The PLANTATION DREAM

*Developing British New Guinea and Papua
1884-1942*

D. C. LEWIS

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CANBERRA

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**In memory of James McAuley,
Charles Rowley and Peter Lawrence
Australian School of Pacific Administration 1958-59**

Preface

THIS STUDY BEGAN and begins as an account of land settlement by Europeans and of the vicissitudes of expatriate plantation agriculture in British New Guinea and Papua between 1884 and 1942. It became and becomes at the same time a narrative of the settler experience and a prolonged meditation upon the moral difficulties that surrounded and surround the Western intrusion. Nearly a fifth of the work - Part I - is taken up with early attempts and failure before 1907 to attract the white agricultural 'pioneers' believed vital if the country was to 'develop' and pay its way. Part II examines the formation of an Australian federal policy for a 'new' territory thought to be of great economic value. The international plantation boom of the decade before 1914 did bring a considerable investment and a few hundred settlers with high expectations. Part III deals with conflict between the administration of Judge J.H.P. (later Sir Hubert) Murray and the planters over the course of development and the place of the Papuan people in the colonial economy. In Part IV a series of crises and disappointments force settlers to reassess their position and reach a kind of accord with the Papuan Government in the period 1921-26. Part V deals with the remaining history of the plantation industries. Part VI is an account of the culture and life of the settler community and an assessment of relations on the plantations between European management and Papuan workers. Part VII contains conclusions of various kinds.

I was aware as I wrote that the preparatory chapters collectively seemed to be acquiring a dimension out of proportion to the whole. I wish that it was possible to get to the heart of the matter sooner but the chapters that make up Parts I and II are nonetheless important groundwork for what follows. As with several other works that treat aspects of the history of British New Guinea and Papua chronologically, the reader will find a quickening of activity and consequently, I suppose, increasing interest in the subject beginning with developments that occur in 1905, and a slackening of activity and of interest for the observer after 1930. This is how it was for the participants in that history themselves and it is reflected in the records they have left. There is a long prelude in which progress is negligible, a period of frenetic activity, a succession of struggles,

dénouement and a gradual reassessment. The residue of all the effort expended before 1942 survived to grow, flourish and wilt again in another age itself now closed or closing.

The account that follows could not have been written without the willingness of some old settlers to recollect their lives in Papua and to respond to questions that were sometimes painful to answer. I gratefully acknowledge a very large debt to these people, some now dead, and to others included here who advised or assisted me in a period of more than a decade: in Sydney, Mrs Winifred Loudon and Mrs Judy Davidson, Kris Klugman, B. E. Fairfax-Ross, Colin Sefton, Mrs Haidee Champion, Commander J. F. Horn, Mr and Mrs Guy Cadden; in Port Moresby, Evan Cleland, Neal Nicklason, AUSA Songoro, Sir Ebia Olewale, and Kevin Green and Moeka Helai then of the National Archives of Papua New Guinea; at Sogeri, Mr and Mrs A. Lisle Johnston; at Popondetta, Mr and Mrs Clendyn Searle of Awala; at Samarai and Alotau, Fred Craig, Ernie Evenett and Keith Gribben; at Galley Reach, George Sariman and Charlie and Joe Arua; at Kanosia, Jan Brouwers; at Kemp Welch River, Owen and Mary Wardrop of Poligolo; at Kikori, Harry Lawson; in Brisbane, Ivan Champion, Mrs Ellen Bruce - 100 years old in 1976 - and her daughters Mrs Lorna Jenkins and Mrs Joan Ru-Desille, and J. W. Lukin of Palm Beach; in Melbourne, Sir John Bloomfield, Major General R. R. McNicoll and Mrs Ellen Hall; in Canberra, Mrs Penelope Hope, Captain Edmund Clay, Lorraine McKnight of the Commonwealth Archives Office then still at Parkes, Mrs 'Peter' Kinsman of the ANU Archives of Business and Labour, the members of the Department of Pacific and South East Asian History in the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University - Robyn Savory who typed the first chapters, Gavan Daws, Niel Gunson, Bob Langdon, and for a time, Peter Corris. Michael Stenson, a visitor in 1976, gave me advice at a critical moment. In Papua New Guinea in 1988 I was assisted with the developments outlined in the Postscript by Yogi Srikhanta, Financial Controller in Port Moresby for S. A. Sipef N. V. of Antwerp, new owners of the old British New Guinea Development Company. The study as presented here is a revised version of a thesis in Pacific History submitted in the Australian National University. My supervisors in turn were Francis West, Stewart Firth and Hank Nelson. I thank each of them. While much of the work was written with Professor Nelson's eye in mind he cannot be held accountable for its defects. In the revision I was grateful for criticism of the original thesis from Bill Gammage, Colin Newbury, and Colin Barlow, and for corrections of detail from Eileen and Ted Johnston, and Wallace and Robyn Kienzle. If I have persisted in error, the blame is mine. I have acknowledged in a dedication my continuing debt to three mentors now dead whose contending ethics stimulated me as a young man and caused

me to hesitate in judgement countless times since. It remains to thank the Australian National University for the research scholarship that allowed me to undertake this study, the members of the Editorial Board of *The Journal of Pacific History* for accepting the work for publication, the *JPH*'s Executive Editor, Jenny Terrell, for her advice and her skills in preparing the work for the printer, and Gillian Boulton-Lewis and our children for their forbearance.

As a Cadet Education Officer fresh from the Australian School of Pacific Administration in January 1960 I first saw tropical verdure and tropical plantations when I was by good fortune posted to Karkar Island in the Madang District of what had been in 1942 the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. This large volcanic island was the richest concentration of lowland plantation agriculture in the country outside the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, with thirteen 'expatriate' and mission owned estates, and innumerable villager smallholdings of coconuts and cocoa. Portions of several Karkar estates had been planted by German settlers between 1911 and their expropriation in 1921. The routines of plantation life were observable daily. Large numbers of contract labourers from the Highlands districts supplemented by settled communities of mostly Mumeng and Sepik workers lived in the labour lines. There was an occasional disturbance of the peace. The plantation managers and assistants led enviable lives and there were several pronounced eccentrics among them. The plantation system seemed timeless and immutable like the Australian administration itself. The plantations were, in fact, just then at the very zenith of their trajectory, enjoying an unprecedented prosperity that was soon to decline as the national independence of Papua New Guinea approached. The history that follows deals with plantations in quite another region of Papua New Guinea and in another age but it rests on the remembered familiarities and indelible impressions left by that encounter with plantation life near Madang thirty-five years ago.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations in the Text

ANGAU	Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
ARM	Assistant Resident Magistrate
BNG	British New Guinea
BNGD	British New Guinea Development (Company Limited)
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CGS	Chief Government Surveyor
c.i.f.	'cost, insurance, freight'
CJO	Chief Judicial Officer
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
CNA	Commissioner for Native Affairs and Control
C.S.I.R.	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DCJO	Deputy Chief Judicial Officer
f.o.b.	'free on board'
FMS	Federated Malay States
GMO	Government Medical Officer
KPM	Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (Royal Packet Line)
LMS	London Missionary Society
£. s. d.	Pounds, shillings, pence
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
NLO	Native Labour Ordinance
RM	Resident Magistrate

Abbreviations in the Notes and Index

ANU	Australian National University
ANUABL	ANU Archives of Business and Labour
BNGAR	<i>British New Guinea Annual Report</i>
CD	Central Division
CPP	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers</i>
CRS	Commonwealth Records Series
ED	Eastern Division
DD	Delta Division
GD	Gulf Division
JPH	<i>Journal of Pacific History</i>
JSO	<i>Journal de la Société des Océanistes</i>
NAPNG	National Archives of Papua New Guinea
ND	Northern Division
NED	North Eastern Division
NLA	National Library of Australia
PAR	<i>(Territory of) Papua Annual Report</i>
SED	South Eastern Division
WD	Western Division

Note on Weights, Measures and Currency

Imperial weights and measures are used throughout. A conversion table is provided below. Since inflation of currencies has obviously taken place since the beginning of the century even as general wealth and income have risen it is difficult to establish standards of comparison by which we now can have some idea of what the value and purchasing power of money was then. A salary of £250 a year provided a sparse but adequate living for a plantation manager in 1914 but a very meagre one by 1921. As a rough measure to obtain the equivalent in 1995 Australian Dollars we might multiply such a figure by a factor of twenty. By this calculation the salary of the Lieutenant Governor of Papua, £1,800 in 1922, would now be about \$36,000, hardly a very large income, but the £1½ million invested in commercial agriculture in Papua during the boom years would be equivalent to \$30 million, the investment of £200,000 by Sir Rupert Clarke and R. S. Whiting alone worth \$4 million today, the minimum £6 a year paid to indentured Papuan labourers at the end of their contract would have the purchasing power of about \$120, the minimum annual cost of a labourer to an employer in wages, food, and fees, \$424.

<i>Imperial</i>		<i>Metric</i>
1 pound (weight)	=	.4536 kilogram
1 hundredweight (112 pounds)	=	50.8 kilograms
1 ton (2240 pounds weight)	=	1.016 tonnes
1 mile	=	1.609 kilometres
1 acre	=	.405 hectare

There were twenty shillings (20s.) in a Pound (£1) whether Sterling (Stg) or Australian (Aust). £1(Stg) was exchanged for twenty-five shillings - or £1. 5s. (Aust) over much of the period under review. There were twelve pence (12d.) in a shilling (1s.) and 240 pence in £1. In 1966 each £1 (Aust) became valued at \$2 (Aust).

Glossary

boss-boy	foreman	(New Guinea Pidgin)
<i>dmdm</i>	white man	(Suau & Eastern Papua)
<i>dohot</i>	presently, 'wait a while'	(Motu, Central Division)
<i>dubu</i>	ceremonial platform, church	(Motu)
<i>gavamani</i>	the government, an officer	(Motu, from English)
<i>kamong</i>	village	(Malay)
<i>kangany</i>	foreman	(Tamil)
<i>lagatol</i>	large double hulled canoe	(Motu)
<i>maganl</i>	wallaby [<i>wallabta agilis</i>]	(Motu)
<i>raml</i>	calico wrap, loin cloth	(Motu)
<i>ravl</i>	ceremonial house, temple	(Namau, Gulf Division)
<i>sinabada</i>	mistress, white woman	(Motu: lit. big mother)
<i>taubada</i>	master, white man	(Motu: lit. big man)
<i>vanagl</i>	outrigger canoe	(Motu)

MAP 1: EASTERN NEW GUINEA, 1884-1942

MAP 3: PLANTATIONS OF THE CENTRAL AND NORTHERN DIVISIONS IN 1940

MAP 5: PLANTATIONS OF THE SOUTH EASTERN DIVISION IN 1940

Introduction

. . . the pioneering spirit of man, a spirit which may have destroyed much as well as created, have caused misery as well as happiness, but to which human civilisation is largely indebted and which we cannot condemn unless we condemn civilisation itself.

E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton*, Chatto and Windus, 1930.

The retrospect on modern imperialism presents special problems to western critics living within or on the periphery of an intellectual environment where the old colonial lore has the power to elicit nostalgia for the horizons empire once spanned and lost, the passing of the privileged life of service and romance is still regretted and new legends legitimising past exploits and contemporary neo-imperialist interventions are being newly devised.

Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism*, Macmillan, 1983.

Introduction

THERE CAN BE little posthumous meeting of minds between the white planter of the first quarter of this century and the Melanesian nationalist of the last. To those for whom the European intrusion was essentially a violation, that a settler should have extracted something like a 'Western' standard of living from the labour of Papua New Guineans in Papua New Guinea may appear the taking of an immoral advantage of a defenceless people. In the larger world, plantations stand generally accused of being mere enclaves of the economies of the occupying powers set up to utilise the resources and effort of others, while contributing little to any improvement in their comfort, and at the additional cost of their liberty. Through the unimpeded expatriation of profits, it is said, the operation of these enclaves prevented capital accumulation in the colonies, stranding them in a condition of permanent dependency or 'underdevelopment' with the result that the 'independence' that was finally achieved by former colonised states is a sham, a mask for 'neo-colonialism', a clever system in which economic manipulation continues through duped and compromised national elites. And not only does the plantation system stand accused of being the most extreme form of predatory exploitation undertaken by the Western imperialists but it is widely assumed that during the colonial period it must also have been highly profitable, whatever they say, for the planters in particular, and that in the scale of exploiters these settlers represent an especially pernicious class.

I am not equipped to respond to this analysis, although I can feel its power, except by weighing it against the settler experience in Papua. While, taking the long view, much of the above critique may be sustainable as one perspective, a closer examination of the content and context of their experience certainly permits an alternative representation of the settlers, their character and conduct. Of the character of the settlers I shall have much to say throughout the work, but of their part in a 'general crime', if crime there was, it can be said of the Europeans who made their home in Papua as planters in the period under review that *they* at least profited little from their opportunity, being themselves dupes of excessive expectations and delusions they shared with those who had encouraged them to settle there. They are among the peripheral casualties of the political, economic and cultural transformations of this century.

Indeed, as they failed to prosper it did not take long for planters to come to believe that they had been used and betrayed by the real 'colonisers', the metropolitan politicians, manufacturers and merchants who had promoted settlement in the first place. And it is clear that at least in the period 1905-1914 Australian federal ministries, having resolved on a policy for the development of the 'first grandchild of the Empire'¹ based on the rapid establishment of plantation industries, *were determined* to attract such settlers. For, despite the offer of very generous conditions, scarcely any planting 'pioneers' at all had been persuaded to come to the country in the previous twenty years of European dominion on the coast of southeast New Guinea. Without 'development' from which a revenue could be raised British New Guinea had 'stood still'. The 'new' *Papua*, it seemed, had to be developed. If in the end the rush that followed the passage of the *Papua Act* of 1905 was partly the by-product of an international boom in tropical agriculture that quite fortuitously occurred at the time, it was also a response to urgent government promotional propaganda.

No one in 1905 or 1914 could have envisaged the world of 1919 or 1929, much less that of 1975 or 1995. The European intervention in Papua had seemed then - to those wishing the Papuans well as much as to those who cared only for profit - finally unavoidable, the settlers indispensable, the kind of economy they brought the only one they could have brought. And transactions between such settlers and the Papuans at the time could never have been *equal*. I cannot therefore assert that planters and plantations did not attempt to exploit Papua and Papuans in the sense described above. I can demonstrate that at the time quite rational men, and not always out of self-interest, saw the situation differently. I am not sure that planters and plantations were then wrong to be there. That was just how the world was going to be for a time.

Undoubtedly the Papuan planters of the first decade of this century, like white settlers everywhere, were opportunists on one front of the progress of triumphant Western industrial civilisation - a civilisation underpinned by unparalleled advances in the exact sciences that had institutionalised the seizure and exploitation of economic and technical advantage. Undoubtedly the development of colonial plantations allowed the rapid expansion of production of desired commodities for European or North American consumption at greatly decreased cost. Undoubtedly, also, the power that the industrial states could bring to bear, moderated only by their own imperfectly

¹ The phrase was Beatrice Grimshaw's in her *Papua the Marvellous: The country of chances* (Melbourne 1909), 5. See below p. 70. It was used in the title of a small book, *Papua: 'A Grandchild of the Empire'* by Gordon Inglis published in 1912. This was a collection of articles on Papua written for *The Field*.

applied moral and legal systems, to impose and maintain the conditions in the plantation colonies that were optimum for production was unprecedented. But consumption in the West, if profligate, was not insatiable. So intense did the international competition and efficient the production of tropical commodities become by the 1920s that the profits of the planting industries were bound to decline just as prices to consumers declined. The expectations of an unlimited market held at the outset by settlers and investors in tropical plantations were to prove largely false even as the metropolitan societies at large benefited in cheap commodity imports. If excessive planting and overproduction in the rival mercantile empires were inevitable, no one could have predicted the consequent reduction in profitability exacerbated by the immense blow to wealth, trade and economic growth dealt the Europeans by their self-destructive war of 1914-18. There would be no bargaining power left for coloured labour and little for white capital in the plantation colonies locked into the straitened international economic order of the 1920s and 1930s.

The conditions whereby white men, whether as individual settlers or as employees, could come to tropical territories to work land and secure the service of indentured labourers, who were not white, at a cost in wages, issues, provisions and charges that amounted per head, as in the case of Papua in 1926, to perhaps one twentieth of the cost of a white overseer, a twenty-fifth the cost of an employed manager, or a tenth the cost of an unskilled labourer in metropolitan countries, were thus determined not by the settler but by the reach of European power before 1914 and by the terms of trade that developed between low wage colonies and high wage industrial states.² After a time these conditions ensured that prices of plantation products everywhere were held close to the costs of production in those colonial territories where costs were lowest. Whether by 'good fortune' in being first in attracting capital, or whether by reasons of climate, soil and an abundance of available land and labour, however secured, some colonies became pace-setters in the production of vegetable oils and fibres, rubber, spices, sugar, tea, coffee and cocoa. Ceylon and Malaya, the Philippines, Java and Sumatra, the Gold and Ivory Coasts were among these jewels of empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Benefiting from economies of scale and infrastructure and the higher prices that obtained in the early days of greatest advantage these more successful producers dominated the markets driving prices down until the industries of their competitive rivals elsewhere in the colonial world could not survive without the intercession of anxious governments whose revenues all depended upon the export of tropical commodities. Colonial economies on the margins - and

² See Chapter 11, pp. 145-6.

Papua was to find itself among them - were the last to benefit from rises in prices and the first to falter as prices fell below costs.

Planters and Papuans

This history in recording the attempt to develop Papua through the establishment of plantation industries is also an account of the white *colonists*³ or *settlers* that came to southeast New Guinea between 1884 and 1942, of the expectations they brought and of the difficulties they experienced as individuals and as a group. The foreigners, men and women, who settled in British New Guinea and Papua number only a few hundred and most are known and identifiable by name. With these Australians, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen and others - planters, settlers, men and women - I found it difficult, as I proceeded, not to have a deepening sympathy. The intense relationship with his or her subject matter and a close association with a group of people from whom he or she may feel initially quite alien in temperament and outlook has probably led before to an enhancement of understanding in a researcher that makes it difficult for him, or her, to condemn easily. The researcher might well come to feel as Margery Perham felt in Kenya in 1930 that

I think I now understand the 'immigrant community'. To own a bit of this lovely country, to make a house . . . to have a share in this thrilling sunlight; to have cheap, apparently reverential, impersonal labour; to feel the sense of singularity, of enhanced personality that comes from having a white skin among dark millions . . . You feel there is a future to be made and that your head and hands will count in the laying of its foundations.⁴

With hindsight, we know what the outcomes were for these people and how their world and work have been eclipsed by changes in political and economic reality and in social and racial attitudes. Of that other eclipse, the profound *interruption* to a cultural continuum, the unwelcome challenge to a secure sense of identity and the new imperative to redefine themselves that for Melanesian societies attended white settlement, and of the experience of individual Papuans, others will write. The 'colonised' emerge in the work that follows almost wholly in relation to the intruders - as enumerated servants or labourers, prisoners or witnesses, as friends only in a very restricted sense, or as enemies - all but a few, it might seem, mutely compliant in the

³ The terms 'colony' and 'colonists' were seldom used in Papua to describe the country or its European settlers. By 1901, seeing themselves as a new nation of improved 'British stock', Australians had come to resent the term 'colonial' when used to describe themselves. If Australia in New Guinea could not fail to be influenced by British administrative practice, Papua was nonetheless described as a *Territory* of the Commonwealth, the implied parallels being the 'Territories' of the United States, potential states of the Union, rather than the British Crown Colonies. Those who settled in 'territories' were 'pioneers' and 'settlers'.

⁴ Margery Perham, *East African Journey* (London 1976), 190.

plantation encounter. Defiance we shall find in fact was hardly infrequent. For while the interaction between planter and plantation worker could not be equal, the workers were not entirely powerless nor employers invariably insensitive or indeed always 'in control'. The villager contracted to work far from his home found the experience at once exciting *and* threatening, both intimidating *and* liberating. It was clearly not without either its rewards or a large measure of physical security. Yet it must surely also have been deeply humiliating, the disparities in power, material culture and organisation between Papuans and the newcomers bound for a time to create or confirm notions of inferiority on the one side and superiority on the other. Among the Europeans, certainly, few if any before 1914 or indeed before 1945, however humanitarian, could admit a confident belief in the complete equality of non-Europeans with themselves.

What follows is also a study of conflict - between the desire of the metropolitan power to profit from its dependency and the desire to be seen by others and history to have dealt justly with its original inhabitants; between the interests, as they saw them, of the white 'Papuan' settlers, and the interests of the 'native' Papuans and of good government as seen by the Papuan administration. In the twenty years from 1905 until 1925 contests to settle these matters were dramatically played out. Though perhaps only 'storms in the Papuan teacup'⁵ in a wider context, especially between 1914 and 1922 what seemed at the time to the antagonists a titanic struggle took place in the Papuan microcosm to decide an essential issue - to whom the future of Papua would belong, the 'pioneering' settlers or the indigenous inhabitants. In 1975 it would seem obvious that demographic reality, abstract morality and economic expediency could have determined only one outcome to such a confrontation - and so it could seem at a distance even in 1910 - but settlers whose outlook had been formed in the late Victorian years brought to Papua assumptions about their place in the world and the place of non-Europeans that were not easily shaken, assumptions in conflict with those underpinning the 'excessive and enfeebling' humanitarianism of Christian missions and 'unrealistic' paternalism and legalism of 'hypocritical' governments. The particular bitterness of this struggle between the regime of 'Judge' J. H. P. (later Sir Hubert) Murray and the local and Australian capitalists he represented as being 'indifferent to native suffering' and wanting to debauch the country, had as its underlying cause the frustration of settler

⁵ This assessment is C. D. Rowley's in his *The Australlians in German New Guinea* (Melbourne 1958), 332. He was describing the press agitation and the public meetings of 1920 when opposition to J. H. P. Murray's administration reached its peak. It was 'this storm in the Papuan teacup' - for all its clamour no more than a side-show at a time when the destiny of the former German New Guinea was being decided.

hopes and the failure of the prosperity expected in 1914 to be realised in the following years. These settlers and the investors in plantations all the while saw their difficulties as the consequence of the hostility or indifference of governments pursuing an extravagant native policy paid for out of *their* capital and effort. A collapse of trade in 1921-22 at the very time when tree crops were coming into full production was profoundly cathartic, chastening planter expectations and yielding Murray the field. Thereafter as the administration in Port Moresby increasingly took their part in the real struggle to maintain both the solvency of commerce and the revenue, these settlers became reconciled to the political and economic constraints that operated in Papua just as they had come to accept that the protective legislation designed to secure the persons and working conditions of Papuan workers would remain immutable and effectively administered.

