in the Report of the Select Committee that: “The number of trainers of British nationality in 1914 was only about 20% of the whole. These trainers enjoy the reputation of being more humane in their methods than those of foreign origin, and evidence has been forthcoming to that effect.” Charles Wilson, registrar at the head office of the RSPCA, and formerly an inspector for nearly 20 years, confirmed to the Committee that training often took place abroad. Of performing animal turns on tour between December 1, 1913, and June 30, 1914, 110 out of 147 had been those of foreigners (19 of the remainder being British and 18 of doubtful nationality) (276). The theater electrician, Albert Hill, said that from 1914 there were very few animal turns in Britain, because they were mostly foreign acts affected by the war (1181).
The Special Problem of the “alien enemy,” and Some Equivocation

The profession’s journals never failed to report cases of alleged cruelty that involved foreign trainers and exhibitors, as, for example, when the RSPCA took action against Cossacks for cruelty to unfit horses ridden through flames (World’s Fair, October 10, 1925, p. 9), but special attention was reserved for the “alien enemy.” The context had been set: for example, with the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, Horatio Bottomley promoted Germanophobia in John Bull magazine. After the war, he said, “no shop, no factory, no office, no trade, no profession” should be open to Germans. As a Member of Parliament, in 1919 he advocated “Britain for the British socially and industrially,” and, after the passing of the Aliens Act in 1919, liberal attitudes to foreigners disappeared altogether (Holmes, 1988, pp. 112-14). During the war, Germans had faced social animosity, official racism, popular hostility, and boycott in the professional environment, and after its conclusion they suffered an enhanced version of the employment discrimination traditionally suffered by minority groups (Panayi, 1994, pp. 110-111 and 121).

At the Select Committee hearings, Germans were frequently described as the most cruel, but at other times during the hearings they were also described by their British counterparts as the best trainers. This association of attributes undermined the frequent assurances given by trainers and exhibitors that any effective training was only possible by kindness. Charles Haverly, an ex-actor-manager, confirmed that a great many trainers were Germans and that they were also the cleverest, perhaps because they were more cruel than the English ones and so achieved better results. (Americans were fairly good trainers, he said, but the French and Italians were no good at all.) E. H. Bostock described (presumably white) American training methods as similar to British ones (3245). Perhaps Americans were considered favorably because they were allies and, typically, Anglo-Saxon and English-speaking.

Haverly described the method of subduing lions with close confinement, trident, whip, and starvation, as used by a German at the Balham Empire 15 to 20 years previously; and also the ferocious beatings of the American John Cooper 30 years before. Very cruel men came mostly from Germany, and while on the Stoll circuit he had seen gratuitous use by one of them of an iron-tipped whip at the Leicester Empire in 1904 (582, 548-555). Samuel James, an ex-artiste, theater manager, and lessee of 15 theatres, had engaged in 1906 at the Grand Theatre in Islington a “German-American looking gentleman” with a troupe of dogs and ponies. Because he thrashed his dogs when training them in the back somersault and to jump from heights, James canceled his contract. When at the King’s Music Hall in Poplar in 1909, he saw a “Ger-
man-American-Jewish-looking gentleman” hitting baboons on a short leash across the snout with a log of wood, to make them jump (703). George Lockhart said that the best animal trainers came from Germany, and they were the best because they probably used methods that would give British trainers a very bad name indeed. He admitted he had never seen them at work, but they had trained horses to perform in ways not attempted or achieved by English trainers, so cruelty was suspected (1430-1434, 1467). Mrs. Mollie Lawrence, the estranged wife of an artiste, declared: “The German is the most cruel brute to animals” (2821). Mrs. Margaret Martin, an ex-music-hall artiste, described a German woman at the Hippodrome who shouted at and beat cats with a dog whip (512), and Jack Thompson reported that he had complained to the manager of the Grand Theatre in Birmingham about the condition of a very tightly muzzled and bleeding dog kept in the wings by the German, “Zerto” (1505-1526).