The Setting

Papua here comprises the southeastern quarter of the great island called by the white men New Guinea, and the surrounding archipelagoes. These lands became for a while the Protectorate and then Possession of British New Guinea (1884-1906), from 1902 placed under Australian jurisdiction and in 1906 renamed the Territory of Papua. Situated in northwestern Melanesia this was among the very last areas penetrated by the Europeans in the period of their decisive political, economic and cultural expansion that brought the modern world order into being. The boundaries of the new Protectorate in 1884, as the intruders measured them, extended from 141 to 155 degrees east, a distance of 930 miles, and from five to twelve degrees south, a distance at its maximum of 320 miles, with a total land area of over 86,000 square miles. British New Guinea was bounded on the west by the Netherlands East Indies dependency of West New Guinea and on the north by German New Guinea until 1919 and then by the Territory of New Guinea mandated by the League of Nations to Australia.⁶ The surrounding islands included within the boundaries of the British claim were the D'Entrecasteaux and Trobriand Islands, the Louisiade Archipelago, Woodlark (Murua), and numerous smaller groups and isolated islands. The mainland consists broadly of four regions - the very thinly populated and low lying region of the Trans-Fly and Fly river estuary in the west; a region in the centre of very heavy rainfall at the head of the Gulf of Papua into which flowed the Bamu, Turama, Kikori, Purari and Vailala rivers; a region with the ranges running parallel to the prevailing

⁶ After 1945 the Mandated Territory of New Guinea became a Trust Territory of the United Nations administered by Australia and linked in an 'administrative union' with the Territory of Papua from 1949. The territories were formally combined as Papua New Guinea with limited self-government in 1972 becoming the Independent State of Papua New Guinea in September 1975.

winds and therefore in partial rain shadow along the south coast; and, to the north over the great unbroken chain of mountains that extend to the eastern tip of New Guinea, a region of extensive coastal lowlands with two areas of volcanic activity facing the Solomon Sea.

The Melanesian population of the coastal communities was counted as it came under government control but the total for the whole country would not be known until after 1945. It was variously estimated at between 250,000 and 350,000. The high valleys of the central ranges did support comparatively large populations but these were not visited until the 1930s and much of the malarial intermediate zone between these highlands and the smaller coastal concentrations of people had never been settled by men. During the period examined in this study British New Guinea and Papua in practical terms consisted of the southeastern littoral of New Guinea and neighbouring islands with an enumerated 'native' or 'Papuan' population of less than 200,000 and with the numbers of Europeans that settled or sojourned in the country at any one time never exceeding 1,500 until the second world war approached. These then are the setting and the scale of things for what follows: a large territory, much of it still to be systematically explored, inhabited by several hundred thousand Melanesians separated by geography, language, mutual unfamiliarity or hostility, and a few hundred newcomers widely dispersed and divided by status, occupation and motive, but well known to each other and in communication with the larger world.

Foundations

In 1956 J. D. Legge provided a reliable general account of the administration, economic development, and land and labour policy in Papua based on the indispensable Papuan *Annual Reports* and Australian *Parliamentary Papers* over the whole period.⁷ Like Dr Francis West's biography of Sir Hubert Murray⁸, Professor Legge's book could not have been expected, within the limits of its objectives, to have considered the settler experience in any detail. A large body of archival material needed examination if a more confidently based account of the events and controversies over economic development in Papua was to be made. A reading of both Legge and West suggests that Murray's administration from 1908 until 1940 probably achieved the best that could be done in a period of stagnant capitalism, Australian indifference and racial prejudice. In general this remains, of course, a reasonable conclusion.

These were the texts that I began with together with Margriet Roe's early thesis on Southeast Papua to 1930⁹ and Liese Baker's sub-thesis 'The

⁷ J.D. Legge, *Australian Colonial Policy* (Sydney 1956).

⁸ Francis West, *Hubert Murray: The Australian Proconsul* (Melbourne 1968).

⁹ Margriet Roe, 'A History of South-east Papua to 1930', PhD thesis, ANU, 1962.

beginning of the indentured labour system in Papua 1888-1908'.¹⁰ My preliminary study of the conflict that developed between the then Judge Murray's administration and the British New Guinea Development Company in the period 1910-22, now reconsidered, forms the basis of Parts III and IV.¹¹

Of other material dealing wholly or in part with Papua before 1942, the works of E. P. Wolfers¹² and Amirah Inglis¹³ on race relations are a little too 'unambivalent' in my view. While I believe, as I am sure they do, that the defence of the paramount principle of self-determination is now - if we are to live together in a greatly shrunken world - a moral imperative that may urge us to judge settler societies harshly, and I accept many of their individual judgements, I find myself still defending the accused. Interpreting their world rather than judging it is the harder task. Prevailing opinion may have changed but the white settlers in Papua were not evil or stupid above the norm. They were caught up in their milieu, time and place, as we are in ours. They saw themselves as pioneers and they were certainly racially prejudiced. They were confident that they had the right, and not merely the power, to be where they were and to do what they were doing. Why was this so? These people had not created the intellectual world in which for Europeans everywhere an assumption of racial superiority had then the burden of self-evident truth, or a world economic order that permitted and encouraged white settlement in the tropics. Excepting their particular offences they are not culpable. Hank Nelson's history of encounters between expatriate miners and Papuans comes nearer to adding to our understanding of the human dilemma posed by the collision of cultures - an exposure that illuminates without general censure and with an overriding humanity.¹⁴ Perhaps the present work will add a further perspective.

General works of use were those by Lucy Mair¹⁵ and Harold Brookfield.¹⁶ Mair brought an experienced comparative eye and a steady ethical position to bear on development policies under Australian rule in both Papua and New Guinea, a perspective usefully maintained by Brookfield. Specialists in other disciplines, their work as historians has been more broad than detailed. George Beckford's *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in the Plantation*

¹⁰ Liese Baker, 'The beginning of the indentured labour system in Papua, 1888-1908', BA Honours thesis, ANU, 1970.

¹¹ D. C. Lewis, 'Labour and development in Papua: The case of the British New Guinea Development Company', MA Qualifying thesis, ANU, 1973.

¹² E. P. Wolfers, *Race relations and colonial rule in Papua New Guinea* (Sydney 1975).

¹³ Amirah Inglis, *Not a white woman safe* (Canberra 1974).

¹⁴ Hank Nelson, *Black, white and gold* (Canberra 1976).

¹⁵ Lucy Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (Melbourne 1948 and 1970).

¹⁶ Harold Brookfield, *Colonialism, development and independence* (Cambridge 1972).

*Economies of the Third World*¹⁷ was provocative but not, on the whole, I believe, relevant to Papua or to my particular enterprise. I accept that the vast plantation systems imposed upon the tropical world by European power in the last three centuries may now comprise an economic trap from which many societies created in the process are hard-pressed to escape. But Papua never became a 'pure' plantation economy and the settler plantation episode there and in the other Pacific territories was too brief for the burden of blame for 'underdevelopment' to be placed upon it. Certainly some settlers had in their minds an ideal of what a plantation based society might be like and tested the constraints on its realisation. Certainly Hubert Murray, Lieutenant Governor 1908-1940, was soon determined that such a society would not be permitted to develop in Papua.

Azeem Amarshi, Kenneth Good and Rex Mortimer in their *Development and Dependency: The political economy of Papua New Guinea*¹⁸ reach many conclusions that I find incontestable though it will be obvious that I also differ with them about much. I cannot accept their attempt to impose a scheme derived from Beckford and others, and in their case heavily burdened with ideological rhetoric, upon the Papua and New Guinea data. They imply that there might have been another way by which the world could have passed through recent centuries, one free of a phase of intervention and temporary domination by Europeans then and one free of inequity now. I do not believe, as they seem to believe, that the government of an independent Papua New Guinea is essentially 'neo-colonialist', even while I concede it cannot readily escape the constraints of the present international order. This is just how the world is for a time.

In retrospect there does seem an inevitability in the Papuan case. Given the world as it had become by 1884 the European intrusion could hardly have been further delayed and certainly not prevented. Thereafter of fundamental concern to Australia only as a strategic barrier, and without any decisive economic advantage, southeast New Guinea never acquired more than quite marginal significance as a producer of tropical commodities. Nonetheless the great issues of colonialism and colonisation were exposed and contested there and in consideration of these in context might lie an interest in 'storms in the Papuan teacup'.

Following the pioneering work by Legge on colonial policy in Papua, the biographical studies of the principal administrators by Joyce¹⁹ and West,

¹⁷ George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York 1972).

¹⁸ Azeem Amarshi, Kenneth Good and Rex Mortimer, *Development and dependency: The political economy of Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne 1979).

¹⁹ Roger Joyce, *Sir William MacGregor* (Melbourne 1971).

Hank Nelson's work on the miners, and the studies by David Wetherell and Diane Langmore of the missionaries in Papua,²⁰ the present research is intended to fill another large gap in our knowledge of the Papuan region of Papua New Guinea in the colonial period. Work remains for others in a complementary study of the planters of German New Guinea and the Mandated Territory to 1942, in a history of plantations in the combined territories after 1945, and for parallel studies of the experience of Papuans and New Guineans under indenture.²¹

²⁰ David Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea 1891-1942* (Queensland 1977); Diane Langmore, *Tamate, a king* (Melbourne 1974), and *Missionary Lives: Papua 1875-1914* (Hawaii 1989).

²¹ See Appendix A: The Indentured Labour System in Papua: Some Recent Studies, pp. 316-8, below.

PART 1

Remote estuary - British New Guinea 1884-1905

The natives of New Guinea will need the same protection which the law gives to the young and weak in factory towns, and to the poor and defenceless everywhere . . . [They] are an agricultural people, but they are superstitious followers of their fathers and it will be very difficult to get them out of the rut of many generations . . . All growth requires time, but I see no reason why British rule should not succeed in New Guinea, and prove a benefit and blessing to the native as to the alien race.

Rev. W.G. Lawes, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1886.

The position of Europeans in the colony can, speaking generally, only be to supervise field labour performed by coloured men, and to work under shade or cover of some kind.

Dr William MacGregor, *British New Guinea Annual Report*, 1890-91.

CHAPTER 1

A strategic purpose obtained

A PROTECTORATE was finally established over southeastern New Guinea and adjacent islands in 1884 to satisfy the need of the still unfederated Australian colonies for emotional and strategic security. Aware of the difficulties being caused elsewhere in the western Pacific by the random settlement of traders, the depredations of labour recruiters, and the unregulated purchase of land by planters in areas not as yet annexed by one of the great powers, the Colonial Office had included New Guinea among the island groups where, under the Western Pacific Order in Council, 1877, the conduct of British subjects fell within the jurisdiction of British law. Further than this the imperial government in London did not wish to go. Indeed, the malarial coasts and the reputation of the inhabitants for ferocity had hitherto protected New Guinea from the South Sea labour trade, and, apart from the small mixed community of copra traders and Methodist missionaries centred in the Duke of York islands in the northeast and a few traders in *bêche-de-mer* and pearl and a handful of missionaries of the London Missionary Society in the south-east and the Torres Strait, most of the eastern littoral and all of the interior of the great island had remained quite undisturbed by Europeans when four ships of the Pacific Naval Squadron appeared off the south coast in September.

Politicians and speculators in the Australian colonies had for more than a decade been pressing the British authorities with an extraordinary blend of imperialist rhetoric and penny-pinching nationalism to annexe the eastern half of New Guinea together with the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides for an 'Australian empire' in the South Seas, and several attempts were made to float enterprises to trade, plant or prospect in New Guinea - some expeditions actually reaching the country - but these appeals, threats, and adventures had failed to move London. Moreover, it was made quite clear to British subjects contemplating settlement in New Guinea that there could be 'no sanction, even tacitly, to the acquisition of land' and that no such 'acquisition . . . made previous to a decision [on the future status of the country] can be recognised to the prejudice of the Crown'.¹ Though reconciled

¹ George Seymour Fort, *Report on British New Guinea, 1886*. Compiled from the notes of the late Sir Peter Scratchley, H.M. Special Commissioner in British New Guinea, by his private secretary, Appendix 13: Letter to Mr E. Schubert, 13 Oct. 1875.

by 1883 to the inevitability of having to proceed further, Lord Derby, Colonial Secretary in Gladstone's second ministry, disowned a pre-emptive annexation by the Queensland government in April of that year. By November, when a Colonial Convention meeting in Sydney pressed for annexation in the face of a now palpable German interest in New Britain and the whole northeast coast of the New Guinea mainland, and for the first time offered to meet part of the costs of an administration, action could no longer be delayed.

To bolster the arguments for possession for reasons of security, the Convention reiterated those of Australian economic self-interest. The delegates concurred that 'a rapid extension of British trade and enterprise in the Torres Straits' was likely and that New Guinea would 'shortly be the resort of many adventurous subjects of Great Britain'.² Yet the proclamation of a Protectorate over British New Guinea in November 1884 was clearly not in answer to an 'economic' impulse, or in order to assume responsibility where British traders and adventurers had already developed a significant British interest, but because the protection of a much larger interest in the Australasian colonies seemed to demand it. In an empire sated with territorial responsibilities and held captive by their needs, it was a desire much more strongly felt in the existing colonies than at 'home' to balance the initiative of a rival imperialism that eventually prompted action.

As for agricultural investment by any of the 'adventurous sons of Great Britain' that were expected to flock there - this the very terms of the Protectorate appeared at first to preclude. The proclamation of 1884 assured the Papuan 'chiefs' gathered at points around the coast for a succession of ceremonies that 'your lands will be secured to you' and declared that 'no settlement or acquisition of land is to be permitted'.³ Too literal a construction placed upon these assurances would have made provision of a settled government impossible and the instructions issued by the Colonial Office to Sir Peter Scratchley, the Special Commissioner appointed to administer the country, allowed for some land acquisition both for public and private purposes.

But it was enjoined upon him that should it 'be decided to allow Her Majesty's subjects to purchase land, such transactions must in every case be conducted through you; that [the wishes of the native people] in these matters will be respected, and that the purchase money will be paid through you'.⁴ Scratchley disallowed an original purchase claim of 1878 but gave permissive occupancy both to Andrew Goldie, the storekeeper at Port Moresby who had

² In D. C. Gordon, *The Australian Frontier in New Guinea 1870-1885* (New York 1951), 192. See also Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific* (Melbourne 1980).

³ In J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea* (London 1912), 74.

⁴ Seymour Fort, *Report*, 1

made the application, and to Ah Gim, a Chinese trader at Suau Island. Blocks were purchased for a government bungalow at each of these two places and an additional large area obtained at Port Moresby for the principal settlement.

While the administration needed to acquire land for its headquarters and for a port, no real expectation was held of a sudden influx of settlers. Scratchley received only a scatter of applications for land - from a firm representing a German company, from a 'New Guinea Land and Emigration Company' of London, and from a third trader. The first was referred to the imperial government, the second Scratchley described as 'unworkable and premature' and the correspondence concerning the third was never completed. Seymour Fort, Scratchley's secretary, noted that New Guinea had been 'primarily annexed for a strategic purpose' and that 'that purpose had been obtained'. Nothing, he believed, could be done 'towards systematically developing the country and developing its resources until it is made an integral part of the Anglo-Australian political system', but that it was 'doubtful whether the country [could] ever be self-supporting, partly on account of the climate and partly owing to the attitude and condition of the natives'.⁵

Scratchley's successor, John Douglas, invited a horticulturist from Queensland, Carl Hartmann, to establish a government fruit garden in which a wide range of exotic fruits was planted. But while he purchased tracts from the villagers on the Veimauri River and considerably extended the boundaries available for the settlement at Port Moresby, Douglas felt unable to proceed further in alienating land. To applicants he 'invariably replied that [he] had no power to make grants or to confer immunities of this kind'. He received applications from a London syndicate which he described as possessed of 'very imperfect geographic data'; from John Strachan of Sydney, master mariner and explorer in the Torres Strait; from H. C. Everill, leader of the Australasian Geographic Society's Fly River Expedition of 1885; and from Theodore Bevan, an explorer in the Papuan Gulf. Bevan had made three voyages to southeast New Guinea, the third backed by the islands trading and shipping firm of Burns Philp. His application was for 200,000 acres. None of these bids could be considered. Alone among the applicants, H. O. Forbes, a naturalist, was given some kind of permission to buy a small area of land on the Astrolabe Range behind Port Moresby.⁶

The explorers' proposals for huge unconditional freehold grants were obviously speculations on the likelihood that the demands of future settlement would make the land valuable and Douglas commented,

⁵ Ibid., 24, 27.

⁶ BNGAR 1888, 7.

Experience in other countries has amply shown that the granting of land apart from conditions of settlement and a real equivalent obtained in some form of value is the most fatal impediment to future development. It would be the same in British New Guinea and though I do not think there are any valid reasons against the moderate alienation of land where there is so much which is of no utility whatever to the natives, care should be taken to secure some real equivalent in settlement and civilisation.⁷

Though some moderate alienation might be allowed in the future, of the likely availability of large areas of good land for extensive white settlement, he advised,

Now as far as has been learned there are no large areas of fine land that are not required by the natives . . . They . . . being a race of cultivators plant their food crops in the best lands sometimes at long distances from the village. The Government could not, without violating the law, dispossess these settled communities and it certainly does not possess the physical force that would be required to do so.⁸

The uncertainty of the Special Commissioners as to their powers and the transparently speculative nature of most of the proposals for grants of land made to them did not deter criticism from those who through vision or self-interest had hoped for more in the way of development. Andrew Goldie, Port Moresby's only resident trader and 'not a man to mince matters', thought the Protectorate 'a blow to the country' and a device inspired by the missionaries who wished to prevent settlement. Theodore Bevan had been confronted in Port Moresby by the Deputy Commissioner, Hugh Hastings Romilly, with the opinion that the widespread belief in Australia that settlement would be permitted in British New Guinea was 'very delusive'. Bevan called the Protectorate 'an effete and meretricious system' and 'a failure in every sense of the word', under which, as the small population of gold prospectors fluctuated downwards, the tenuous European foothold in the country appeared to be slipping away.⁹

In the very last month under this 'system', in August 1888, with the discovery of gold on Sudest, largest of the Louisiades, hundreds of miners entered the country from Queensland and Bevan admitted that 'should permanent [*sic*] deposits of the precious metal be found on a payable basis then of course will the future of New Guinea be assured'.¹⁰ But raised, as he said, in 'bleak, rainy, foggy London' he did not identify himself with the antipodean paradigm of the laconic miner or with the mateship of the diggers' camp. It was the country itself that held him in thrall. His first glimpse of the

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ Ibid., xxiii.

⁹ Theodore Bevan, *Toll, Travel and Discovery in British New Guinea* (London 1890), 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 272.

coast from the deck of a Chinese junk out of Cooktown ravished him as it was to ravish many another susceptible eye, for,

While sailing along the fine bold coast (characterised by lofty headlands, interspersed with lovely little coves and deep delicious bays) I, for the first time, beheld rich groves of the feathery coco-nut palm, overshadowing native villages which nestled at the foot of grassy round topped swelling hills, and could feast my eyes on a wealth of tropical form and colouring never before imagined, not even in my most vivid dreams of the isles of the Southern Seas. A truly beautiful picture, with the sun shining on it there; a right fair home for an ever-vexed race.¹¹

Gold in sufficient quantities might assure the future of New Guinea for a period, he agreed, but 'otherwise in any case' it would be plantation enterprise that 'must in course of time become the mainspring of the prosperity of this new British possession'. Bevan was but the first of those who recorded the deceptive attractions of the country and the nostalgia its memory could evoke. Tropical verdure, it seems, played upon the imagination, encouraging fantasies of self-sufficiency, avarice, ease or power in varying degrees among all, or almost all, who saw the islands. To the casualties of European societies, disillusioned by failure at home, the tropics represented escape. To those whose ambitions had been merely frustrated, island life might mean opportunities that were closed even in the colonies of white settlement. Infinite possibilities opened before the mind. There appeared in the case of New Guinea abundant land, a moist 'forcing house' where anything planted grew almost visibly in the perpetual summer, land possessed *of*, rather than *by*, a race of indolent children to be corrected and improved and brought to the service of a manifestly superior civilisation.

Theodore Bevan believed as did most of his contemporaries that white men should not be expected to carry out manual work at sea level in these latitudes, but he speculated that the mountainous interior would surely shelter stretches of land in a climate that could allow Europeans to settle and labour 'with accustomed ease'. The country must prove, he believed, 'one of the richest dependencies of the British Crown' with its 'noble rivers' and the 'towering Papuan heights keeping watch and ward to the northward of the vast Australian plain . . . like some mitre-shaped coronet over the brow of the young Australian dominion'.¹² Variations of such expectant prose, usually accompanying criticism, as did Bevan's, of each successive or preceding administration, were to be expressed again and again by others, captivated visitors and hopeful settlers, to the end of the period examined in this study and beyond.

¹¹ Ibid., 8-9.

¹² Ibid., 285.

The Possession

British New Guinea ceased to have the status of a Protectorate in September 1888 when with the arrival of Dr William MacGregor as Administrator British sovereignty was formally proclaimed and the country became an annexed Possession. It was, however, to be a British Possession administered at second hand. While his appointment was made by the Colonial Office, under an agreement between the imperial government and the governments of the three eastern Australian colonies made in 1887, MacGregor was to be responsible in the first place to the Governor of Queensland and not directly to the Colonial Secretary in London. Copies of all significant correspondence were to be forwarded to the 'Home' government where reserve powers were retained over all ordinances that had a bearing upon the native people. An undefined power of intervention was also allowed Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria which between them contributed £15,000 annually towards the revenue.

MacGregor had served under Sir Arthur Gordon in Fiji as Chief Medical Officer, Colonial Secretary and once as Administrator of the Colony. Though prepared when in New Guinea to put down endemic raiding and to establish fear of the government with violence if necessary, he shared with Gordon a respect for 'wild' mankind and a concern to protect native peoples from the destructive effects of white settlement - a necessary intrusion that would inevitably come neither he nor Gordon could doubt. It was fortunate that British New Guinea represented as near as possible a *tabula rasa* in colonisation - an opportunity to establish a 'new' territory free of some of the problems created in the development of other colonies and without the incubus of an entrenched white community in unregulated occupation of native lands.

Within months of his arrival MacGregor enacted in three ordinances fundamental measures to protect the indigenous inhabitants of the new colony from avoidable evils that had done much harm elsewhere. The first forbade dealings with the people in firearms, opium and alcohol; the second acknowledged the *prima facie* claim of the Papuans to ownership of all lands in the Possession - affirming that the Crown alone had the power to deal in land with the original owners; and the third closed the country to recruitment for labour abroad. Not immediately concerned with the encouragement of white settlement, MacGregor set about the urgent and congenial work of establishing the authority of the government among the population and of exploring a rugged domain greater in its extent than the United Kingdom. His success in pacification and exploration was judged ten years later by the visiting Queensland premier, Sir Hugh Nelson, as 'an achievement unprecedented in the world's history, one worthy of nineteenth century

civilisation, and one which reflects the highest honour upon those by whom it has been accomplished'.¹³

MacGregor was to describe the *Land Regulation Ordinance of 1888* in retrospect as the 'palladium of Papua' for the unprecedented protection it gave to the interests of a diverse, 'primitive' and fragmented population without a common body of law or the attributes of a state.¹⁴ Under the ordinance such lands as the Papuans were willing to sell could be purchased or leased by the Crown only when in each case the Administrator had satisfied himself after sufficient inquiry that the owners could be deprived permanently of the land in question and of its resources without predictable hardship. The process of purchase could be lengthy and complicated. Traditional tenure was not uniform and rights to the use of land might be based on inheritance through either the male or female line, on recent use by relatives, or on conquest. There could be rival claims. Even after land had been bought the Crown acquired no indefeasible title under the ordinance. Indefeasibility was to be asserted in 1899 but in other respects the protective provisions of the original land statute were to remain unchanged throughout the colonial period. A second land ordinance in 1889 allowed the Crown to grant to settlers, upon payment of survey fees, the freehold of lands it had acquired. But it was the *Crown Lands Ordinance of 1890* that was to provide a comprehensive framework for the extensive acquisition and alienation of crown grants that would permit white settlement to proceed at last on some scale.¹⁵ Or so, it was hoped, would be the result.

Part I of this ordinance allowed for consideration of the few purchase claims that antedated 4 September 1888, 2,645 acres of which were eventually recognised. Part II empowered the Administrator to declare areas of land unoccupied and unclaimed by the Papuans to be 'waste and vacant' and at the disposal of the Crown. Added to lands that were to be acquired by purchase these areas were to form a pool from which settlement blocks might be offered to enquirers. Part III contained provisions to prevent irregular settlement and illegal occupation of land.

Part IV set out the payments and conditions for crown grants. Agricultural land was offered in fee simple at 10s. an acre, or at 2s. 6d. an acre if improvement covenants were undertaken. Land on sandy foreshores or on coral limestone designated expressly for the planting of coconuts could be bought for 5s. an acre, pasturage for 2s. an acre, and small blocks for trading

¹³ Queensland Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*. 1898. Notes of trip to British New Guinea. Compiled for Lord Lamington and Sir Hugh Nelson. p. 29 (p. 1085).

¹⁴ Sir William MacGregor, Introduction to J. H. P. Murray's *Papua or British New Guinea* (London 1912).

¹⁵ Supplement to BNG *Government Gazette*, 23 Nov. 1889.

or fishing stations for £5 an acre. A fifth part set out the conditions for crown leases. Agricultural leases could be obtained at a shilling an acre without conditions or at 6d. an acre after three years with improvement conditions, with a maximum term of twenty-five years. Coconut land could be leased for up to sixty years without rent within the first five years in which a quarter of the land had to be planted up. Pasture could be leased for fifteen years at 2d. an acre.

While land could be alienated out of areas the Crown might acquire and hold in anticipation of demand, a prospective settler could also apply for Papuan held land. Since so much land appeared to be of little use to the population and the interest shown in land by *bona fide* settlers was to remain slight, a willingness on the part of the owners to sell seemed the only matter to decide and an officer, under MacGregor usually the Government Surveyor, would investigate and buy the land in question with its immediate alienation in mind. Indeed permissive occupancy was often allowed to traders and sometimes to settlers in expectation of a favourable conclusion to an application, and though no 'dealing' could take place under the law it was to his advantage if before he lodged his application the settler enquired among the villagers after land in which he was interested. All applications remained subject to the scrutiny of the Executive Council consisting of the Administrator (from 1895, the Lieutenant Governor), the Chief Judicial Officer, the Government Secretary, and the Treasurer, with from time to time the Government Surveyor as a provisional member.

In 1908 the Government Secretary would be uneasy about the consequences of officers purchasing land in haste and without sufficient care in marking the boundaries with the Papuans who were selling it, but there is no evidence that Papuan refusal to sell was ever overridden in the Executive Council and there was even then still no provision for any compulsory purchase of native lands.¹⁶ Collusion under this system between a private settler and a government officer purchasing land to defraud or intimidate Papuan owners, whilst not inconceivable, was hardly possible. The chain of official accountability was formidable and precise, and discovery of wrongdoing would mean disgrace and punishment. The small white community, like the communities from which it sprang, was deeply divided into occupational and class divisions each with its own loyalties and code and each prepared to allege corruption in another. Within easy corresponding distance a free and sensation-mongering Australasian press stood ever ready to exploit charges of malpractice. It was indeed ironical, if not perhaps surprising, that Australian parliaments and newspapers, the public voices of a settler society that had singularly failed, and was failing still, to protect the

¹⁶ See below p. 109.

Aboriginal people it had dispossessed in Australia, would be sensitive to any charge of failure to protect Papuans. For so they would prove.

In what became German New Guinea in 1884, Richard Parkinson had begun clearing land for the first coconut plantation at Ralum on the Gazelle Peninsula in 1882. But no planting on the generous scale of Ralum was to begin in British New Guinea while it retained the name. MacGregor sent prisoners to Daugo (Fisherman's Island) outside Fairfax Harbour in 1890 to plant coconuts. The work was supervised by a sandalwood getter, Robert Hunter. The object was to stimulate the nearby Port Moresby villagers to extend their groves by example. In 1894 the Administrator introduced a regulation for the compulsory planting of coconuts throughout the Possession - wherever enforcement was possible - in an effort to induce the Papuans to produce on their own account, for 'if they cannot greatly increase present exports and create new ones, they cannot exist long as a race'.¹⁷ But rapid increase in the productivity of the 'native race' could hardly have been expected and unless a revenue base could be found that would lead the colony to the stage where it was self-supporting the government could scarcely be said to have fulfilled the expectations generally held about colonies - that they both be self-sustaining and, it was to be hoped, profitable to their possessors. Only the 'intervention of Europeans' could promise these ends in the short term and at the same time give the Papuans the models and experience of civilised industry and commerce they must imitate to survive, for - MacGregor was also to conclude in 1898 - 'natives are not likely alone ever to add much to the exports of the colony'.¹⁸ Yet the settling of Europeans, possibly with families, and isolated from one another on their holdings, required an extension of law and order and a convincing guarantee of protection that could not immediately be given in 1890.

MacGregor had previously demonstrated his sympathy with what he regarded as the legitimate aspirations of white planters in Fiji where he had himself taken up land and planted for his private interest and profit. But Fiji was comparatively a finite sphere. There, pacification had meant subordinating the known hereditary and hierarchical authorities among the Fijians to the government and placing a control on a volatile settler community whose presence long antedated the cession to Britain. In New Guinea, where the Protectorate had not even raised a police force and where the native communities were smaller but more numerous, more distinct from each other in language and custom than the Fijians, constantly at war, and with 'chiefs' - if that was what they were to be called - that could scarcely be distinguished from their fellows, MacGregor had to begin upon a more uncertain foundation. The process of exploration alone in Papua would not end for another fifty years.

¹⁷ In R. B. Joyce, *Sir William MacGregor* (Melbourne 1971), 198. MacGregor to Governor of Queensland, 15 Nov. 1893 (Colonial Office file CO422/9/7848).

¹⁸ BNGAR 1897-98, xliii.

CHAPTER 2

Neither working settlers nor land-grabbers

BY 1892 MacGREGOR had begun to be anxious about the absence of development affirming in a letter introducing a first *Handbook for Intending Settlers in British New Guinea* that 'the circumstances of the Possession are such as now make it the duty of the Government to attract the working settler possessed of some capital'.¹ Exploration had revealed tracts of country that he thought were suitable for sugar, tea, coffee, and rice, and pacification had opened up areas where settlers could live in reasonable safety and where the men of the district, themselves newly free from threat, would be available as labour. Not only were coconuts and native foods cultivated on the government stations - in the Mekeo and at Rigo, Samarai and at Nivani Island - but consignments of economic plants imported from the botanic gardens at Rockhampton in Queensland had been sent to Resident Magistrates and Government Agents for trial elsewhere. By 1894 more than forty exotic fruits, spices, vegetables and trees were thriving on the Rigo station including cotton in sixteen varieties. Small quantities of seed, cuttings and root stock could be made available.

The difficulty appeared in finding enterprising settlers in a world wide open to the white man and offering many a more comfortable life and less risky prospect. For, though it might ravish the eye and imagination of those who saw the country, practical consideration of New Guinea untinted from afar could only suggest caution to prudent men of modest means for whom Australia itself provided much greater attraction. Very few settlers of the yeoman kind that MacGregor had in mind were to come to the country until long after he had gone. Instead, in the mid-nineties, interest abroad seemed restricted as before to a few speculators who were prepared to gamble on some eventual boom in land when large holdings minimally improved might be disposed of at great profit. To 'the speculator in land the country offers no field' MacGregor made quite clear in 1892, and until 1897

¹ *Handbook of Information for Intending Settlers in British New Guinea*, 1892. Preface (NLA, MS 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 1459).

he scorned all large proposals.² On leave in England in 1894 he grasped every opportunity offered by invitations to address learned societies to publicise the scientific and commercial attractions of British New Guinea. His speeches were published in journals and reported in newspapers, magnifying MacGregor's reputation - he was created a knight in 1895 and his position elevated from that of an Administrator to that of Lieutenant Governor - but without other result.

The first tentative commercial plantings of export crops were not for the most part made by settlers who had come for that purpose but by already resident traders, government officials and missionaries who with little or no capital turned to experiments with coconuts, coffee, rubber and other cultures from a variety of motives, chiefly as means of spreading the base of their incomes. Traders, such as Reginald Guise at Hula and Richard Ede in the Laughlins, planted groves of coconuts on their small blocks dotted around the coast both to encourage imitation among the Papuans and to ensure a steadier future supply of nuts for copra. Several of the 'planters' whose ambitions stretched to the establishment of plantations of a size that could wholly or substantially provide a living were to come from among these traders. Indeed, the distinction in southeast New Guinea as elsewhere in the Pacific between traders who aspired to become planters and many smaller planters who subsisted through the years of development on trade was blurred. After 1907 in Papua with the coming of plantation companies, the salaried manager, assistant or overseer became the more characteristic representative of the planter class than either of these categories of 'small' men.

The earliest plantation of an ambitious size in British New Guinea was the project of first manager of the Port Moresby branch of Burns, Philp and Company Limited, Walter Henry Gors. The property was at Dedele on Cloudy Bay where in partnership with a Norwegian trader, Thomas Andersen, Gors had acquired a crown grant of 440 acres in February 1894. Andersen lived at Dedele overseeing the work of coconut planting while operating a store Gors supplied from Port Moresby.³

Walter Gors had arrived in the country in 1891, the first of four brothers and a sister to come and eventually take up land. He gained a reputation for indefatigable work on behalf of Burns Philp and the company was for a

² Ibid. One smaller 'speculation' MacGregor did entertain was the grant in 1894 of 1,280 acres at Vaigana near Port Moresby to Dr Lamberto Loria, 'doctor of Mathematics' and ethnographer. The land remained undeveloped and was sold to R. A. Gordon in 1914 following Loria's death in Rome. 'Gordon's Estate' and 'Waigani' (the former Vaigana) became suburbs of Port Moresby in later years.

³ Andersen committed suicide in November 1899 after the discovery that he had 'robbed' his own (and Gors's) store (*BNGAR 1899-1900*, 4).

period locally identified with him. He bought and sold anything that might reap a profit, from 'shark fins to pearls, massoi bark to wild rubber, paradise bird feathers to human skulls', but principally copra.⁴ Having bought out Andrew Goldie, Burns Philp were the suppliers of traders and the bankers and creditors to the whole white community from Mullins Harbour to Daru, and the company issued its own One Pound and Five Pound notes negotiable as far south as Sydney. Its monopoly of both wholesale and retail trade was soon challenged in Port Moresby by Captain C. R. Baldwin, a former employee, and at Samarai, where there was a separate branch, it was rivalled from the beginning by the firm of Whitten Brothers. Nonetheless, until Dutch vessels were attracted to Papua in the new century and provided some competition in overseas shipping, Burns Philp completely dominated the purchase of copra and the modest export trade of both ports.

In 1897, Port Moresby employees of Burns Philp also began clearing land for *arabica* coffee on the first portion of 250 acres of a freehold block that Gors had acquired as a staff 'sanatorium' at Warirata, over 2,000 feet above the Laloki gorge thirty miles inland from the port. It was to be developed and maintained by staff in rotation as they took local leave. As well as the coffee which flourished, tea, passion fruit, pineapples and cinnamon were grown, and for a period until Gors left British New Guinea in 1902, irregular supplies of Warirata produce reached the town.

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Division, there had appeared at last - almost as if from nowhere - a private settler prepared to take up planting with vigour. Indeed, when the Royal Commissioners of 1906 arrived in Papua, as British New Guinea had just been renamed, his was still the 'most systematic attempt at cocoanut planting' in the country and the only plantation in production that had been laid down by an experienced planter. The plantation was on Panasesa, an island in the Conflict Group seventy miles east of Samarai.⁵ The Conflicts comprising a circle of very small islets under 1,800 acres in extent were uninhabited and had been leased with an option to convert to freehold by Henry Alexander Wickham in 1896.

Widely travelled and subsequently to be given late recognition and a knighthood for his exploit in 1876 in securing the original *Para (Hevea Brasiliensis)* rubber seeds from which the entire rubber industry of Southeast Asia was developed, Wickham was fifty years old when he came to New Guinea. After a daunting experience as a planter in South America

⁴ *Papuan Courler*, 22 May 1935, Obituary: Walter H. Gors.

⁵ CPP 1907, p.137-459, British New Guinea, *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into present conditions...*, xvi (p. 152).

he had held positions as a district commissioner in British Honduras and as Commissioner for the Introduction of the Para India-rubber Tree and Inspector of Forests for the Government of India. Settling for a time in Australia he had attempted to grow coffee in North Queensland, and on coming to New Guinea he interested himself at first in the latex bearing trees and vines that its forests offered. What could have prompted this restless man, comparatively late in life, to commit himself to a lease of a remote atoll on which to grow coconuts? Perhaps, since he arrived in 1895, his had been a solitary response to MacGregor's advertisement of the country in 1894. Perhaps he needed to provide for retirement; or perhaps his interest had been impulsively engaged, like Theodore Bevan's, by the tropical verdure - for Wickham was a talented amateur artist illustrating a book he wrote on rubber production in 1908 with his own work. He was remembered as 'every inch a pioneer, broad-shouldered and heavily built with an extraordinary long and wavy moustache, his physical strength . . . as great as his resolution'.⁶

His isolation in the Conflicts only apparent, Henry Wickham was singularly able to draw on the wider planting world for information and assistance and upon a long personal experience of practical experiment with new materials and processes. Seeking to exploit the full commercial possibilities of his lease he employed Papuans to dive not only for the usual shell, pearls and *bêche-de-mer*, but also for marine sponges which he was the first to treat and export. In 1899 he brought a marine biologist to the lagoon to test whether pearls could be artificially cultured there. In the boom of 1910, regarded as an authority on both plantations and the country, Wickham was to commend Papua to potential rubber investors.⁷ He had continued to travel, spending less and less time at Panasesa until 1911 when he assigned control of his Conflict Islands Planting Association to a new company in which he retained an interest.

Despite the beginnings recently made by Walter Gors and Henry Wickham, as yet too small to notice, MacGregor regretted in the *Annual Report* of 1895-96 that 'no European planting on a scale of any importance has been started'.⁸ No new grants at all had been issued in the year, but now an effort was mounted to rapidly increase the areas of obviously good land that the Crown could offer. The Government Surveyor, John Cameron,

⁶ *The Times* (London), 28 Sept. 1928. Obituary: Sir Henry Wickham. An obituary in the *Papuan Courier* (14 Dec. 1928) mentions Wickham's pioneering in 'New Guinea' without detail. He had been knighted in 1920.

⁷ ANUABL Deposit 95, M37, British New Guinea Development Co. Ltd, London Office Records, BNGD Prospectus (1910), p. 9.

⁸ BNGAR 1895-96, xxxiii.

purchased 31,000 acres of the best lands he could find around the head of Milne Bay in the Eastern Division and at Cloudy Bay, Domara, Marshall Lagoon and on the Kemp Welch river in the Central Division. The blocks selected by Cameron in 1895-96, attractive to the eye, were among the first to be offered to investors and taken up a decade later.

In 1894 Cameron himself had been granted the freehold of an area of over 2,000 acres in the Kabadi district on the western side of Galley Reach, the estuary of the Laloki, Vanapa and Brown rivers midway between Port Moresby and Yule Island. He was the first of several government officers to whom MacGregor saw no reason to deny the privilege of taking up land. In retrospect, Sir Francis Winter, Chief Judicial Officer under both MacGregor and his successor, thought that if it might be conceded that in permitting his officers these interests MacGregor had departed from strict observance of the 'rules of the civil service', he had clearly done so only 'for the benefit of the country'. Cameron did not live to develop his grant but in 1897 the Lieutenant Governor encouraged David Ballantine, Treasurer, Collector of Customs and Resident Magistrate (RM), to begin the planting of coffee on 100 acres granted to him in the Sogeri district, a rolling plateau behind the Astrolabe Range of which Warirata was a spur. Ballantine had only recently 'pacified the tribes' between Sogeri and the Owen Stanley Range and his plantation might have been a device to establish a European presence near the periphery of control.

By 1897 too, Albert Charles English, the Government Agent responsible for the plant nurseries at Rigo, forty miles southeast of Port Moresby, had planted out a private estate of fifty acres of native rubber. Small quantities of this rubber had been exported since 1895 and the value of the trade exceeded £1,000 in 1902-03. The latex was extracted from various trees, principally the *Ficus Rigo*, or *Maktmaki*, and was gathered usually by Papuans employed by sandalwood getters. A regulation was passed in 1895 to protect the trees in what MacGregor hoped would become a 'new native industry'. A. C. English sent samples to London at the time where they were regarded as the equal in quality of the best rubber then coming out of the Amazon. Assured by such comparisons he proceeded to plant *Ficus Rigo* on grants he had obtained in 1894 neighbouring the government station. By 1901 he had 12,000 of these trees together with about fifty *Ficus Elastica*. A Londoner who had come to the country to trade in bird of paradise plumes, English had been appointed Government Agent at Rigo under the Protectorate. He accompanied MacGregor on several journeys of exploration and was commended with his constabulary for 'pluck and gallantry' in an engagement with 'hill tribes' near Dedele in 1894. Becoming an Assistant Resident Magistrate (ARM) after MacGregor's departure, he was accused by Captain Baldwin before the Royal Commission in 1906 of

neglecting his official duties to engage in trade and his other pursuits which by then included, in addition to the rubber plantation, Barodobo, a potentially profitable 'experiment' with sisal (*agave sisalana*).⁹

Denying neglect of his responsibilities, English defended himself on the grounds that as the civil service made no provision for the retirement of its officers he had been but prudent and industrious in his spare time. Undoubtedly impressed by the ARM's undertakings and prepared to use them to illustrate what private enterprise could accomplish, the Commissioners could only agree that English's interests and duties were in conflict. He resigned from the service in March 1907 remaining a planter at Rigo until 1942.