The music halls had originally given birth to jingoism, and they then encouraged anti-German sentiment before and during hostilities, but once it had started, some patrons found their treatment of the war trivial or distasteful, and turned away, especially to the cinema (Cheshire, 1974, pp. 54-55). Some representatives of the music-hall stage and circus seemed reluctant to endorse the negative stereotyping of foreign, especially German, trainers or their audiences. Frederick Trussell claimed that, when manager at the London Hippodrome for nearly 20 years, he was aware of only one small conviction—that of a Frenchman, about the use of a spur—and that he did not understand that the method of treatment in training by “late alien enemies” was particularly cruel (2903, 3098). Everard Calthrop, an amateur trainer, told the Select Committee that the foreign performances he had seen showed that training abroad was not necessarily cruel, and that he had seen perfect performances with willing, eager animals (1900). After extensive visits to continental horse shows and circuses, Bertram Mills had only seen cruelty once, in the treatment of horses in the ring in Sweden; and a month previously in Berlin he had disapproved of a display of a dog balancing on one leg on a man’s hand. In both cases, he said, there was disapproval expressed by the local audience. He added: “We quite appreciate the position between Germany and this country now, but I do not think the German public like cruelty any more than we do” (2159-2160). Arthur Aitchley, a horse trainer, stated that German trainers were effective because the German was more pig-headed and persistent than the English, not more cruel in his methods (2144).

Frequent favorable mention was made of Carl Hagenbeck during the Select Committee’s hearing of evidence, and he was the foreign personality most commonly referred to, generally in unusually complimentary terms. Jack
Russell Vokes found Hagenbeck's establishment acceptable because it was open, and it was possible to pay to see good training (2086). Edward Henry Bostock, owner of menageries, music halls, and theaters (he was a member for several years of the Glasgow Corporation, which appointed him senior adviser to Glasgow Zoo), could not speak too highly of Carl Hagenbeck and his mode of training or keeping animals (3233-3235). In Appendix I of the Select Committee’s Report of 1922, however, among “declarations from persons in foreign countries who were unable to appear before the Committee,” a Dutch painter, Paul Schultze, reported cruelties to horses he had seen while permitted to sketch at the training sessions of Carl Hagenbeck’s circus at Scheveningen, near The Hague; and in the same year, 1920, Miss E. des Tombe, founder of the Dutch Jack London Club, saw cruelty in the training of polar bears and elephants at the circus of Wilhelm Hagenbeck (Carl’s nephew) at The Hague. In these accounts, there is no indication that Carl Hagenbeck was personally involved, but Wilhelm Hagenbeck carried out some of the training himself. On March 28, Wilhelm forwarded to Bertram Mills a letter from a close family acquaintance, Professor Heck, manager of the Zoological Gardens in Berlin, in which the humane methods of the Hagenbecks were confirmed and praised. Heck concluded by saying that the allegations made in the English newspapers gave him the impression that they had been prompted by “untechnical and anti-German motives.” Mills had also kept Carl Hagenbeck briefed on the evidence presented to the Select Committee, and he had replied on March 24, pointing out the humane methods of his family’s business, and his and his family’s membership of the Humane Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Hamburg (Report from the Select Committee on Performing Animals, together with the Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence, London: HMSO. 1922. Appendices I and II).

Peter Chalmers Mitchell, secretary of the Zoological Society of London, and the Select Committee’s most valuable independent expert witness, confirmed that Hagenbeck was good with animals. He respected him and suggested that conditions in Germany were not worse than in Britain (2254-2256). In Mitchell’s autobiography, there is no mention of the Select Committee or the resulting legislation, but he noted that Hagenbeck was awarded the silver medal of the Society, referring to him as a great showman and trainer of animals, the lucrative part of his business being the formation of troupes and circuses, which he sent to every part of the world; but, he added (Mitchell, 1937, pp. 123-124):

On the training of animals for shows I was never able to agree with him. All my life I have tried to avoid these emotional judgments which interpret the behaviour of ani-
mals in terms of human feelings . . . For many years I seldom lost an opportunity of seeing exhibitions of performing animals, but I came to the conclusion that, with the possible exception of sea lions, terror of the trainer lay behind the tricks, a conviction that was not disturbed by the rewards of food that were given.