After the miners, the missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS), the New Guinea Anglican Mission, the Methodist Overseas Mission, and the Congregation of the Sacred Heart were the largest group of white residents. They were clearly the more widely distributed and settled part of the community and more than 140 grants - mostly of under five acres - had been made to the missions by 1898. As the mission stations, like those of the government, were expected to become largely self-sufficient in foods, exotic trees and vegetables were inevitably planted. MacGregor recommended that the missions also establish small plantations of economic trees from which the Papuans could obtain 'seed and example'. He thought he could 'confidently expect valuable assistance from Dr Ginocchi [at the head of the Catholic Mission in the Mekeo district] in this matter'.¹⁰ By 1895 *arabica* coffee was bearing 'splendidly' on mission land on Hall Sound. In the years to come a large copra plantation was indeed developed by the Sacred Heart Fathers on Yule Island. But while there was to be some expansion of mission plantations, most remained more horticultural and educational than commercial and were never in British New Guinea or Papua to compare in size or significance with the mission estates, both Catholic and Lutheran, in German New Guinea.¹¹

Keeping out the Land Grabber

In his last *Annual Report* in 1897-98, MacGregor surveyed the whole decade of his administration. There was much to find satisfaction with in the extension of law and order and in the work of exploration, but economic development had been negligible. Scarcely more than 5,000 acres had been granted for agricultural purposes in ten years and the situation of the colony *qua* colony had become desperate. He wrote

⁹ CPP 1907, 297-8, *Royal Commission...*, 2-5, 31-2.

¹⁰ BNGAR 1893-94, 44.

¹¹ By 1900 mission grants had increased to 340. See below p. 37 and n.

The time has come when agricultural development should be pushed in the Possession with as much perseverance as has been employed in forcing peace on the different hostile tribes to prepare for it . . . industrial development through agriculture is now a pressing necessity if British New Guinea is to be made a British colony in anything more than name. The conditions under which land has been offered for some years for settlement have been very easy but they have failed to attract settlers. There will be no help for this condition of matters except to grant facilities and inducements as may attract settlers of the kind now required. There is already undoubtedly as much land known and available for occupation as, if utilized, would suffice to make the colony self-supporting.¹²

Failure to attract independent settlers and the urgent need to extend the revenue base now made MacGregor treat with interest and approval the proposal of a British New Guinea Syndicate formed in London early in 1897 to take up lands in New Guinea for large scale plantation development. The promoters of the scheme, John Lowles MP, Sir Somers Vine and Sir Charles Kennedy, sought and obtained the support of the then Premier of Queensland, Sir Hugh Nelson. Early in 1898, after MacGregor had drafted an agreement acceptable to Vine and Lowles, an ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council in Port Moresby that allowed grants totalling up to 250,000 acres to be made progressively to the Syndicate over eight years after which their options would lapse. The Colonial Office had rejected an early proposal of the syndicators that they be given a charter. For the first time the colonial governments that contributed to the revenue chose to exercise their right of intervention to oppose allowance of the ordinance.

Opposition was roused by a series of articles in the *Melbourne Age* in May 1898 written with the assistance and inspiration of Theodore Bevan. From time to time since 1888 Bevan had sought to use his contribution to exploration as a lever to obtain large grants of land for projects varying from plantations to gold dredging. Vague and blatantly speculative, these applications had not commanded sufficient capital to make them credible and had been refused. Now MacGregor was accused of partiality in giving preference to the 'British' scheme over those of an 'Australian' and at the same time denounced for betraying the principles he had earlier espoused by being lately prepared to allow a 'monopoly' in pursuit of huge concessions into the country.¹³

Though MacGregor's instructions obliged him to consult only with the government of Queensland which had hitherto borne the full responsibility of representing the contributing colonies, the *Age* asserted that in a matter

¹² *BNGAR 1897-98*, 59.

¹³ Queensland Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*, 1898, contains copies of a large correspondence over the BNG Syndicate. The *Age* (Melbourne) articles appeared on 10, 11, 16, 17 and 25 May 1898.

of the importance of the current proposal the Victorian and New South Wales governments should have been expressly consulted. Whether this view was justified or not, its assertion made it politically perilous for these governments to condone the scheme, and when a new Queensland ministry itself withdrew its support, all three colonies declared their opposition. MacGregor's defence of his actions was ignored in the furore of populist indignation against 'speculators', 'land grabbers' and the 'astute boomers' who would tie up the best lands in the Possession against Australian enterprise. The Colonial Office, itself reserved about the good faith of the promoters, was yet reluctant to disallow the ordinance after matters had proceeded so far and did so only after insisting that compensation be paid to the Syndicate. A disappointed visionary and an opportunist and sensational press had combined to manipulate governments and public opinion by appealing to an anglophobia that jostled with imperial sentiment in the minds of most Australians. Yet there was no substance in the assumption that Australian capital was eager to enter New Guinea or that any serious Australian enterprise had been hindered. New Guinea, it seemed, was to be an Australian preserve and to be exploited by Australians when they were ready to do so. That was all.

In defending his actions over the Syndicate, the Lieutenant Governor referred to failure in attempts he had made in the years since 1890 to interest large Australian firms in agricultural investment in New Guinea.¹⁴ But a year after the collapse of the 'British' scheme and after Sir William Macgregor had left the Possession to become Governor of Lagos, a conference was held in Sydney between George Ruthven LeHunte, his successor in New Guinea, and the 'Prime Ministers' of Queensland and New South Wales to consider LeHunte's proposals for a new land ordinance and the financing of the administration as Australian federation approached. Between sessions of the conference, James Burns, chairman and managing director of Burns, Philp and Company, asked LeHunte to consider the draft prospectus of a company to be floated to purchase and develop 100,000 acres for agriculture and 100,000 for pasture in British New Guinea with capital of £100,000.¹⁵ In reaction to what had been decided to be the speculative and excessive nature of the British New Guinea Syndicate's proposals, the conference had only the previous day agreed that under the new ordinance no grants of more than ten square miles (6,400 acres) could

¹⁴ Queensland Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*, 1898. MacGregor to Governor of Queensland, 31 Dec. 1897. See also R. B. Joyce's 'The British New Guinea Syndicate Affair' in the *Journal of the Queensland Historical Society*, Vol. V, 1953.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1899, p. 20. 'Notes of a meeting held at Sydney on the 15th and 16th August 1899 to discuss land and financial matters of British New Guinea'.

be made without the consent of the contributing colonies and that no grants exceeding 50,000 acres were to be made at all. LeHunte suggested to Burns that his company, if floated, might accept 50,000 acres in fee simple and 50,000 acres in leasehold. Burns found this unacceptable on the grounds that no investor could be expected to put his money into the leases, which as the law stood were only for a twenty-five year term. Obviously startled by the sudden emergence of an Australian interest, the conference, with great inconsistency, inserted a provision in the ordinance that allowed that the granting of areas larger than 50,000 acres freehold could be permitted after the new law had been in operation for six months.

In September 1900 the Hall Sound Company was registered. The provisional board of directors included James Burns, Sir Malcolm McEacharn - a Melbourne shipowner, J. T. Walker and Sir George Dibbs of Sydney, and Walter Gors, the promoter of the company and 'local' director in Port Moresby. The capital of the company was now to be £50,000 in £1 shares of which 30,000 were to be issued at 1s. on application with calls of 1s. to be made at not less than monthly intervals. Gors as promoter was to receive 3,000 fully paid up shares 'under certain conditions' - presumably that he undertook to manage the affairs of the company in British New Guinea for a specified period.¹⁶

As its name indicated, the company sought to acquire land around Hall Sound, the sheltered anchorage between Yule Island and the mouth of the St Joseph or Angabunga River seventy miles northwest of Port Moresby. Within its powers under the new ordinance the government proceeded immediately to make an initial grant to the company of 5,000 acres near Inawaia, a village some miles up the Angabunga, and of a portion of Yule Island for sheds, a store and a wharf.

The Hall Sound Company had the enthusiastic support of LeHunte and of the Queensland government now led by Robert Philp, one of the founders of Burns Philp, and 'this first large *bona fide* attempt by an Australian company to develop the untouched resources of British New Guinea' was commended to the Victorian and New South Wales governments for approval.¹⁷ But, while they had been prepared to combine with Queensland to oppose the intrusion of a large alien 'British' enterprise into an Australian preserve, the premiers in Sydney and Melbourne were by no

¹⁶ Ibid., 1900, p. 853. 'Application of Hall Sound Company to take up land in British New Guinea'. This contains further correspondence and includes the Hall Sound Company Prospectus. McEacharn and Walker were also directors of Burns Philp.

¹⁷ Ibid., 855 (p. 3). The Chief Secretary of Queensland to the Prime Minister of Victoria, 28 Sept. 1900.

means prepared now to allow even an Australian company into the field without scrutiny, and both asked the Queenslanders for more information.

Burns let it be known through LeHunte that if difficulties were put in the way of an agreement then the company was unlikely to proceed. This may have been perceived as a ploy to induce compliance with the scheme, but almost certainly it represented a disinclination to pursue very far a course of action essentially inspired by Walter Gors that to Burns involved at best some considerable risk. The prospectus had drawn attention to the success of the plantings at Warirata and it acknowledged Gors's unrivalled qualifications for overseeing the work, but no agricultural development had been undertaken in British New Guinea that could as yet give some guide as to commercial possibilities. Indeed, the prospectus betrayed this uncertainty where it spoke of one of the principal objects of the company being 'to test the adaptability of the land for tropical agriculture'.¹⁸ The capital was scarcely adequate for the development of the lands Gors and Burns hoped to obtain and unless further capital was raised, and this probably outside Australia, then the company might certainly be considered a speculative venture. And so the premiers in Sydney and Melbourne concluded.

If British New Guinea had little attraction for the small settler and 'if this scheme is also set aside from want of encouragement', the Queensland government responded, the question arose as to

What offers which have for their object the development, on an advantageous scale, of the resources of British New Guinea, are to be accepted at all, or are any beginnings to be made to such development except those which have no other recommendations than that of being so small as to contribute only in an inappreciable degree to the prospect of the Possession becoming a self-sustaining province?¹⁹

At his first and perhaps only 'glance', the New South Wales premier, Sir William Lyne, felt that the proposal was open to the same objections as those raised against the British New Guinea Syndicate. That the Hall Sound Company was Australian, that it asked now for no concessions outside the recently amended land law, and that the governments of the contributing colonies were being consulted about its proposals, failed to sway him. He announced without debate in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in November 1900 that he firmly opposed the scheme on the grounds that he did 'not think that a lease of so large an area should be granted'.²⁰ It was the last exercise of power with respect to New

¹⁸ Ibid., 853 (p. 2). Prospectus.

¹⁹ Ibid., 856 (p. 4).

²⁰ New South Wales, *Parliamentary Record*, Nov. 1900.

Guinea by one of the Australian colonial governments before responsibility for dealings with the Possession passed to the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia in January 1901.

LeHunte was greatly disappointed and raised the question of the Hall Sound Company for reconsideration by the Federal Government. Lengthy debates on New Guinea in both houses of Parliament in their first session included reference to the scheme but rhetoric laden opposition to 'land grabbers' in general so clouded the air that members could scarcely distinguish between the reviled 'Somers Vine' syndicate and the Australian company despite the presence in the House of Representatives of Sir Malcolm McEacharn and in the Senate of J. T. Walker.²¹

The populist Western Australian senator, Staniforth Smith, visited the Hall Sound Company land on his first visit to British New Guinea in 1903. Before leaving Australia he had heard that the company 'was composed of men who were genuine investors desirous of putting their money in the development of valuable industries'. He had gone 'at considerable trouble . . . inland to inspect their property and found ten acres planted with chillies which practically grow wild. The whole staff consisted of a Samoan and two Papuans'.²² He was told that the promoters were still hoping to obtain a much larger freehold grant before floating a company in London with enough capital to develop the lands acquired. In a report Smith denounced the venture as another speculative fraud. He was not seriously challenged.

The larger grant was never obtained, James Burns was never to be induced to invest further in Papuan lands and the Hall Sound Company died. Despite the promising beginnings made by Walter Gors, Burns Philp cautiously avoided direct interest in plantations in southeast New Guinea until the thirties when a few largely planted-up estates could be bought at or for less than the cost of their development. On many occasions in the intervening years planters reflected resentfully that the failure of the company to undertake the risks of planting - while living off those who did - demonstrated a farsightedness on the part of the 'octopus of the Pacific' they wished they had themselves possessed.

²¹ Commonwealth of Australia. *Parliamentary Debates*. (Representatives), p. 7451, 19 Nov. 1901; (Senate), pp. 7467, 7479-81, 7486, 20 Nov. 1901.

²² NLA, Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 1461, 'British New Guinea with a preface on Australia's policy in the Pacific', by Senator Staniforth Smith, 21 July 1903. Portions taken from articles in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), *Morning Herald* (Perth), and the *Kalgoorlie Miner*.

CHAPTER 3

The interregnum

MACGREGOR HAD FRAMED the terms and fees payable for land under the 1890 ordinance when he could not have predicted the difficulties in obtaining settlers and when it was hoped that land sales would come for a period to make a considerable contribution to the revenue. If the original cost to the government of the lands it had acquired had averaged, as he estimated, at about 1s. an acre, then the extent to which the revenue might have benefited if demand for land had been greater can be appreciated. But in 1899 LeHunte thought that the charges were excessive and had been a positive discouragement to settlement. Francis Winter, the Chief Judicial Officer, in a memorandum accompanying a proposal for changes LeHunte wished to make in the law, pointed out that both the annual rents of pastoral leases, equivalent to £5 3s. a square mile, and their term of fifteen years would seem to compare very unfavourably with what selectors or graziers could obtain in Australia.¹ In addition to the new conditions it contained requiring the Lieutenant Governor to gain the approval of the governments of the contributing colonies before making any large grant, the *Lands Ordinance of 1899* considerably lowered the charges for crown lands. The government could now sell freehold agricultural blocks for a shilling an acre, virtually at cost. Annual rents on pastoral leases were reduced to a penny an acre and the term extended to twenty-five years.

Letters Patent transferring the government of British New Guinea to the new Commonwealth of Australia were finally issued on 18 March 1902 and Sir George LeHunte left the country in the March of the following year. Due chiefly to the efforts in the Federal Parliament of a strong temperance lobby which sought, in the interests of the native people, to impose complete prohibition on the import of alcohol into New Guinea, including any for white consumption, and to the filibustering pressure of a few members influenced by the principles of Social Credit who wanted to end the freehold grant system, there occurred a delay of over four years before a new constitution for the country to be called the Territory of Papua was brought into operation in September 1906. This long period of uncertainty about the policies that would be followed under direct Australian rule was

¹ Queensland Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. 4, 1899, p. 944.

prolonged still further by the need to await the outcome of a Royal Commission brought on by dissension in the government service and a delay in the appointment of the first Australian Lieutenant Governor until 1908.

Between 1898 and the end of the interregnum in 1906 serious interest in taking up land holdings limited to a size that could be approved in Port Moresby without referring the applications to Australia remained, as it had been since 1890, almost wholly confined to a few residents who had come to the country for some purpose other than to plant. In 1899 ten square miles of unoccupied land on the Musa River in the Northern Division were selected by the Government Medical Officer (GMO) at Samarai, Dr Cecil Vaughan, for a rubber plantation. Granted permissive occupancy, Vaughan floated a small company in Australia to develop the block. Though it had been agreed that the land should not be more than twenty miles from the coast it was soon found that the area chosen was subject to seasonal flooding and a second selection had to be made a further twenty miles inland. LeHunte used the example of Vaughan's original selection to show that even when land could be inspected by a prospective settler in person its nature could be unknown.² Since he doubted that very large tracts of good land were available in any one place, a thorough inspection by a buyer was imperative both in his own interest and that of the reputation of the country. In the same year a large block was taken up on the Oriomo River opposite Daru in the Western Division. Again country for which the Papuans had little use, its fertility an illusion, this land could also be inundated by both flood and tide. In fact, very large stretches of low-lying coastline from the Dutch border almost to Hall Sound in the south and from the German border to Cape Vogel in the north, accessible and seemingly fertile, if their vegetation was any guide, were vulnerable to flooding. Vaughan commenced clearing the Musa block but neither of these properties was developed.

More successful were plantations begun on a less ambitious scale. In the Eastern Division the first plantings since Henry Wickham's were on three small blocks developed after 1898 around the shores of Milne Bay. Bubuleta, the oldest, was the first experiment in planting of the Samarai merchant, William Whitten. A Londoner who had arrived in British New Guinea during the Protectorate, Whitten was joined in 1892 by his brother Robert and the firm of Whitten Brothers grew into a prosperous agency and trading business with several modest plantations, a Port Moresby branch and stores on the goldfields. Advancing credit with some generosity to the

² Ibid., 938.

miners and smaller traders of the Eastern, South Eastern, and Northern Divisions, their position in the east paralleled that of Walter Gors and Burns Philp and Company in the western divisions. William Whitten bought the original Dedele Plantation from Walter Gors after Gors left for Australia in 1902.

Killerton, the second development on Milne Bay, covered a small island and was the first of a string of properties on the coasts near Samarai developed for income and example by Charles Abel, a prominent LMS missionary and a pioneer in the technical education of the Papuans. In 1910 Abel set up Enesi Plantations Limited to manage these properties. His interest in developing the 'industrial' side of Christian mission work was to lead him out of the LMS and to the formation of the Kwato Extension Association in 1917.³ The third plantation, Ramaga, on the south side of the bay, was not begun until 1902. It was developed slowly by John Clunn, a Cooktown miner who had become proprietor of a Samarai hotel. Another miner, William Shedden, in partnership with John Gusth Nelsson, a Swede and trader to the miners on the Murua (Woodlark) goldfield, and Charles Arbouin, Burns Philps' first agent at Samarai, began development of a plantation on Doini or Blanchard Island to the south and in sight of Samarai in 1903.

Also in the Eastern Division a naturalist and major collector for Lord Rothschild's Tring Museum, Albert Meek, had been granted 300 acres on Goodenough in the D'Entrecasteaux in 1896 in partnership with a Woodlark miner, James Thompson.⁴ The land was reported the following year to be largely planted up but seems to have been soon abandoned.⁵ In 1899 Meek was clearing land for a coconut plantation and 'farm' on Sariba Island on the China Strait near Samarai.⁶ He imported a herd of cattle from 'south' to keep the ground clear under the palms and to supply the nearby township with milk. But by 1906, his experiment with planter life evidently exhausted, he had resumed collecting in the Solomons.

Cows were also used in later years to maintain clear ground under coconuts at Loani, a plantation on the mainland opposite Samarai. This property of 500 acres had been partly cleared and planted by a brother of the LMS missionary Fred Walker and taken up in the brothers' joint names in 1897. It was to pass in 1909 to Elias Solomon, a settler possibly from

³ See David Wetherell's *Reluctant Mission: The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea 1891-1942* (Queensland 1977), 215-24, for a discussion of the industrial missions. See also pp. 81-2 below.

⁴ Miriam Rothschild, *Dear Lord Rothschild* (Baltimore 1983). Over 500 of Meek's letters are held in the Rothschild Archive.

⁵ *BNGAR 1896-97*, 49.

⁶ A. S. Meek, *A Naturalist in Cannibal Land* (London 1913), 100.

Mauritius, who had overseen a government nursery at Wagawaga on Milne Bay in 1907. Solomon planted rubber, a few *cacao* trees and vanilla.

In the Central Division a third plantation was begun in the Sogeri District. In 1902 the Chief Clerk and Registrar of the Central Court, Charles Grant Garrioch, went into partnership with Henry Lesueur Greene to plant coffee on a block not far from David Ballantine's. Both of these men, it appears, had also come to New Guinea from Mauritius. Both were acquainted with plantations rather than experienced in them. Greene, who managed the property for the partnership, was a former bank clerk, aged twenty-four. He had, he said, come to the country for his health and had found Sogeri favourable; more probably Garrioch had invited him to come and try his luck in obtaining a government 'billet' for which Greene was to make several approaches. In addition to *coffea arabica*, Garrioch and Greene planted the first *Para* or *hevea* rubber in the country at Sagoro Tano, about eight acres in December 1903.

In October 1903 a small grant of land was made to Edward Robert Anderson at Hisiu beach, a long sweep of coast on Redscar Bay to the west of Galley Reach. Here he planted the first commercial palms in a district that was to attract others. In 1905 he was joined as neighbour by Alearce Savery Anthony, yet another settler from Mauritius, who had managed for David Ballantine at Sogeri. Described as a 'coloured' man, Anthony may have come to New Guinea as a personal servant of the Government Secretary, Anthony Musgrave, but became a collector of specimens both natural and cultural for European museums. At Hisiu he obtained a lease of 640 acres.⁷

At the two extremities of the country interest remained slight. In the South Eastern Division the first grant for a coconut plantation was not made until 1903 when 200 acres at the eastern end of Rossel (Yela) Island were acquired by the island's only resident white trader, Frank Osborne. In the Western Division apart from the Oriomo River lands and a small experiment recorded as having been made with peanuts on Gebaro Island in 1899 by Charles 'Peanut Charlie' Gillingham, there was no further development before 1905, when Mibu Island, at the mouth of the Fly River, was leased to the Western British New Guinea Trading Company, an ambitiously named venture of a Daru trader and recruiter Captain William

⁷ At the time of his death Anthony claimed Malta as his birthplace. (*Papuan Courier*, 24 Sept. 1920.) He was also believed to have been 'MacGregor's taxidermist'. He bequeathed his property to Lord Roberts' Incorporated Soldiers and Sailors Help Society. The Port Moresby publican, T.D. Ryan, bought the plantation in 1921 and in 1928 sold it to Dr C.C. Simson. (For Simson, see below p. 102.)

Luff.⁸ The lease was forfeited undeveloped in 1908. Mibu was found to comprise mostly tidal flats and the only area on the island suitable for coconuts was eventually planted in 1914 by John Cowling, a Thursday Island trader and pearl buyer who had kept a store at the Pahoturi River since 1899.

While these modest developments were all that stood out in commercial plantation agriculture in the interregnum, the interstices of opportunity had continued to fill with even smaller undertakings. In 1894 an 'energetic settler', Richard Edward Weaver, had begun cultivation of a market garden on the Laloki River near Sapphire Creek, demonstrating after all, Francis Winter observed, 'that a European can do manual labour' on the coastal lowlands.⁹ Weaver was representative of a class of perhaps fifty settlers who could make little claim to being either traders or planters in the conventional sense. They included a handful of 'Manilla' men, several Chinese and Lascars, a variety of South Sea Islanders - castaways and absconding crew, two Malay servants left behind by the Italian naturalist Luigi D'Albertis in 1876, runaway convicts from the French penal settlement at Nouméa, and English and Australian 'knockabouts'. They gathered sandalwood, pearls, trochus and trepang, or drifted in and out of prospecting. They subsisted as best they could on small holdings and what the country could offer, intermarrying with Papuans and heavily dependent on their goodwill. Some like Robert Hunter, sandalwood and wild rubber collector, were relatively prosperous. Most never were. Hunter planted cotton at Obu on Hisiu Beach in 1898 and, with his brother George, was employed for a time by the government.

The European population was still very small, rising to 573 in 1904. With concentrations only on the goldfields and at Samarai and Port Moresby, this community was widely distributed in ones and twos along the coasts. Possessed as they were of artefacts of great novelty, and pursuing their mysterious ends often with a display of swagger, bluff and exaggerated idiosyncrasy that would hardly have been tolerated at 'home', their very scarcity enhanced the notoriety of these strangers among the Papuans. Among these Europeans and their Papuan employees a mental map of British New Guinea was already being formed upon which the isolated stations and settlements connected by ketch, launch and lugger or the government yacht, the *Merrle England*, appeared a formidable and reassuring network, the distances between points seemed less than they were, and two or three whites together might be felt almost to comprise a town.

⁸ BNGAR 1898-99, xxvii.

⁹ BNGAR 1894-95, xxvii.

In the interregnum land acquired by the Crown far exceeded the land actually alienated for settlement or development. In 1899 over 326,000 acres of the Laloki, Brown and Goldie river lands between Port Moresby and the Astrolabe Range were declared waste and vacant. This area, the largest so declared, had been the hunting grounds of the coastal Motu and Koitapu peoples and a buffer territory between them and the Koiaris of the range. In the same year 12,500 acres were purchased from the Koiaris between Warirata and Sogeri. After LeHunte had asked the Queensland government for help, the staff of surveyors was increased temporarily to six with a draughtsman and two assistants in November 1900. In the following year there were seventy applications for land. Sixteen were made by Christian missions, fifteen of which were granted. Of the remainder, nine were withdrawn, six refused, and twenty three remained under consideration at the end of the year. The total area granted amounted to only 1,115 acres nearly half of which went to the missions. The total area applied for had been 202,529 acres, including a resubmitted application of the Hall Sound Company and another for a block of over 100,000 acres at Mullens Harbour that LeHunte favoured but was unable to consider - presumably because the applicant who made it could not command sufficient capital. This applicant was the Hon. Richard de Moleyns, son of an Irish peer and probably living on a remittance. He had entered the government service briefly in 1900 and later worked as an assistant on various plantations. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was to know 'Dirty Dick' in Samarai during the war years as 'a thoroughbred noble figure. Drunk as a sponge, so long as there is whiskey about . . . After sobering up . . . with strikingly good manners . . . [but] little intellectual culture'.¹⁰ De Moleyns committed suicide in Samarai hospital in 1916 and his family repudiated his debts. If he was exceptional in his origins and manners, there were others who shared his style of life on the fringes of the white community.

By 1904 lands purchased from the Papuans amounted to 353,614 acres and areas declared 'waste and vacant' totalled 338,988 acres, while the area actually alienated to settlers was 22,099 acres or 19,576 acres if mission grants were excepted. Christopher Robinson, Winter's successor as CJO and Acting Administrator in 1903, submitted further recommendations for changes in the land law. He advocated that the Crown should at last assume the radical title to all lands whether presently occupied or claimed under customary tenure or not, but that future alienation should only be allowed under lease. A questionnaire circulated

¹⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London 1967), 39.

among the white residents had brought answers overwhelmingly favouring the continuance of the freehold grant system but even so, as Robinson noted, the demand for land had been 'very slight'.¹¹ A system of land alienation based on leasing, he pointed out, protected planters from creditors, for the lessee was saved a large initial outlay that could instead be turned to development. Rents could be scaled according to the increasing capacity of an enterprise to pay and would provide the government with a continuing and direct source of income to augment and perhaps exceed import duties as the principal source of local revenue. If despite the prejudice in its favour, the offer of land in freehold had failed to attract settlement, then long leases with their advantages well advertised might yet do so.

By 1906, gold exports amounted to over £58,000 in value, or three quarters of the exports. The value of copra, still coming mostly from village groves, had increased to more than £9,000. It remained the principal item of trade with the Papuans but its value did not exceed that of the combined export of pearls, *bêche-de-mer*, trochus and sandalwood, declining as these small industries were. Coffee exports of about fifteen tons were valued at £915. But of the 700,000 acres of crown lands and the grants and leases made from them for agricultural purposes, barely 1,500 acres had been actually developed after more than twenty years of European presence on the coast.¹² Devoid generally of both capital and experience, the few planters, even when beginning to see some success, remained mostly amateurs working on a small scale and depending upon some other livelihood or a partnership to supplement their income or provide development funds.

The *Land Ordinance of 1906* was to end the granting of freehold rights in Papua. It did not assert the Crown's claim to radical title and preserved MacGregor's presumption of the Papuans' customary ownership of all land unless otherwise determined. The ordinance nonetheless provided very generous leasing conditions that until 1909 waived survey charges, levied no rents for the first ten years, and exacted only 3d. an acre *per annum* thereafter. Improvement conditions alone applied a check on excessive ambition. But these too seemed light. A fifth of any agricultural lease taken up was to be planted with an 'approved' crop within five years, or, in the case of pastoral leases, the lessee was given five years in which to stock each square mile with ten head of cattle. Within twenty years three quarters of a plantation lease had to be planted up.

¹¹ NAPNG Series G64, Despatch No 35, 12 Aug. 1903, to Governor of Queensland.

¹² PAR 1906-07, 132; PAR 1912-13, 23.

In a flurry of activity outstanding freehold grants were issued to the remaining provisional grantees and published in the last British New Guinea *Government Gazette* in September 1906. Since 1890 465 grants had been made, the last to be finalised being Henry Wickham's. Because the Conflict Islands, still unsurveyed, did not contain more than a third of the area stated in the deed of grant, Wickham had disputed the purchase charges and the freehold title was not issued until 1920.¹³

Commenting in 1912, Sir William MacGregor saw the argument over the form of tenure given alienated land to have been irrelevant to the development of the country since a boom in tropical commodities in the interim had succeeded in attracting capital to leasehold land in Papua when offers of cheap freehold in British New Guinea had failed to excite interest. What was meritorious about the land legislation of British New Guinea and Papua, he thought, was its guarantee of Papuan rights.¹⁴ A more recent writer has concluded that it was 'to the credit of Papua's rulers that they were never dominated by the determination to make lands available at all costs'.¹⁵ To the extent that large speculative land bids were discouraged before 1906 this is obviously true. But short of being offered absolutely free and without conditions, land had been made amply available. The government had already acquired far more crown land than it was ever able to dispose of, and had heavy demands developed, far greater areas could have been obtained without alteration in the law. In British New Guinea the reach of imperialism had, at least temporarily, exceeded its grasp and the goodwill of the new *gavaman* towards the Papuans was never really brought to the test. Among the remoter estuaries of empire, the country had remained barely touched by the high tide of the Western sea, possessed of a well intentioned land law designed to protect the native inhabitants in a flow of alien settlers that could not be induced to come. With the end of the interregnum coinciding with an international plantation boom it appeared that at last the flow might begin.

¹³ CRS A1 22/9540. A Bill was introduced in 1906 in the Federal Parliament to permit the grant but was withdrawn. The *Papua Act* was amended in 1920 to overcome the impasse.

¹⁴ Sir William MacGregor in the Foreword to J.H.P. Murray's *Papua or British New Guinea* (London 1912).

¹⁵ L.P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (Melbourne 1970), 135.

CHAPTER 4

The greatest freedom of contract

THE QUESTION OF exploitation of the labour of the 'natives' of New Guinea had arisen even before the establishment of the Protectorate. A report of a Committee of Inquiry into the workings of the Western Pacific Orders in Council was presented to the Colonial Secretary in Whitehall in October 1883. With the unrecognised attempt by the Queensland government in the previous April to annex the whole of eastern New Guinea still a recent memory and with the Convention of the Australasian Colonies in session and pressing again for an assertion of British sovereignty, the Committee opposed the creation of a protectorate on any terms other than those which reserved to the imperial authorities the appointment of officials in any government to be established. Sir Arthur Gordon, the first High Commissioner and principal author of the report, was anxious to avoid any step that might lead to direct rule in New Guinea by Australians accountable to representative white colonial legislatures on grounds similar to those which had earlier led him in 1878 to support annexation - the need to protect the islanders from the violence and anarchy that he believed would attend white settlement. But whereas in 1878 he had been disturbed at the thought of the treatment native peoples were likely to receive from miners entering the country, in 1883 he was apprehensive about the capacity of Australian governments, in particular Queensland's, to withstand pressure from sugar interests to allow large scale use of cheap labour drawn from this new, large and populous source by the Queensland sugar industry. It was 'to place the destinies of many millions of men entirely in the hands of those whose interests are always alien, and too often antagonistic to their own'.¹

The Colonial Office took a different view from that of the Committee and could see little reason to bear the burden of undertaking new responsibilities in New Guinea except in response to Australian pressures and upon the understanding that the burden must eventually pass to the Australians. But in consideration of the scruples of many who shared Gordon's apprehensions the Letters Patent establishing a Protectorate over the southeast coast in September 1884 explicitly forbade the removal of

¹ Quoted in Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire* (Canberra 1967), 131.

labour from the country. As if to confirm Gordon's worst predictions, the first recruiting vessels to visit the coasts had begun calling at the Louisiades in April 1883 - the captain and Queensland government agent on the very first ship, the *Stanley*, being subsequently convicted of offences under the Queensland *Kidnapping Act*. In the succeeding year repeated violations of the Queensland law regarding recruitment and the desertions of 'New Guinea natives' from sugar plantations led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in December 1884, the Report of which gave so much evidence of misunderstanding, deception and violence in a traffic barely eighteen months old that the government in Brisbane ordered the repatriation of all New Guinea labourers. Of a total of 648 'recruited' in the Louisiades, 404 were returned in 1885, fifty saw out their contracts in Queensland for another year or two, and the balance of 150 remain unaccounted for and might have died of disease or starvation in service or after absconding from it. To those Australians now sensitive to their countrymen's treatment of 'coloured people' it seemed that a calamity had barely been avoided.

The Protectorate was recognised by the European powers as an assertion of a claim to a future consolidation of British interests in the region but otherwise by definition it meant the provision of no more than a protective shield under which still sovereign native political structures and community life could continue to work without outside interference. After the unfavourable findings of the Royal Commission of 1884, and as with the issue of land alienation, the question of whether or how the labour of the native people of New Guinea might be exploited was left unresolved for as long as the Protectorate lasted.

The final assumption of British sovereignty in September 1888 was preceded a month earlier by a gold rush on Sudest. In his third enactment as Administrator Dr William MacGregor proclaimed an interim *Labour Ordinance* aimed at the miners. This placed an immediate restraint on the use of 'aboriginal natives' of British New Guinea as labourers outside defined districts or otherwise beyond ten miles from their homes unless for government service or engagement under agreement sanctioned by a Resident Magistrate to work on coastal boats. No agreement could be for more than six months and the consent of the 'tribe' or family needed to be secured. In other respects the conditions of service, briefly set out in this ordinance, were to remain those upon which all future contract or indentured labour law was to be based.² These conditions were that the determination of the willingness of New Guinea men to engage and of their

² *Natives Removal Prohibition Ordinance, 1888*. Supplement to BNG *Government Gazette*, 17 Sept. 1888.

understanding of what they were committing themselves to, and of the employer's preparedness to offer an agreed wage, rations, fair treatment and a passage home after a fixed term of service, should from the beginning be the responsibility of the magisterial staff. Employers were required either to deposit wages in advance or to supply a guarantee to cover default. The Resident Magistrates (RMs) while remaining accountable to the Government Secretary could cancel agreements at any time without being obliged to give reasons.

That the labourers recruited in the Louisiades for service in Queensland in the brief labour trade of 1883-85 were apparently less tractable or vigorous than workers drawn from elsewhere in western Melanesia led no one to suppose that the largest of all Pacific islands could not yield more than sufficient labour for its own economic development if a properly regulated internal system of contract labour was instituted. It was unthinkable in the 1890s that it might ever be thought desirable to import labour into New Guinea to work mines and plantations - for if most white Australians were uneasy about the use of *kanakas* by Queensland sugar planters and would soon proceed to end the trade in island labour into Australia, they were not likely to consent to the importation of *coolies* into a territory so close to their northern coasts and which they already considered their own.

A comprehensive *Native Labour Ordinance* in 1892 permitted casual employment of the 'natives of British New Guinea' within twenty-five miles of their villages for periods up to a month, and contracts of service entered into before an RM now allowed labour to be removed from one Division to another for periods up to a year. Employers in the Torres Strait pearl fisheries who maintained assets in the Possession and provided security could take Papuans outside the boundaries of the country as far south as Cooktown - a privilege extended also to the missions, effectively the Sacred Heart Mission which wanted to send pupils from the Mekeo to Thursday Island. Either party to a contract could now apply to have agreements altered or cancelled though in any case the employer was obliged to bear the cost of returning labourers home. Only the death of a labourer or his positive refusal to return to his village could relieve the employer of this obligation.³

The law as yet contained no sanctions - except loss of pay - that could be applied to labourers who 'without reasonable cause' deserted their employers or who refused to work, and since wages were normally paid in full at the termination of the contract in the presence of an RM, the

³ *Native Labour Ordinance, 1892*. Supplement to BNG Government Gazette, 4 June 1892.

employer was compelled to register desertions or other complaints promptly or remain liable for the whole amount of the wages agreed to at the outset and other costs stipulated by law.

As elsewhere in the tropical world where labour was secured by contract, the wage in cash paid in full at the end of the term of indenture was not the whole wage nor the total cost of labour. Employers were required to maintain their workers, to accommodate, feed and minimally clothe them, the cost of these provisions together with the expenses of recruitment and repatriation amounting to three or more times the average cash wage that accrued at the rate of between 5s. and £1 a month. And clearly this deferred cash wage was not intended to provide support for distant dependants during the period of indenture. MacGregor included a clause in the new ordinance to the effect that an RM sanctioning an agreement had to be satisfied that the dependants of a labourer would be adequately maintained in their village in his absence but it was not expected that they would be maintained by either the labourer or his employer.⁴ In British New Guinea and subsequently in Papua, unless they were permitted to accompany the indentured labourer wholly at the employer's risk and expense, a worker's dependants were expected to find their subsistence at home.

To MacGregor the ordinance had been 'framed to permit the greatest freedom of contract between the employer and the native that is compatible with reasonable protection of the latter in his present condition'.⁵ To the few settlers, as matters stood in 1892, it might reasonably have seemed that the men of British New Guinea had very little to lose in breaking their contracts whereas employers took a considerable risk in employing them at all. While the chief inducement to engage for service with the white man must always have been the goods purchased with the wages labourers expected to receive at the end of their indenture, and while coastal communities were quickly made dependent on the metal goods, cloth and tobacco which indentured service allowed them to buy, in an essential sense the capacity of the people to subsist without work for money was not greatly diminished by the European intrusion.

Villagers could not finally be compelled to work for Europeans, and indentured labourers possessed, unlike their employers, no movable wealth that could be claimed in redress of a breach of contract - it being agreed that their lands could not so be used. There seemed no means by which Papuan workers could be forced to honour an agreement with an employer other than by withholding their wages - unless penalties properly belonging

⁴ *NLO 1892*, XIV (3).

⁵ *BNGAR 1891-91*, 12.

to the criminal law were applied in cases of default by native employees in civil contracts of service. This was legally anomalous but deemed practically necessary and in 1893, in an amending ordinance, MacGregor imposed such a penalty in the form of a month's imprisonment for unjustified desertion or refusal to begin contracted service. A further amendment in 1897, waiving imprisonment, allowed for the arrest and return to their employers of deserters, but another in 1900 imposed a fortnight's gaol for failure to carry out reasonable orders. Thus the inequalities of the situation were resolved in the employer's favour with the power of the magistrates and the threat of gaol standing behind a *taubada's* order. The extent to which employers could exploit this advantage would be tested in the coming years.

A further ordinance consolidating the labour law and amendments was proclaimed by MacGregor's successor, G. R. LeHunte, in January 1900.⁶ This required recruiters of Papuan labour to be licensed and to lodge guarantees covered by a bond of £50 with a licensing officer. The recruiter's responsibilities towards men he had recruited, like those subsequently of the employer, became a charge against his estate in the case of his death and the RMs were to be allowed the same unobstructed access to recruiters' boats that they had to labour lines on mines and plantations. By making it an offence to use false pretences to induce a villager to leave his home to travel to a government station to be engaged as a labourer, the law placed upon the recruiter the first responsibility of making sure that recruits understood enough of the purpose, duration, destination and conditions of the employment they were being offered well before they appeared before an RM who could witness their contract.⁷ In effect recruiters needed to know from employers requiring labour what the conditions and type of work would be so that labourers could be recruited to specific order. There were to be no labour exchanges or pools.

Labourers could now have their contracts endorsed to permit re-engagement for a second year and contracts could be signed before any RM along large parts of the coast soon to be declared Settled Labour Districts. The penal sanctions for refusal to work, desertion or neglect of duty could

⁶ *Native Labour Ordinance, 1900*. Supplement to BNG *Government Gazette*, 10 Feb. 1900.

⁷ See note 7, p. 94 below for mention of a prosecution in 1903 of Edward Auerback for using false pretences while recruiting. The missionary Charles Abel noted in a letter to the Foreign Secretary of the LMS in London that 'Auerback, Lindsay Bell, Nicholl[s] and [F.] Evenett had all been detected transgressing the law' that year. (Abel to W. I. Thompson, 20 Oct. 1903, cited in Liese Baker: 'The beginning of the indentured labour system in Papua, 1888-1908', BA Honours thesis, ANU, 1970, p. 24. The Papuan letters of the LMS, 1872-1906, are held in NLA, Microfilm M91-101.)

include both imprisonment and loss of wages though the costs of carrying out a warrant for the arrest of deserters were still to be borne by the employer. The relaxation for a time of the requirement that labourers be signed on at the government station nearest their homes came under criticism and in 1912 the more stringent rule was restored. Thus, unless the employer was a licensed recruiter himself, the burden of seeing that the conditions at the outset of engagement were fulfilled was to rest with recruiters and government officers in the divisions where labour was obtained. Though RMs were frequently moved the offices on stations soon acquired systematic records of labour movements that allowed recruitment and repatriation to be policed with an apparently complete effectiveness.

The structure of the system of indentured labour in British New Guinea and inherited by the Territory of Papua under the Commonwealth was thus substantially assembled and in place well before 1906. The actual numbers of the 'Papuan natives of British New Guinea' who were affected by the consolidated *Labour Ordinance of 1900* were relatively small with most employed in gold mining in the South Eastern and Northern Divisions or the Torres Strait pearl fisheries. In 1902-03, the Eastern Division was providing most labourers with 2,114 engaging there in the year, 1,122 for work in other divisions.⁸

Both employers and distant governments could readily argue that employment did no more than soak up the idle labour become available with the suppression of tribal warfare, that service for the white man was a healthy substitute for feuding and that the absence of young men placed little added burden upon communities where the labour of subsistence had always fallen unequally upon the women. Indeed engagement was to be largely confined to those apparently most easily 'spared' - the young unmarried men - whose labour may always have been marginal to the strictly subsistence requirements of village life. But responsible officers nearer at hand soon saw that there were cultural and social stresses brought about by the absence of cohorts of such young men year after year that could not be calculated, and in ensuring that workers spent substantial periods at home between contracts, the successive administrations sought at least to temper the worst effects of the indenture system upon the fabric of Papuan societies. And clearly, in dependencies like British New Guinea and its successor entity, the Territory of Papua, where labour was exclusively drawn from within the country, the healthy continuance of the parallel subsistence economy in the communities that supplied the new workers remained vital to the plantation or mining

⁸ BNGAR 1902-03, 27.

economy that Europeans sought to establish. We may now think that it was the distant consumers of tropical commodities and not the white settlers in the tropics who chiefly benefited from the near perfect competition that existed between the plantation colonies in the production of these commodities. We may also think those consumers beneficiaries of an effective subsidy to production provided by the enduring capacity of subjected peoples to forego both the society of many of the younger men and the added labour they might have contributed at home - or to any alternative smallholder cash-crop development, and to otherwise furnish subsistence to workers' dependents independently of the cash system.

It may be a virtue of the administrations of British New Guinea and Papua that in tacit recognition of the intractability of the international terms of trade that determined 'native' wages, the Papuans would never be permitted to become a landless and permanently wage dependent proletariat. The corollary of this, it seems, was that they were ever to remain 'boys' and their wages in the nature of pocket money for the purchase of imported luxuries. The sensitivity to the moral issues surrounding the acquisition of new colonial responsibilities that characterised the best in late nineteenth century British imperialism could secure a situation no better than this.