Disagreement and concern about the foreign factor continued from the 1920s into the following decades. T. H. Gillespie, director of the Zoological Park, Edinburgh, wrote: “I cannot conceive that my own country has a monopoly in kindness and common sense” (Gillespie, 1934, p. 113); but in her book, published to counter his, Helen Trevelyan (1936) complained that:

The great majority of animal acts are trained on the Continent, where the feeling for and treatment of animals is notoriously low, practically absent in many places, and by men whose names alone would hardly inspire confidence in the treatment of things less sensitive than animals. (pp. 105-106)

In her autobiography, Vesta Tilley, the actress and male impersonator, regretted that Variety was “dead” by the mid-1930s, one of the reasons being the banning of foreign performers, because:

. . . in the old days, to make up a real Variety programme it was absolutely necessary to introduce foreign acts. The Germans were supreme in acrobatic and strong man acts, and many entertaining dumb shows. Performing animals were a strong item on the programme before public taste veered round against them, on the accusation [with which she did not agree] that such shows were only possible by exercising cruelty in the training of the animals. Foreign acts were barred largely owing to the War, but the Variety profession itself was not altogether blameless for their banishment, owing to the introduction of trade union methods in a profession that could prosper only by welcoming the largest measure of free trade in entertainment. (De Frece, 1934, pp. 271-272)

Work Permits and the Employment Market

In the House of Commons, well after the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act had been passed, Sir Robert Gower asked the Home Secretary to cancel and stop further issue of permits to alien exhibitors of performing animals but was told in reply that the few permits were for strictly limited periods and that withdrawal or refusal would be unjustifiable (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1928-29)). Then Mr. Peter Freeman (president of the Vegetarian Society between 1937 and 1942) asked the Home Secretary for details of the number of foreign performing animal turns touring in the country, the species
of animals involved, the names of the owners, and whether they were domiciled. In reply it was stated that the information was restricted to certificates of registration, which showed that 205 trainers had been registered since the passing of the Act, of whom 125 were British and 80 foreign, but that there was no way of knowing how many foreigners were domiciled or engaged in training (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1929-30)). Gower unsuccessfully asked the Home Secretary how many alien exhibitors of performing animals were given a license during the previous 12 months, how many there were currently, and whether he would consider withholding licenses in the future (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1930-31)). Soon afterward, he unsuccessfully asked the Home Secretary to consider discouraging animal performances by refusing to grant permits to alien exhibitors, because there was no discrimination in the Performing Animals (Regulation) Act between British subjects and foreigners (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1931-32)). Questions along these lines were to continue. After his question to the Home Secretary in a later Session, Mr. Frederick Messer was told that 51 aliens currently had certificates of registration (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1936-37)), and in the 1950s Mr. Peter Freeman was still expressing concern, asking the Secretary of State for the Home Department to provide information to animal welfare societies about foreign training conditions that would not be tolerated in Britain (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1954-55)).

Addressing the question of the possible effect of a legislative prohibition of animal performances on employment, Sydney Arthur, a booking manager, informed the Select Committee that there were at the time more English trainers and exhibitors following the boycott of German acts, but that these were not many, and so there would be no significant unemployment problem, and other specialisms could be turned to in order to obviate any unemployment in the profession (754-761). By the 1930s, the presence of foreign trainers had increased, and on May 4, 1933, Lord Danesfort pointed out that there was no obligation to preserve the employment of trainers in Germany, most trainers and exhibitors then being foreign. He reported that 113 foreign trainers were currently registered, as opposed to 77 British (net numbers would be less because individual trainers were sometimes registered for more than one animal), and so domestic employment would not suffer significantly (Parliamentary Debates, Lords (1933)). In the meantime, animal performances appeared to Helen Trevelyan (1936, p. 91) to continue to guarantee large sums of money to foreigners.
Conclusion

Circus and music-hall professionals were long used to working with foreign colleagues, having much opportunity to develop appropriate professional respect and familiarity, although there is a suggestion from the Select Committee evidence that individual performers generally kept themselves to themselves when on tour. Perhaps at the time of the controversy, a new, contrived opinion of them was sometimes expressed as part of a defensive strategy. In this controversy, in addition to any genuine concern about known instances of real cruelty, there would have been concern to protect domestic professional employment interests at a time when the music hall was in decline, and when anti-German sentiment after the war was not just commonplace but also convenient. The reputation of German trainers in such circumstances was not helped by the fact that they were often acknowledged to be the most effective in their work. Those critical of animal performances might also share the anti-German sentiment common in society at the time, but they were less concerned with foreign threats to domestic employment in the music hall and circus than with the impossibility of regulating foreign training methods. For that reason, their concerns were directed less at the “alien enemy” than at foreign sources in general.