A new *Native Labour Ordinance* drafted in 1906 while Captain F. R. Barton was Administrator by J. H. P. Murray CJO was given assent in April 1907.⁹ It permitted terms of indenture of up to three years, or consecutive shorter terms of indenture amounting to three years, after which labourers were to be returned to live in their villages for a minimum of twelve months before they could be re-engaged. The ordinance consolidated the previous legislation placing the full responsibility for the care, safety and safe repatriation of indentured labourers clearly in the hands of the Europeans recruiting or employing them. In the case of an employer his obligations commenced from the day on which a contract was signed until the labourer's return home. As before, Contracts of Service were to be signed before an RM or ARM in the labourer's home division, the kind of labour to be undertaken and the place of work to be limited to those 'agreed to' in the contract. Wages were to be lodged at monthly intervals with the RM in the division in which the worker was employed and paid out in full in the presence of an officer at the end of the term of indenture. The wages of deceased labourers were sent on to their relatives. A further ordinance in 1911 which continued in force with amendments until 1941, permitted signing on for a fourth year provided at least a year separated the

⁹ *Native Labour Ordinance, 1907. Supplement to Territory of Papua Government Gazette, 23 Apr. 1907.*

completion of the prolonged period of indenture and the commencement of another.¹⁰ Employers were required to place an amount equivalent to three months' wages in advance with an RM or nominate a guarantor who had agreed to provide surety for the employer's liabilities. In later years larger employers might have this requirement waived.

The administration was reluctant to allow the payment of 'advances' - payments to labourers during the term of indenture - on account of the advantage such payments would give the planter (or very commonly his wife) as storekeeper. But from 1919 amounts totalling no more than a sixth of the wages due at the end of the contract could be advanced out of the deposits held by the RM, and spent locally, usually at the plantation store. Native Affairs officers routinely checked prices in such stores as plantations were inspected.¹¹

The techniques of cultivation and preparation for export of tropical tree crops did not greatly change throughout the period under review. Much of the work on plantations was essentially horticultural, if on a large scale, and continued to require a very large input of manual labour by comparison with the increasingly mechanised agriculture of the temperate lands.¹² The standards for the export of tropical products were set and the technology developed usually in the main producing countries. These requirements were quickly passed on through trade and agricultural bulletins and the signals given by the market to the growers in places like Papua who could not afford to fall far behind.¹³ Little or none of the value of increased efficiency or productivity achieved over the years was retained by the producers in these territories - this was quickly absorbed by the metropolitan manufacturers and consumers who as a consequence did no more than buy more cheaply and well.

¹⁰ Exemptions from the requirements of the NLO to allow repeated re-engagements were very frequently permitted Papuans from the villages near Port Moresby.

¹¹ By the thirties advances of up to a third of accumulated wages were permitted (PAR 1935-35, 7).

¹² Temperate tree crops required pickers and packers in large numbers only at harvest time and markets in their produce remained accustomed to accepting prices determined by competition among European producers employing white labour, the latter, if not necessarily unionised, forming a class hardly to be ignored - as 'native' and indentured labour in the colonies could be - in political calculations in the metropole.

¹³ Staniforth Smith, Director of Agriculture 1907-30, kept himself and planters well abreast of new ideas in the boom years and beyond. From 1911 too, the *Papuan Times* and its successor, the *Papuan Courier*, regularly published news of the markets in copra and rubber and frequently other information useful to planters. The BNGD Co. from 1910 was able to draw on the knowledge of members of its board who were also directors of the Kuala Selangor Rubber Co., subscribers to the Rubber Growers' Association of Malaya bulletins. As mentioned in Chapter 16 below at least two inventions developed by a Papuan settler were of some interest to others - a new type of copra dryer and a coconut desiccator both designed by the Samarai engineer and planter, Norman Izod.

PART II

First grandchild of the Empire - 1901-1914

Your Commissioners, feeling convinced that the outside world generally possesses only the vaguest knowledge with regard to Papua, and this often of the most misleading character, consider that in the interests of the Territory every means should be adopted for placing its great natural possibilities before the public, so that the inaccuracies as to climate and the nature of the native population be swept aside, and the fact brought out that neither the one nor yet the other is half as bad as it has been painted, while further, that its beauties and potentialities in the way of immediate and profitable white settlement should be put forward in an attractive and authentic form.

Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Present Conditions &c, 1907.

There is chance in everything mortal, it is true, but the element of chance in the Papuan planter's gains is, after all, the personal factor only. The soil will produce. The products will sell. Neither drought nor hurricane will sweep away the results of a man's labour of years in a day or a month, for both are unknown in Papua. Nothing can prevent a small capitalist doing well, and making money rapidly, save his own fault . . . if he has common-sense, common industry and patience, his fortune will surely follow.

Beatrice Grimshaw, Papua the Marvellous: The country of Chances. c. 1909.

CHAPTER 5

A natural dependency of Australia

WITH THE APPROACH of federation in Australia, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, sought to establish that the full responsibility for the future government and expense of British New Guinea should be with the new Commonwealth. In June 1898 he reminded the colonial governments that participated in supporting the administration that the Possession was a 'natural dependency' of Australia, that it was likely to be developed almost entirely by Australian enterprise, and that it had been annexed solely in response to an overwhelming colonial demand. From the end of 1900 the British government declined to make further contributions to the revenue of British New Guinea, the expenditure in 1901 being mostly met out of a small reserve built up by MacGregor. With the establishment of the Commonwealth, the former contributing colonies also withdrew their financial support pending federal initiative in a matter that had ceased to be a States responsibility under the Australian Constitution. By late 1901 LeHunte was forced to approach the Queensland Government for guarantees to cover his deficit.¹

Pressed thus to consider the acceptance of British New Guinea as a territory of the Commonwealth before, in the opinion of some members, the new nation was ready to undertake such a responsibility, both houses of the federal parliament debated the issues in November 1901. The debates are instructive for in them were raised the fundamental contradictions that existed between preservation of a 'White Australia' and an expansionist policy by the Commonwealth in the South Pacific. In view of the threat implicit in the stand of the imperial authorities - that the Possession might otherwise be abandoned - the government of Sir Edmund Barton moved that British New Guinea be accepted as a 'Territory' of the Commonwealth and that £20,000 a year be voted for five years as an interim measure to meet the costs of administration.² In the end a majority of the parliamentarians were readily persuaded that an increased responsibility in

¹ CRS A2 03/2538, Letter LeHunte to Sir Samuel Griffith, 1 Oct. 1901.

² *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. VI, 1901, p. 7092. (Representatives) 12 Nov. 1901. The debate was resumed on 19 Nov., p. 7396. The record of the debate of 20 Nov. in the Senate includes the text of Chamberlain's despatch of 8 June 1898, p. 7470.

New Guinea was justly commensurate with Australia's new status and imperative if hostile powers were to continue to be denied use of numerous harbours from which an attack upon Australia might in future be launched. But a minority felt that the acquisition of common borders between unambiguously Australian territory and territories of the German and Dutch empires might lead directly to those very entanglements and confrontations that *British* possession was supposed to prevent and which continuation of the former arrangement might avoid. The symmetry of an island continent inhabited by one race and nation, so recently established, was to be immediately lost and the policy of white racial exclusivism compromised from the start.

The member for New England and a wealthy grazier, William Bowie Stuart Sawers failed to see any advantage for Australia in accepting the full burden of a limitless expenditure in New Guinea where the experience of the 'home' government with many another unprofitable colonial possession was likely to be repeated. Or, he asked, were industries such as sugar production to be encouraged there and given assistance that would be 'to the detriment of our own workers within our own proper Australian territory'? He hoped that if the Commonwealth could find part of the costs of government, the Colonial Office would continue to administer British New Guinea and that some rearrangement of the spheres of influence of European powers in the Pacific might be made to remove the danger of conflict further from Australian shores, for 'the policy of mopping up the islands is a sort of Jingoism which I hope Australia will refrain from'.³

The Attorney General, Alfred Deakin, eloquently advanced those arguments for the government that were calculated to disarm opposition through an appeal to humanitarianism. If the attitude of the 'home authorities' was firm and unalterable in refusing further to take responsibility, and since British New Guinea had indeed been 'virtually annexed' at the behest of the Australian colonies 'for many years past', the Commonwealth had very little choice in the matter. Nor could it be admitted that 'separated by half the earth's circuit, a Government in Downing Street would be likely to administer [New Guinea's] affairs more efficiently in the interests of the Empire as a whole than would the Government of the Commonwealth with its much greater proximity'.⁴ As for the threat to Australia's security posed by the common borders acquired, it was unlikely, Deakin thought, that the settlers of the respective Australian, German and Dutch territories would find themselves face to face for many years.

³ Ibid., 7406, 7407.

⁴ Ibid., 7410.

Ultimately, he argued, it was essential that the Commonwealth assume full control over the Possession in the interests of the native people, for the protection of their lands and labour from 'irresponsible men who are a law unto themselves' and who would inevitably be drawn there, as

The only guarantee, or the most efficient we can have, that the settlement of New Guinea shall form an exception in the history of the development of a tropical country inhabited by native races - that the settlement shall take place on the lines of peace, order, and good government, so that great land monopolies and injustice to the native may be prevented - is that when we pay this £20,000 a year, the Commonwealth Parliament shall be able to impose its own conditions, and see to the administration itself.⁵

There was, it seemed, no alternative to an acceptance of this responsibility just as 'there can be no pause in New Guinea till its resources are sufficiently developed to yield a revenue to provide for its efficient administration'.⁶

Among the speakers in the debate in the upper house on the following day was a senator from Western Australia, Miles Staniforth Cater Smith. Senator Smith regretted that 'we have to accept the government of any territory outside of Australia for the next fifty or hundred years' when Australians had such a vast land of their own to develop.⁷ He was immediately intrigued, nonetheless, by the alternatives open to Australia in the development of the Possession and by the difficulties presented by the incorporation in some manner of '350,000 aliens . . . equal in number to the population of two states of the Commonwealth'. In particular and in direct reference to both the Hall Sound Company and the 'Somers Vine Syndicate' he condemned 'endeavours . . . to monopolise huge tracts of country' in New Guinea and hoped that if Australia was to be obliged to undertake the government that a stipulation should be that no alienation of land in fee simple be permitted.⁸ It was declamation of a kind that was repeated and which made it difficult for Senator Walker, the Hall Sound director, to do more than seem to apologise for his company with suggestions that it would accept long leases instead of freehold land. Australian populism whether expressed on the left or the right of representative legislatures could find easy game and electoral profit in inveighing against any step by capitalists that it suited politicians (or *other* capitalists) to represent as excessive.

⁵ Ibid., 7412.

⁶ Ibid., 7411.

⁷ Ibid., (Senate) 7477.

⁸ Ibid., 7476.

Staniforth Smith's interest in British New Guinea was to increase. He was born in Victoria in 1869. Having gone as a telegraph linesman to the Western Australian goldfields he had become Reuters' correspondent and a highly successful and popular mayor of Kalgoorlie at thirty. He established the town markets undercutting middlemen by profitably railing fresh fruit and vegetables from the coast at municipal expense. He gave Kalgoorlie children holidays by the sea. In the elections for the first Senate he received the most votes of any Western Australian candidate. After March 1902 he 'adopted' British New Guinea as a cause, becoming an undisputed parliamentary authority on the Possession, and in 1903, on an investigatory tour that also included German New Guinea and the British Solomon Islands, he visited the country.

Senator Smith returned greatly impressed by the luxuriance of tropical vegetation and the fertility this might suggest to anyone who had spent years on the arid Western Australian diggings. Of Australia's 'new' dependency he concluded,

British New Guinea is like a large and valuable estate which, up to the present lying idle, only requires money judiciously spent in cultivation to make it capable of yielding a large revenue. The present revenue is sufficient to maintain the status quo and unless the Commonwealth is prepared to initiate a more liberal policy New Guinea will remain undeveloped, and always be a financial burden.⁹

But, he repeated, the country must not be given over to speculators, syndicators or promoters like the Hall Sound Company 'who desire to obtain the freehold of huge areas, not to cultivate, but to hold until white settlers arrive, when they will be in a position to demand a share of the wealth they produce'.¹⁰ For Staniforth Smith it was to the same enterprising white smallholder-planter for whom MacGregor had waited in vain that the Commonwealth should look if the country was to be 'opened up'. In the full flush of federation, Australia now seemed possessed of immensely increased capacity to carry out the work of development and, indeed, must find the means or forfeit the right to hold such a valuable territory. Point was again given to the threat posed by other powers in the region in October 1904 when the *Melbourne Age* reported that a writer in the St Petersburg paper *Novoe Vremya* had urged the establishment of a Russian naval refuelling station in the vicinity of New Guinea for the Baltic

⁹ NLA Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 1461, 'British New Guinea with a preface on Australia's policy in the Pacific' by Senator Staniforth Smith, 21 July 1903, p. 17. This contains portions of articles by Smith that had appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), the *Morning Herald* (Perth), and the *Kalgoorlie Miner*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Fleet then embarking for the Far East.¹¹ The Prime Minister consulted Senator Smith, recently returned from New Guinea, about conditions in the Dutch territory. The senator understood these to be chaotic and urged opposition to any Russian move. No member of parliament, it seemed, now knew more of the region than Staniforth Smith and in the debates late in 1905 over the form of a new constitution for British New Guinea to be embodied in the *Papua Act*, his advantage, unfailingly demonstrated, might well have irritated some of his colleagues.

At the end of the year in a letter to Deakin, now Prime Minister, Smith suggested that he be enabled to visit Java, the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States in order to see alternatives from which to choose in the development of the 'new' Territory of Papua and to make recommendations. The permanent head of the Department of External Affairs, Atlee Hunt, responded that

Mr Deakin wishes to say that he much appreciates the public spirit you display, and will be pleased indeed to receive a report on the lines indicated by you. Your knowledge of the Territory of Papua will place you in a position enjoyed by very few others of making your report of such a nature that it will have practical value in assisting the development of the Possession.¹²

The *Report* was tabled as a Parliamentary Paper in June 1906. It was clearly the work of an energetic mind, voracious for administrative and agricultural minutiae, unfettered by doubt. Smith concluded 'confidently . . . that any economic plant growing successfully in Java could be grown equally successfully in Papua' which was, after all, at 'the same latitude and in the same isotherm' as 'the Garden of the East'.¹³ Only the lack of skill and experience among the Papuans could prevent the commercial development of many of the agricultural products that might be grown and in time this condition could be amended. Meanwhile he could recommend the development of rubber and copra industries certain that they would succeed.

Nonetheless, 'exceptionally easy terms' must be offered if settlers were to be attracted to New Guinea when huge areas of tropic lands appeared to be available elsewhere. While leasehold title was preferable to alienation of land in freehold, Smith continued to believe, lessees who fulfilled the conditions of their leases should be allowed the virtual equivalent of freehold - the leases should be perpetual and the rental kept to a 'peppercorn' rate for the first ten or fifteen years. Much impressed by the

¹¹ Staniforth Smith Papers, Items 930-936.

¹² *Ibid.*, item 938, Atlee Hunt to Staniforth Smith, 3 Jan. 1906.

¹³ CPP 1906, Vol. 2, *Report on the Federated Malay States and Java*, by Senator Staniforth Smith, p. 53.

support given to the planters of Java by the Netherlands East Indies Government through the research establishments at Buitenzorg, he recommended that the Papuan Government quickly develop coastal and hill experimental stations with nurseries from which planters could obtain seed at cost. The government should also establish its own commercial plantations of rubber and coconuts in conjunction with these stations and smaller experimental plots should be maintained by the RMs with prison labour at all divisional headquarters. Finally, there was a need for an agriculture department administered by a 'thoroughly practical expert in tropical plantation work'. It must operate as an 'Intelligence Department' constantly in touch with developments abroad, for, being 'the last of the nations to take upon our shoulders the burden of a tropical dependency', Australia could begin its work in Papua 'lightened by the fact that almost every important problem of subordinate government in the tropics, and almost every difficulty regarding economic development, has either been solved or has been the subject of prolonged investigation'.¹⁴

Of the Papuans, their 'true welfare', Staniforth Smith thought, would more probably be served by Australian imitation of the methods used by the Dutch in compelling the native Javanese to become an efficient and prosperous workforce - rather than by following the British practice of importing more 'virile' races under an indenture system. The transfer of labour from India and China to Malaya had injured the Malays, accentuating their 'listlessness' and 'destroying their distinctive race characteristics'.¹⁵ If doubts were held about the industriousness of the Papuans it was to be remembered that they were an agricultural people, that thousands of them were already under voluntary indenture within the Territory and that similar people from the South Sea Islands had worked well in Queensland. Taxation, he thought, should not therefore be used, for the present at least, to force the people into wage labour and they were to have their possession of the lands they occupied once more confirmed.

Hesitant as he may have been in 1901 about Australia's capacity to undertake responsibility for British New Guinea when so much remained to be done at home, by 1906 Staniforth Smith had come to see the country as an inviting national and personal opportunity. For by 1906 also, developments in Papua had set in train steps that would lead to a Royal Commission into the administration, and the senator could see that in considering his own future he might reasonably aspire to a greater and more direct influence on the government of the Territory if and when the Administrator, Captain Francis Rickman Barton, retired. It was an

¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

attractive option but not the only one open to him. In June 1906 he sought nomination from non-Labor groups in Western Australia for the House of Representatives seat of Fremantle, believing that the Senate was too elevated a base for an active and continuing political career in Australia. It seems likely that Smith would have received that nomination for he remained a popular figure, the very image of a plain-speaking and practical politician whose views seemed to reflect public opinion. But on 4 September Deakin offered Staniforth Smith the post of Director of Agriculture, Mines and Public Works together with the office of Commissioner of Lands and Surveys in the Government of Papua with an invitation to carry out those policies he had advocated for the development of the Territory.¹⁶ So broad and encompassing did this mandate seem that Smith can only have thought that he was being prepared for the highest office in the administration when it became vacant. Accepting the appointment the following day he set out his hopes in an effort to bind Deakin to their fulfilment adding that

I shall trust entirely to you when the official offer is made to so amplify my position that I shall not be cramped in carrying out a strenuous development policy, and at the same time enable me to succeed Captain Barton whenever his term may expire, as the first Australian Lieutenant Governor.¹⁷

Yet the Prime Minister had been trying to arrange the return of Sir William MacGregor to serve a further term in New Guinea and to smooth the passage of new policies that the Commonwealth might undertake there. Such an appointment would not necessarily have barred the way for Staniforth Smith for long and Deakin went so far as to say in reply that 'I have no knowledge of any Australian with qualifications for the post of Lieutenant Governor equal to your own. After you have had local experience I do not suppose that you could be passed over but I cannot officially guarantee it'.¹⁸ But as an unofficial guarantee this was enough. Senator Smith telegraphed his political brokers his intention to retire from politics to take up 'farming'.¹⁹

To secure an opinion upon which Commonwealth policy might be based the permanent secretary of the federal department responsible for the Territory had earlier been sent to Port Moresby in July 1905. This was Arthur Atlee Hunt. Born in 1864, Atlee Hunt had been private secretary to the first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, and as head of External Affairs (1901-1917), and subsequently of Home and Territories (1917-1921), he

¹⁶ Staniforth Smith Papers, item 969, Deakin to Staniforth Smith, 4 Sept. 1906.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Staniforth Smith to Deakin, 5 Sept. 1906.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, item 968, Deakin to Staniforth Smith, 5 Sept. 1906.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, item 955.

was to remain the Commonwealth officer responsible for relations with the administration in Papua through many changes of federal ministry and years of hope, conflict and disappointment. The permanent secretary's *Report* was barely tabled before the *Papua Act* was passed in November 1905.

His *Report* couched in terms more circumspect than Smith's, Hunt had not seen in New Guinea a country where white men could be encouraged to settle in large numbers both on account of the climate and because such settlers 'are the very kind . . . of whom Australia stands in need herself'.²⁰ But since a policy of mere possession and pacification could only lead to the degeneration of the Papuans through sloth, and might hardly be said to be making 'the fullest use of the goodly heritage' it had become Australia's 'privilege to possess', the country must be developed. And while 'extravagant optimism' was not warranted and the time and investment required in the progress of development should not be underestimated, a combination of imported capital, white direction and native labour would lead eventually, he suggested, to 'a solid and substantial prosperity'.²¹

Cautious, prudent, yet suggesting the possibility of real gain, this was well calculated not to escape the eye of 'judicious' investors and Hunt went on to hold out the hope that in time the country, rightly administered, might indeed be another Java and repay its possessors 'most handsomely', for 'the management of a colony is . . . merely the conduct of a commercial undertaking' and Australia's principal consideration must be 'where . . . the capital [is] to be found which is to run this mercantile enterprise that we have taken on our hands'.²² Using the example of the public loans that had financed the development programs of the Australian colonies he went so far as to propose that the Commonwealth invest a fixed amount, a minimum of £300,000, in the government of British New Guinea in annual payments of £15,000 upon which an interest of 3% or 3.5% might be levied.