In the absence of total prohibition of animal performances, it was fair that those genuinely interested in animal welfare should express concern about the application of acceptable standards in the circus and music hall; and because Britain had well-established animal welfare legislation\(^{10}\) that barely existed in some countries and was entirely absent in others, it was understandable that, within this general area of concern, uncertain foreign practices were open to suspicion. Exactly the same type of concern continues today, for this same reason, regarding other areas of animal use, but it is not often couched in the xenophobic terms that were more readily used and accepted in the early twentieth century; and no strategic attempt is now made by the negligible British animal training interest to shift blame for any shortcomings on to foreign sources.

Notes

1. During the debate on the second reading of the Performing Animals (Regulation) Bill, a member cited the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals’ annual report for 1919, mentioning the 1494 members of the Jack London Club and its steady growth and influence (Parliamentary Debates, Commons (1923)).

2. Because of deportation and repatriation, the overall size of the German community in Britain declined from 57,500 in 1914 to 22,254 in 1919 (Panayi, 1994, pp. 106-107).
3. For an account of the Hagenbecks, see Rothfels (2002).

4. Principally the VAF’s Performer; the Showmen’s Guild’s World’s Fair; the Encore, a music hall and theatrical review; the Era, representing the Provincial Entertainments Proprietors’ and Managers’ Association, and closely associated with the Showmen’s Guild; and the Magnet, which described itself as the oldest penny professional journal published, devoted to the interests of the music hall, theatrical, and equestrian professions.

5. Later, under the Third Reich, laws on animal protection were passed in 1933 and 1938. It was forbidden to use an animal for demonstrations, film-making, spectacles, or other public events to the extent that these events caused the animal appreciable pain or appreciable damage to health. In 1938 the Minister of the Interior also issued a Decree on Wandering Animal Shows and Menageries (Sax, 2000, pp. 175-82).

6. Mitchell was an anatomist who was appointed secretary of the Zoological Society of London in 1903. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1906 and later served as president of the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire between 1923 and 1927. He worked also for the Times between 1919 and 1932, writing leaders and scientific articles.

7. Vesta Tilley was married to Sir Walter de Frece, who took the leading part on the Select Committee, opposite Kenworthy, in resisting new legislation. He was Unionist member for Ashton-under-Lyne between 1920 and 1924 and for Blackpool between 1924 and 1931, and managing director of a company controlling up to 20 theaters. In parliamentary business connected with the performing animals controversy, he represented the interests of the Society of West End Managers, the Theatrical Managers’ Association, the VAF, and the music hall and circus generally.

8. Gower was chairman of the Animal Welfare Committee in the House of Commons between 1929 and 1945, chairman of the National Canine Defence League from 1920, and chairman of the RSPCA between 1925 and 1951. In 1931 he was presented by the president of France with a Sévres vase in recognition of animal welfare work in that country.

9. Formerly Sir John Butcher, ennobled in 1924. He had been Kenworthy’s main ally in the promotion of new legislation.

10. Earlier related legislation consisted of the Wild Animals in Captivity Protection Act, 1900, and the Protection of Animals Act, 1911, drafted by the RSPCA and introduced by George Greenwood MP, one of its council members. Under the 1900 Act it became illegal to cause any unnecessary suffering, or to cruelly abuse, infuriate, tease, or terrify; and the 1911 Act made illegal, again by cause or permission, similar mistreatments of any animal, including those of a more everyday nature, such as beating, overloading, or stressful transportation, and also staged animal fighting and baiting, poisoning, and cruel operations.

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