Hunt was prepared to concede that the 'savage practices' of the inhabitants were 'inhuman' perhaps only to European minds and he was surprised and impressed by the variety and settled quality of Papuan community life. Yet he accepted as axiomatic that iron tools and peace would debilitate the people and rob them of the opportunity for struggle without which, as every reasonable man would grant, health and vigour could not be maintained whether by races or individuals. He proposed that taxation should be used to compel the villagers into work either for

²⁰ CPP 1905, Vol. 2, *British New Guinea Report*, by Atlee Hunt, p. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19, 28.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

themselves or for others. If, as he thought likely, the lot of raising economic crops and therefore the tax in the villages should fall mainly upon the women who traditionally bore a disproportionate burden of the garden labour, then a levy 'of young men for plantation service to be performed as a national duty' could be imposed upon each community from the wages of whom the tax could be deducted.²³

It was a confident age for Europeans, their collective hubris as yet to face its most terrible challenges. Staniforth Smith's and Atlee Hunt's *Reports* were written in the last decade of what had been an extraordinary century of expansion in white settlement overseas. And everywhere white men had settled extensively 'native' peoples seemed to be in retreat, their numbers diminishing inexorably towards extinction, the Australian Aborigines the most conspicuous among them. Java was an exception. There it appeared the Dutch had solved the problem of population decline with a policy that compelled the Javanese to work for Europeans. The concern expressed by Hunt and Smith to 'save' the Papuans by getting them likewise to labour for foreigners might now seem to some more an exercise in casuistry, a convenient rationalisation for the exploitation of the weak by the strong. But these men like many of their contemporaries elsewhere - including many who were unaware that they might derive any personal advantage from the labour of Javanese or Papuans - were responding to facts that seemed indisputable. The invigorating function of work, struggle and effort in human societies was obvious. Getting the Papuans to work was an urgent necessity if they were to survive as a people.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 24.

²⁴ There was a similar presumption that the adoption of European clothing by 'native' peoples was also a contributor to their 'annihilation'. The Native Regulations issued under the *Native Regulations Ordinance 1908-1930* forbade (subject only to express exemptions) the wearing of clothing on the upper body by Papuans, men and women.

CHAPTER 6

The late Crown Colony traditions

ATLEE HUNT HAD stayed in Port Moresby as a guest of Captain Barton, the Administrator, and his *Report* gave a favourable impression of both the administration and its officers; the 'standstill' in development he attributed wholly to the uncertainty that prevailed as to what Australian policy would be. But a case arose while Hunt was in Papua that was to place doubts in Deakin's mind that Hunt's high opinion of Barton's administration was justified. The Administrator had suspended the Chief Government Surveyor, John Richmond, when Richmond refused to withdraw a charge that Barton had altered official papers connected with the forfeiture and transfer of an urban lease and had destroyed an official minute paper. The case further divided two factions that had formed among the fifty officers that comprised the government service - those who were loyal to the Administrator and those sympathising with Richmond and aggrieved in other ways, who were grouped around the doyen of the service and Government Secretary, Anthony Musgrave.

The case was examined by a board of enquiry in Australia and Barton exonerated. But now aware of the division among the officials in Port Moresby and unwilling to act publicly in view of the support Hunt's report together with the outcome of the enquiry gave to the Administrator, Deakin wrote privately in March 1906 to the Chief Judicial Officer (CJO) in Papua, John Hubert Plunkett Murray, requesting a confidential 'criticism of the circumstances in New Guinea' and the 'fullest and frankest judgement you can favour me with upon our officers, methods and aims'.¹ The moves that led to the eventual appointment of Hubert Murray as Lieutenant Governor have been recounted by his and Deakin's biographers but since the choice of Murray was due in part to a view of development for Papua which he held at this time and that he was to express before a Royal Commission in November 1906 they must be discussed here.

Murray, always standing at a distance from events in which he was engaged and as self-sufficient and reserved as Staniforth Smith was gregarious and garrulous, possessed an intimidating and enigmatic personality. Physically imposing, a graduate with Firsts at Oxford, Lieutenant

¹ J. A. LaNauze, *Alfred Deakin* (Melbourne 1965), Vol. 2, p. 459.

Colonel of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry in the South African War and in every way an apparent anglophile in manner, he identified himself as an Australian nationalist, a Roman Catholic and a sympathiser with both Boer and Fenian. After an undistinguished career as a circuit court judge in New South Wales, he was forty-three in 1904 when appointed CJO in British New Guinea following the suicide of his predecessor. A profound boredom can account at least in part for his going there.

In 1900 Murray had seen quarrels between English and Australian officers in South Africa as 'inevitable'. He had then stood in no doubt that his loyalties were with the fitter, and he thought better led, colonials. In his long letter of 26 March 1906 in reply to Deakin he revealed with what cold and legal eye but partisan heart he had silently contemplated the cavalier vestige that remained of LeHunte's 'English' administration. In short there was in Papua, he wrote, a 'Colonial Office' party led by the Administrator that had no interest in the development of the country and 'imbued with horror, doubtless sincere, of Australian democracy, would inwardly rejoice if all white settlers - especially miners - could be removed from the country, and who consider, apparently, that the destiny of B.N.G. would be fulfilled if it never came to anything more than a sort of curiosity-shop and an extensive and very expensive ethnological museum'. Opposed was an 'Australian' party 'anxious for the development of the country, and sincere in their dislike of a policy which, in their opinion, had retarded the progress of the Possession'.² If the *sincerity* of each party with regard to the development of the country could not be doubted there was much in the behaviour of the Administrator and his friends that could be represented as scandalous. Murray affirmed that it was his private view that Richmond's claims had been correct and that Captain Barton was indeed a 'man of weak character and indolent disposition', thoroughly dominated by the 'unscrupulous' Treasurer and drunkard, David Ballantine.³ There was much else besides. It needed hardly to be added, as Murray said, where his sympathies lay.

These were revelations that the Prime Minister having solicited them could hardly ignore. Yet neither, on account of the way in which they were obtained, could he discuss them with his officer responsible for Papua, Atlee Hunt, with whom Barton carried on a friendly correspondence. Having been informed by an irritated Hunt that Deakin had received 'adverse criticism' about affairs in

² Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), 37, letter No. 32, Murray to Deakin, 26 March 1906.

³ *Ibid.*, 40.

Papua, Barton, 'astonished', called for a full enquiry.⁴ In the circumstances Deakin found it very convenient to grant the request.

Three members of a Royal Commission were appointed in August 1906 and were taking evidence in Port Moresby in September. The terms of reference went well beyond an enquiry into 'present conditions' to allow the Commissioners to make general recommendations about the government and development of the Territory.

Murray's evidence before the Commission in November - essentially an expanded version of what he had written in confidence to Deakin in March and relying as it did both upon a critique of Barton's 'policy' of opposition to white settlement and upon criticism of the personal conduct of the Administrator and his adherents - was bound to provoke deep bitterness among the condemned. While he could plausibly claim that there was considerable and culpable carelessness in the recent work of the administration in the processing of land applications and in the accounting of money and stores, Murray's central contention that the 'scantiness of white settlement' could be attributed to 'interminable delay' and obstruction by Captain Barton's and previous administrations in the making of land available rested ultimately on subjective impressions - the few applications with which the government had dithered were not, as he implied, the tip of some submerged iceberg of demand for land, but all that there were.

Yet if it was conceded that there was a *prima facie* case that the administration had been dilatory over land applications - and Captain Barton was to challenge that there was a single case of unnecessary delay - then the cause could be found, Murray claimed, in the Administrator's own attitude of deep hostility to white settlement. In private and unguarded conversation Barton had expressed his distaste for the miners as a class and his wish that gold had never been discovered in British New Guinea. In another instance the Administrator had denied protection sought by a settler who believed himself exposed to attack by Papuan raiders. This latter case made a profound impression upon the Commissioners and concerned a request for a police patrol made by Henry Greene at Sagoro Tano after a rumour had spread among the Koiari that the 'Hagari' were about to descend upon his plantation and murder the two Europeans there.⁵ A force of the Armed Constabulary was, in fact, already in the Sogeri area but Greene was never told. Instead the file of correspondence in the matter had annotations made by Barton or his

⁴ NLA Deposit 52, Atlee Hunt Papers, item 41, Captain F. R. Barton to Hunt, 5 July 1906.

⁵ CPP 1907, pp. 137-459, British New Guinea, *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into present conditions...*, pp. xciv-xcvi (pp. 214-233) contain the Commissioners' comments on the case; pp. 25-31 (pp. 291-97) contain a record of the hearings in the matter.

officers that referred to Greene's 'funk' and a copy of a letter to Greene from the Administrator's private secretary that suggested that he leave the country if he felt so easily threatened, for the sake of 'the prestige of the white man'.⁶ This prestige had not been so great as recently as April 1906, Murray had elsewhere reminded the Commissioners, as to discourage the murderers of old Weaver, the market gardener on the Laloki, whose property was within ten miles of Port Moresby.

For Barton's hostility to settlement Murray could also find a cause in an excessive sympathy for the Papuans - the placing of the natives 'on a pedestal for too long'.⁷ It is true that Barton had a gentlemanly but serious interest in ethnography, contributing to C. G. Seligman's great work *The Melanestans of British New Guinea*.⁸ And in evidence the Administrator defended his refusal to press Papuans who were unwilling to sell land for settlement, and his adherence to the guarantees proclaimed by Commodore Erskine in 1884. Yet beyond this his 'sympathy' might have been slight. He was quick to make late proposals to tax the Papuans through forced labour on village plantations when, in November 1906, he saw how events were turning. Meant to vindicate his decisiveness this gesture might well have suggested that it had been inertia rather than preoccupation with Papuan welfare that had been more characteristic of his 'policy'. Certainly the unnecessary violence employed by several RMs, Barton's friends, and brought as evidence against them by Murray, seems hardly congruent with the view that a sensitive appreciation of Papuan interests was the uppermost concern with the Administrator's clique.

There is no doubt that Judge Murray believed in the substantial truth of his own testimony for it was consistent with views expressed in letters to his family since 1904. Nor need we doubt that he was quite sincere in recommending to Deakin in March that it would be best if a complete stranger were chosen to succeed Barton - the argument at the time and afterwards that his 'disloyalty' to the Administrator had been prompted by ambition has no sure basis. Indeed Murray had little choice but to reiterate before the Commission the opinions he had privately expressed to the Prime Minister and to do so as forcefully as possible. The divisions within the service were real enough and the Administrator's inadequacies now appeared obvious. Yet the factionalism had derived far more from personal antipathies than from the fundamental differences over policy that Murray thought he could descry, and Barton, though an Englishman, had been appointed as interim Administrator not by the Colonial Office but by Deakin himself.

⁶ Ibid., xcvi. Copy of letter from Arthur Jewell to Greene, 22 Jan. 1906.

⁷ Ibid., p. 85, Murray's evidence, 8 Nov. 1906.

⁸ C. G. Seligman, *The Melanestans of British New Guinea* (Cambridge 1910).

Whether correct in point of detail or not - and the Commissioners could find error in several of his charges - the CJO's evidence represented a formidable synthesis of argument the general credibility of which could withstand refutation in its parts. The overriding impression Murray gave that the administration of British New Guinea had fallen into the hands of amateurs was entirely compatible with what the Commissioners wanted to find. A scapegoat for stagnation had been identified not in the physical and economic circumstances of the country nor in the lack of an Australian policy, indeed any policy, in the years until 1906, but in a deliberate and reactionary 'policy of retard' allegedly pursued by an effete and misguided coterie of officials that felt no responsibility towards Australia or Australian interests.

If the 'late Crown Colony traditions' could be set aside, the Commissioners were convinced, the country might be turned 'into an agricultural and pastoral asset of great value to the Commonwealth'. The land they had observed to be 'rich, virgin, and easily worked while its infinite variety makes the successful cultivation of almost all tropical products possible'. The Papuan, on the other hand, had been plunged by government protection 'into a condition of peaceful sloth', a 'lotus-eaters' dream' from which it was 'an imperative and immediate necessity' to awaken him if he was 'to be saved from the fate of most aboriginal races'.⁹ It now seemed that the eventual fate projected for the Papuans by Atlee Hunt and Staniforth Smith only the year before, if work could not be found for them, had become immanent.

The Royal Commission Recommendations

Their recommendations were to betray the extent to which the Commissioners, having placed blame in an acceptable quarter, conceded that a vigorous development policy required much more of Australia than it had hitherto provided. Every part of the administration, it seemed, required reform or decisive new initiatives with the purpose of opening up the country at last to permanent and profitable white settlement and eventual incorporation into the Commonwealth as a state. The white community were to be provided with schools, better communications, higher government salaries, trial by jury, and a hill station for local recuperation. The development of roads and ports was to be financed through an interest free loan and an Australian tariff protection given to territorial produce. All lands unclaimed by the Papuans were to be declared the property of the Crown and all lands 'which the natives are willing to sell should at once be purchased'.¹⁰ The power of compulsory purchase of lands for purposes that might extend beyond public use was to be acquired,

⁹ *Report of the Royal Commission*, xcvi, x, xiii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cxxiv.

the Crown's right to all minerals found on native lands unequivocally asserted and a geological survey of the country carried out.

In return for the benefits of security and civilisation they now enjoyed and to arrest the 'present indolent, apathetic state into which Government protection [was] sinking a race capable of a more useful and worthy destiny', the Papuans were to be taxed, compelled to attend schools at which English was to be taught, and systematically recruited for employment through a government agency. Easy optimism over the prospects for economic development was thus matched by a similar certainty about the place to be accorded 'native' peoples in a future dominated by Europeans. For Europeans everywhere, however some of them might deplore the rapaciousness of their fellows, the evidence of their eyes in 1906 could as yet suggest no other possibility than that there was a scale of humanity, biologically determined it seemed, for the races of men as for individuals, and a corresponding scale of civilisation only to be ascended with much time and labour. The casual and innocent expression of these assumptions recorded in the *Report of the Royal Commission* of 1906 was entirely of its time; there could be no insuperable conflict between essential native interests and those of development in such a view of the world.

Yet beyond the swift execution of its recommendations concerning officials who were to be retired, or in the case of the Commandant of the Armed Constabulary to have his position abolished, the *Report* was to be largely disregarded as a plan for immediate action. The areas of land already held by the Crown and available for settlement made further acquisition hardly an urgent matter. The proclamation of the *Papua Act* shortly after the Commissioners' arrival had ended all alienation to settlers in freehold and the passage of the *Lands Ordinance 1906* in the same month, drafted as it was by Murray but incorporating Captain Barton's strong concern to preserve the assurances given the Papuans in 1884 and embodied since in the intervening Lands Ordinances, effectively forestalled any recommendation that the Crown assume the radical title to all lands - a step that Murray had advocated before the Commission and one with which in their questioning of Barton the Commissioners had implied they sympathised. The adoption of 'development' recommendations conceived in an expansive mood depended on a financial settlement that was not to be nearly as generous as the Commissioners had expected.

But as a clarion call to investors and as encouragement to settlement the *Report's* influence was immediate and considerable - if still to an extent far less than that anticipated by its authors. They had also recommended that Papua be advertised to overcome the ignorance or the unfortunate prejudices that prevailed about conditions there. The Territory they could affirm was not only potentially rich, but beautiful, relatively safe and healthy, facts that

should be brought together with statistics and information about the availability of land for settlement in the *Commonwealth Year Book*. Copies of this material separately bound might also be distributed, they suggested, 'through those countries whose people would be most likely to be attracted by the information given'.¹¹ If it was the publication of the Commission's *Report* that in itself did most to stimulate public interest, the Commonwealth and the Papuan Governments accepted that advertising the Territory might help, and both proceeded in the following years to pay for further publicity.

Neither the significance of the Commissioners' endorsement of the substance of his testimony nor an awareness of the impression of self-assurance, high principles and intelligence he had succeeded in giving in the presentation of his evidence could have escaped Hubert Murray. Privately he could now dare to hope that by an unexpected turn of fortune he might be given an opportunity to test and employ talents he had long resigned to wither. With the tabling of the Commission's Report in February 1907, Captain Barton began a face-saving leave of absence for one year. Deakin, in some haste to be away to London but with the advice of the Commission's chairman, Colonel Mackay, and after a first meeting with Murray himself, appointed the CJO as Acting Administrator. The situation could scarcely have been more difficult for the appointee. He was naturally to be regarded as a traitor by the members of Barton's party, several of whom were to remain in Papua for many years, to acquire new allies, and to dog Murray's steps until by longevity and prolonged service in office he was to outlast or convert them.

In November 1907, Beatrice Grimshaw, an Anglo-Irish journalist then becoming well known, visited the 'new' Territory of Papua and quickly found rapport with Judge Murray. His views expressed before the Royal Commission had placed the Acting Administrator in a position where he was expected to promote vigorously development of the country at the very moment when, in a sense, an effort was no longer required. But Grimshaw attributed the great changes taking place, after decades of evident stagnation, to Murray's initiative while recognising his detached concern for Papuan welfare, her perceptions seasoned by finding her opinions in agreement with his over a wide range of issues religious and political. As 'an unprejudiced observer' in the following January she began a correspondence with Deakin that gave an analysis of the situation in Papua highly favourable to Murray and critical of the remaining Bartonites who, she could report, while they were completely outnumbered in the white community, had continued to intrigue.¹² In her letters and at two meetings with the Prime Minister she undoubtedly gave support to the impression developing in his mind that Judge Murray could not

¹¹ Ibid., lxiv.

¹² LaNauze, *Alfred Deakin*, 471.

be passed over without 'an injustice to Papua, and to a deserving public servant' in the permanent appointment of an Australian Lieutenant Governor.¹³ Beatrice Grimshaw was to live for extended periods in Papua over the next twenty-six years, initially as a publicist on contract to the government and subsequently as a dilettante planter supporting herself with her journalism, travel books and novels.

Officers leaving the government service in 1907 included two senior RMs, Henry Moreton and C. A. W. Monckton, the latter at least unwilling to work under Murray, and the *eminentia grise* behind Barton, the Treasurer David Ballantine. Moreton and Monckton left the country but Ballantine stayed. A Scot, he had served for eighteen years without a break under MacGregor, LeHunte, Robinson and Barton. He retired to his plantation at Sogeri, there to die of alcoholism in 1909 aged forty-one. One of the few legends preserved by a settler Papua which otherwise found native superstition ridiculous - and one kept alive, no doubt, by those who saw Ballantine as ill-used - related how his ghost riding the grey horse he had ridden in life was repeatedly seen by plantation labourers in the Sogeri area in the following years.

As a device to rid the service of the impetuous Commandant of the Armed Constabulary, William Cunningham Bruce, the Commissioners had recommended the abolition of his office. Born in India, a veteran of the Boer War, a good cricketer and shot, Bruce epitomised the swagger and irresponsibility of the Barton regime that Murray could deplore. He had barely survived unscathed an earlier Royal Commission into the 'affray' at Goaribari in 1904 when, in the belated attempt to arrest the murderers of the missionary James Chalmers, Bruce had been at first unable or unwilling to restrain the fire of panicking Papuan police.¹⁴ In 1906 the record of his having used obscene language in front of women on several occasions and his abuse of a missionary were considered. The evidence left little doubt that Barton had shielded Bruce from the consequences of his behaviour in allowing him to plead in each case that he had been drinking. The hurt to his pride now dealt him by the Commission, prompted by what he saw as Murray's sanctimonious duplicity, was to rankle and fester in Bruce's mind to the point where some believed it had become unhinged. Though he might have left the country he chose to stay on, to live by his wits and to hope, it can be presumed, to bring Murray down. He became for a period a planting contractor to companies entering the country after 1907. He prospected for gold, obtained planting blocks at Sogeri and near Galley Reach, and milled timber cleared from the estates in the Galley Reach district and from concessions he obtained along the Vanapa River at a sawmill he and a partner

¹³ Ibid., 473.

¹⁴ *Report of the Royal Commission*, pp. lxxv-lxxvi, 182-6.

established at Manu Manu. As editor of the Territory's first newspaper from 1911 until 1917 he pursued Murray with constant obloquy and denunciation. His bitterness was never assuaged. After the deaths of two of his children from dysentery and several years living beyond his means in grand style on Touaguba hill in Port Moresby he was to die, his health broken and in poverty, in a cottage at Sapphire Creek in 1924. We will meet him again in the following chapters.

Of other officers, A. C. English, ARM at Rigo, retired to his neighbouring sisal and *ficus* rubber plantation; Arthur Jewell, Barton's private secretary and one of those whom Murray was eventually to reconcile, resigned to work as a contractor on the Fairfax Harbour sisal estates subsequently becoming manager of a plantation company floated by Henry Wickham; and Guy Manning, ARM, contracted to develop land at Marshall Lagoon. Henry Lysaght Griffin, RM for the Northern Division, was permitted to resign honourably the following year when discovered shooting birds of paradise in 'anticipation' of a change he expected in the law forbidding the killing of the birds. Griffin also went to work developing a plantation at Galley Reach for a Melbourne syndicate. In 1908 he floated a company in which Arthur Jewell had an interest to plant sisal at Tavai near Gaire, thirty miles southeast of Port Moresby. This company would buy Ballantine's Sogeri plantation after the former Treasurer's death in 1909. Capital soon exhausted, the properties were sold, Ballantine's block together with Henry Greene's at Sagoro Tano becoming the foundation of the Itikinumu Estate of the British New Guinea Development Company in 1910. Anthony Musgrave, the irascible leader of the anti-Barton faction and Government Secretary since 1888, retired in June 1908 to be succeeded by Alexander Malcolm Campbell, formerly the senior RM in the eastern divisions.

In 1909 the Commonwealth published *Papua the Marvellous, the Country of Chances*, a racy and provocative booklet advertising Papua prepared by Beatrice Grimshaw for distribution in England.¹⁵ It was of a kind with an abundance of promotional matter being printed and distributed at the time in books, journals and brochures by empire enthusiasts, colonial governments and capitalists urging others to settle in this colony or that, or to invest in particular tropical industries. The author began by confronting misconceptions actually or supposedly held about Papua's political status, its climate, native population and agricultural opportunities, and the health of Europeans in the country, proceeding to refute these notions with 'astonishing' facts. Where MacGregor had straightforwardly sought and failed to attract yeoman farmers of sufficient means, Grimshaw, perhaps more

¹⁵ *Papua the Marvellous: The Country of Chances* (Victorian Government Printer 1909).

realistically, aimed her appeal at younger sons of 'county families' possessed of at least £2,000 and daring enough to tackle 'the country of the rough and ready', knowing, it is likely, that rather less distinguished people impressed by such a pitch might the more readily be attracted. For while Papua, like British New Guinea before it, may have acquired a sprinkling of remittance men, there seems scarcely one identifiable 'younger son' among the generation of settlers that came to the country after 1910.

Alexander Campbell thought the exaggerations and inaccuracies in this propaganda amounted to deceit and he protested to Hunt.¹⁶ Murray wrote that because 'no one can speak from experience . . . no useful purpose [would] be served by keeping back [its publication] . . . The object of Miss Grimshaw's pamphlet is primarily to stimulate inquiry, and therefore . . . the sooner it appears the better'.¹⁷ In the following year Beatrice Grimshaw produced *The New New Guinea*, a book of 320 pages of anecdote and further astonishing revelations about Papua, with photographs by William Whitten, for which she apparently received some payment from the Papuan Government and editorial assistance from the Lieutenant Governor.

¹⁶ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 231, Campbell to Hunt, n.d.(1909). Grimshaw had shown Campbell an article for *Chambers' Journal* with 'statements that have no foundation in fact'.

¹⁷ Ibid., item 292. Murray to Hunt, 28 Sept. 1909.

CHAPTER 7

The country of chances

IF FOR JUDGE Murray the arrival of Beatrice Grimshaw and her promotion of his cause was singularly opportune, the employment of her pen to puff Papua among investors and likely settlers was later to rebound on his administration as were his own easy certainties expressed before the Royal Commission and recorded in its *Report*. Disappointed planters one day were to claim that through Grimshaw's pamphlets the government had greatly exaggerated the opportunities the country offered and had understated the difficulties of development. In this view the settlers and investors had been the victims of a confidence trick.

Effective though Miss Grimshaw's hyperbole may have been, the charge of deliberate misrepresentation was unfair. Influences far more substantial were at work in the larger world of investment in tropical commodities in the seven years before 1914 to induce an interest in Papua like that being shown in almost all tropical territories. It now seemed merely to need its geographic existence drawn to the attention of the investing public to acquire a share of this interest and if time was to prove investors the dupes of hope then Beatrice Grimshaw, Hubert Murray and Staniforth Smith had shared their delusions.

The first public intimations of the immense boom to come in the development of rubber plantations in Southeast Asia were felt in 1906. Plantations of all kinds were attracting capital and it seemed, as Beatrice Grimshaw could write in 1909, that

everybody knows somebody who knows somebody who has made a fortune in a surprisingly short time, tea planting in Ceylon, growing rubber in the Malay States, or raising cotton in West Africa . . . the surpassing fertility of tropical soils is a true goldmine, for those who can find the capital to work it.¹

In Australia rhetorical assertions of confidence in the future of New Guinea seemed at last matched with large and available resources of capital and with the resolution of the Federal and Papuan Governments to carry out a vigorous policy of development.

¹ *Papua the Marvellous: The Country of Chances* (Victorian Government Printer, 1909), 7. This booklet was prepared by Beatrice Grimshaw.

As recently as 1900 most of the copra in international commerce was still derived from the trade with indigenous producers of either fresh or dried kernel carried on by beach traders and visiting ships. From the late 1860s, when the earliest commercial coconut plantations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands were being planted, coconut oil was becoming an important ingredient in competition with whale oil and tallow in the manufacture of soaps, especially of the finer kinds, and increasingly used as a cooking oil. By 1906 the demand for the oil for use in the preparation of margarine had risen to such an extent that a crisis of supply had developed, the average price doubling from the £14 a ton that had prevailed in the decade to 1903 to £28 a ton in 1914. In 1912, Sir William (later Lord) Lever would write in an introduction to *Coconuts, the consols of the East*, a book promoting copra production, that he knew of

no field of Tropical Agriculture that is so promising at the present moment as coconut planting, and I do not think in the whole world there is the promise of so lucrative an investment of time and money as in this industry. The world is only just awakening to the value of coco-nut oil in the manufacture of artificial butter of the highest quality, and of the by-product, coprah cake, as a food for cattle . . .²

As late as 1914, in another 'coconut' book, *All about Coconuts*, the authors believed that

we are only on the fringe of gigantic developments in the industry . . . that it was only a question of time before butter made from vegetable fat will entirely supersede the butter made from animal fat . . . [and] that over-production, the bugbear of most industries, is practically impossible.³

It was the same with rubber. In 1907 Henry Ford introduced the assembly line into the manufacture of motor cars and sales of these vehicles in the United States rose from 44,000 in that year to 65,000 in 1908, 127,000 in 1909 and 187,000 in 1910.⁴ In the latter year rubber production throughout the world was still under 100,000 tons, 80% of which came from the finite resources of wild rubber trees. By 1909-10 the rate of investment in plantation rubber flotations exceeded 'any previous boom known in our

² H. Hamel Smith and F. A. G. Pape, *Coconuts, the consols of the East* (London 1912), v.

³ R. Belfort and A. Hoyer, *All about Coconuts* (London 1914), viii-ix. Papua had 'very promising prospects' on p. 44. An article in *The World's Work* was quoted to say that Papuan palms yielded from 100 to 120 nuts a year, an incredible number, and an assessment by the 'manager of one of the largest coconut plantations in the island' that had also appeared in Hamel Smith and Pape's book was repeated. This 'expert' had predicted that 'when Australia has realised what a valuable asset she possesses right at her very doors, Papua will become the most prolific and richest exporter of tropical products outside of Ceylon'. Nothing Beatrice Grimshaw wrote was bolder than this. But such was the cumulative effect of one optimistic claim upon another in that overheated age.

⁴ John Drabble, *Rubber in Malaya 1876-1922* (Kuala Lumpur 1973), 62.

generation, eclipsing the Kaffir boom and . . . coming perilously near the South Sea Bubble'.⁵ In April 1910 the price rose above 12s. a pound. It was being 'estimated by experts that when rubber first falls as low as 3s. a pound, it will become available for use in street paving, and the demand will then be limitless'.⁶ With both extraordinary foresight a decade before and good luck since, investors in Malayan estates had prepared for this opportunity, and the enormous dividends that the pioneer companies were already paying out could only heighten indiscriminating investment in rubber wherever it might be grown.

In Papua the passage of the *Land Ordinance of 1906* had finally settled the question of the form of tenure to be permitted over alienated land. Although the sale of crown lands in freehold was discontinued, the conditions offered to prospective buyers of leases were such as to justify Staniforth Smith's assertion that they were 'the most liberal in the tropics'⁷ - a ninety-nine year lease could now be obtained on the payment of a nominal deposit of as little as £10 a thousand acres, free of rent for a generous period, and with the costs of survey being met by the government. These were terms that were bound to encourage many an incautious application for land once a boom had begun and when the eventual fulfilment of the development conditions attached to the leases seemed underwritten by an insatiable world market in plantation products stretching far into the future.

The appointment in May 1907 of Staniforth Smith, a well known federal senator with a reputation for 'getting things done', to the new position of Director of Agriculture with a responsibility over all the 'development departments' of government in Papua undoubtedly increased confidence in the Territory's agricultural possibilities and of itself did much to create a sense of impending prosperity for the country. Atlee Hunt wrote to Smith in November, and not only to pander to the new Director's vanity, that he was 'the backbone of everything, the feeling is now "Oh, Staniforth Smith's there, it will be all right"'.⁸ Nor did Smith disappoint by want of achievement in those first years. With apparently tireless industry, and tormented all the while by the hope of greater preferment, he applied himself day and night 'making strenuous efforts to anticipate every difficulty that the planters will experience in this new country'.⁹

⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁶ *Papua the Marvellous*, 27. Staniforth Smith also gave details of an experiment with rubber paving in his *1906 Report*.

⁷ Staniforth Smith, *Handbook of the Territory of Papua* (Canberra 1927), 62.

⁸ NLA Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 1024, Hunt to Staniforth Smith, 2 Nov. 1907.

⁹ Ibid., item 659, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 28 July 1907.

A year earlier in March 1906, while on his tour of Java and Malaya, Senator Smith had arranged for the purchase of 100,000 selected rubber seeds through the Director of Agriculture in the Federated Malay States. In the following May he had supplied careful instructions to enable Captain Barton to have a nursery prepared for their reception in October - rubber seeds having brief fertility. The nursery on the Laloki River had been established by the end of 1906 and on taking up his duties as Papuan Director of Agriculture, Smith could feel that *his* foresight had gained a valuable year in the development of the rubber industry.

By July 1907, Staniforth Smith could already announce in the *Government Gazette* that the station plantation at Rigo had sisal suckers available. By October the first 7,000 *hevea* rubber seedlings were for sale at Laloki. In the same month an Economic Museum and Laboratory was opened and residents were asked to send in specimens of any useful plant or mineral that they might come across for identification and exhibition. A year later rubber plants were available from a second nursery on the Kemp Welch river, fifty miles to the south-east of Port Moresby beyond Rigo. Anticipating the early exhaustion of stock, orders were being taken for seed from a further one million ordered from Malaya.

Before the end of 1907 the Director of Agriculture and Commissioner for Lands had published his first *Handbook of the Territory of Papua*, of 108 pages. It gave a brief description of the government, physical features and living conditions in the Territory and the opportunities, if yet untested, for plantation development - the matter-of-fact presentation all the more reassuring after the enthusiasm of the Royal Commission's *Report*. Subsequent and greatly expanded editions of the *Handbook* in 1909, 1912 and 1927 were to be regarded abroad as valuable compendia of information about tropical agriculture and health.¹⁰

Through much of 1908 and in view of his aspiration to be the first Australian appointed Lieutenant Governor, Smith saw no virtue in excessive modesty and he continued to communicate with his former colleagues in the Federal Parliament - in optimistic letters that leave an unmistakable impression of *naïveté* - to keep everyone well informed of his exhausting schedule. Responding appropriately to one letter, Senator Pearce wrote that Smith's 'last very interesting letter' had been received and had 'gone the rounds pretty well in both Houses and . . . caused very favourable comment among those members to whom I have shown it'.¹¹

¹⁰ Hamel Smith and Pape, *Coconuts, the consols of the East*, 75-82. Staniforth Smith is commended as an authority.

¹¹ Staniforth Smith Papers, Pearce to Smith, n.d. (1908).

Indeed so industrious was Staniforth Smith in this period that some thought that he might collapse from overwork. Hunt warned him not to 'knock himself out' and on another occasion to 'try and remember you are a valuable person and that . . . a few score hours of overtime will not be compensated for by some months forced retirement'.¹² H. H. Lewis, Chief Clerk of External Affairs, confided to Smith that Deakin intended bringing him to Melbourne early in 1908 'to save you from a breakdown' as much as 'to afford Ministers an opportunity of discussing with you the policy to be followed in the future'.¹³ Ignorant of the Prime Minister's intentions with regard to the Lieutenant Governorship until the last moment, Atlee Hunt continued to give encouragement to Smith's hopes. When Hubert Murray's appointment was finally announced in November 1908, knowing his man and no doubt despairing of finding a replacement nearly so competent, Hunt played upon Smith's susceptibility to flattery to get him to stay on as Director of Agriculture.¹⁴ He had little difficulty.

Staniforth Smith remained Director of Agriculture and Commissioner for Lands in Papua for most of the years until he retired, aged sixty-one, in 1930. His period in office was interrupted by war service from 1915 until 1919 and by an appointment as Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory in 1919-21. He was also Administrator of Papua, a confusingly named 'personal' position offered to him at the time Murray was appointed Lieutenant Governor and held dormant except in those periods when Murray was overseas and Smith became indeed the officer administering the Territory. The leading planters believed him to be far more sympathetic - or perhaps more easily influenced - than Hubert Murray, and at several points they proposed that he replace the Judge as Lieutenant Governor. Certainly Staniforth Smith saw a more active and expensive development policy as desirable in Papua and his draft of the 1909-10 *Annual Report*, prepared in Murray's absence, met with disapproval in Melbourne because in it he could see no reason why the white residents should not elect the unofficial members of the Legislative Council 'on a one man, one vote basis'.¹⁵

If for Atlee Hunt Staniforth Smith seemed for a time the 'backbone of everything' in Papua, Hunt was himself an indefatigable propagandist for investment in the Territory, the 'backbone' of Australian government interest through a rapid succession of federal ministries. Shrewd and conventional in much of his administration he conducted a most unconventional private

¹² Ibid., Item 1032, Hunt to Staniforth Smith, 21 Oct. 1907.

¹³ Ibid., H. H. Lewis to Staniforth Smith.

¹⁴ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 492, Hunt to Staniforth Smith, 30 Nov. 1908.

¹⁵ The rejected draft Administrator's Report 1909-10 is in Staniforth Smith Papers, item 1120.

correspondence simultaneously with A. M. Campbell, Murray and Smith, seeming to speak to each with a disarming and exclusive candour. It was for Hunt a form of conversation at a distance that allowed him in his isolation to sound out opinion among the senior officials in the Territory, but one which could hardly be considered fair to his correspondents. He carefully recorded every small flurry of interest in Papuan investment being always at home to prospective investors and furnishing any who wished to visit the Territory with letters of introduction to Smith or Murray. In September 1909, writing to Smith, he noted that he was still 'continuing to give lectures to all and sundry, which your slides . . . make of interest. In Ballarat on Monday [there was a] good audience'.¹⁶

Taking a punt on Papua

In July 1907 Fred W. Kitchen of the Melbourne soap making firm of J. Kitchen and Sons, an applicant for a large lease at the head of Milne Bay and armed with a letter of introduction from Hunt, met Staniforth Smith in Port Moresby. Subsequently a subsidiary of Kitchen and Sons, the Commonwealth Copra Company, was formed to develop some 5,000 acres at Giligili, for a time the largest single copra estate in the South Pacific. In 1916 this property was acquired by Lever Brothers in their purchase of Kitchens becoming the only Papuan plantation of the great 'Combine'. Giligili and its neighbours Hagita (also known as Maiwara) and Waigani were established on land that proved to lack elements necessary to healthy palm growth. All three were to be relatively poor producers.

In October 1908 Kitchen and Sons complained to Hunt about the 'great deal of trouble' they had had with a consignment of labourers recruited in the Purari Delta. Since it was upon his 'representations' that the company had gone to Papua rather than to the Solomons, Hunt could claim in a letter to Murray enquiring into the matter that he took 'a very special interest in their success'.¹⁷ It was a claim that in the same letter he could also make with respect to the largest Australian investments in commercial plantation agriculture in Papua before 1942 - those of Sir Rupert Clarke (Bt) and Robert Selmon Whiting that together were to exceed £200,000 by 1922.¹⁸

It was through a friendly acquaintance of Hunt, Arthur Stoughton Bloomfield, that the attentions of Clarke and Whiting were first drawn to Papua. Bloomfield and Whiting were neighbours and friends at their country houses at Mount Macedon near Melbourne with business interests that touched in the city - Whiting a rich and successful solicitor and Bloomfield a

¹⁶ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 501, Hunt to Staniforth Smith, 22 Sept. 1909.

¹⁷ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 275, Hunt to Murray, 23 Oct. 1908.

¹⁸ CRS A1 25/16087. 'Loans to Kemp Welch and New Guinea Rubber Estates. Papua' 1921-1925, Bloomfield to Minister, 29 July 1921.

prosperous chartered accountant and company secretary. Persuaded that a large return might be obtained by those who were the first with the courage to go into Papuan plantations on a large scale, the 'voluble' Bloomfield was to do more than any other man to attract and commit Victorian investors to 'taking a punt' on the 'new' country. R. S. Whiting was a partner with Sir Rupert Clarke in the ownership of the Isis Downs sheep station in Queensland. Clarke, grandson of the most successful of the successful graziers of the Western District of Victoria, was probably the richest man in Australia, flamboyant in character and a taker of risks - in 1914 in search of the reefs from which he and others thought the alluvial gold of Papua must have come, he was to finance and lead an expedition up the Fly River, a venture which to the great relief of the Papuan Government ended without major incident. Two years later having enlisted for active service in the war he was invalided home from Salonika aged fifty-one.

In 1907 Clarke was prepared to invest very large sums by Australian standards in the proposals presented to him by Bloomfield. Without the example of Sir Rupert Clarke at the time, the Papuan 'boom' might have amounted to little and indeed, even he, with all his wealth, was later to regret his judgement with respect to Papua, so costly had it proved.

As early as July 1906 Bloomfield had met and talked with Alexander Campbell and the Government Surveyor, Ralph Drummond, about the availability of land. With Burns Philp as his agents he took out one of the first leases under the new Ordinance, 1,000 acres at Galley Reach. To develop this property he floated a company in Melbourne which with the addition of a further lease of 1,280 acres acquired in his wife Ada's name became in 1908 the Galley Reach Rubber Estates Limited. Having visited the Federated Malay States early in 1907 to see the technical side of rubber planting for himself he returned to Papua in July to begin the work at Galley Reach and to make further applications for leases for companies yet to be formed. Writing to Atlee Hunt in September, Judge Murray reported that Bloomfield had 'succeeded in getting all the land he required. His people have, I think, 15,000 rubber stumps in the ground already - 80% of them growing - and have ordered a million seeds; so they are evidently in earnest'.¹⁹

The leases he obtained on the Kemp Welch River totalling 2,000 acres were soon assigned to two Melbourne companies promoted by Bloomfield in 1908 - Kemp Welch River Rubber Estates Limited in which Atlee Hunt himself took up 500 £1 shares, and New Guinea Rubber Estates Limited where a controlling interest was held by Geoffrey Syme, literary editor and subsequently managing director of the Melbourne Age. Bloomfield disposed

¹⁹ Atlee Hunt Papers, Item 263, Murray to Hunt, 18 Sept. 1907.

of a lease of 1,000 acres at Marshall Lagoon to a Laka River Rubber Company. Partly developed this property was to be sold in 1910 to the British New Guinea Development Company.

In February 1907 Sir Rupert Clarke and R. S. Whiting had registered a company in Victoria to be known as The Papua Rubber Plantations Proprietary, Limited, with Bloomfield as secretary. By July 5,000 acres on the western and northern sides of Galley Reach had been leased in Clarke's name and a further 3,800 acres on the Veimaui River entering Galley Reach from the northeast in Whiting's. The P.R.P. Proprietary developed two plantations on Clarke's lease, Kanosia and Rorona, for rubber and copra respectively, with Veimaui maintained as a separate rubber plantation and concern. Thus, while Bloomfield acted as public officer of Clarke's and Whiting's companies in Australia until 1916, their general manager at Kanosia could superintend Bloomfield's nearby Galley Reach interests. Little expense was withheld in the establishment of the Clarke and Whiting properties. An experienced Ceylon planter was employed to develop the estates and the rubber stumps for Kanosia were shipped to Papua from Malaya in Wardian cases.²⁰

In 1909 after a trader living at Porebada, John Exton, had shown that sisal grew well in the surrounding savannah, Clarke and Whiting extended their interests further by obtaining a lease of 10,000 acres between the western extremity of Fairfax Harbour and the sea at Boera to grow the plant from which a fibre used in rope manufacture was extracted. Two new companies, Fairfax Harbour Plantations and North Fairfax Harbour Plantations were set up to develop this land.

A. S. Bloomfield was indeed as Staniforth Smith wrote to Hunt 'the most valuable man in the investment line we have had' for he had demonstrated more than the glib confidence of the promoter. He had put hard money into the country and his 'Galley Reach plantation [was] already a show place'.²¹ By 1909 considered and considering himself another authority on the development of commercial plantations Bloomfield published a well produced promotional brochure called *Tropical Agriculture in Papua*.²² This incidentally showed that in four of the companies in which he had an interest, and which he used as examples to illustrate his argument, some £53,000 out of an issued capital of £68,000 had already been contributed and, it can be presumed, largely spent in developing a total of 927 acres on leases amounting to 13,980 acres. That the balance of the issued capital available for further calls amounted to only £15,000 when so large an acreage remained undeveloped and when the plantations were barely two years old might have

²⁰ See below p. 88.

²¹ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 444. Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 9 Feb. 1908.

²² A. S. Bloomfield, *Tropical Agriculture in Papua* (Melbourne 1909).

been thought ominous in less buoyant times. The reserves of the nominal capital of the companies remaining for issue amounted to little more than a further £15,000.

The Papuan contagion had nonetheless already proved widely infectious in Australia and among Australian connections in Great Britain. Of other Australian speculators one of the earliest was a well-known writer and mining engineer who had visited British New Guinea in 1905 and denounced its government, Randolph Bedford.²³ In 1907 Bedford applied for two leases totalling 4,950 acres on Eworogo Creek at Sogeri in the district between Burns Philps's old Warirata property and the plantations of David Ballantine and of Garrioch and Greene, and a lease of 10,000 acres on the Maiwara River at the head of Milne Bay in the Eastern Division. The Sogeri lease was refused when the Papuan owners declined to sell but that at Milne Bay was transferred in 1910 to James Robert Osborne, a former Wesleyan missionary and managing director of a Milne Bay Rubber Company formed in Victoria in which the large retail grocery firm of Moran and Cato had an interest.²⁴ Belying the company's name, its plantation, Hagita, was to be largely turned over to coconuts after rubber proved unsuited to the area.

More land at Sogeri at the junction of Eworogo Creek and the Laloki River was taken up in 1907 by a Papua Para Rubber Company, an enterprise in which several government officers held shares. Soon forfeited without development, the land was eventually to pass to a syndicate of old plantation managers employed by the British New Guinea Development Company in the late thirties to provide retirement security that the company itself could not afford. A neighbouring lease of 1,500 acres planted with 115 acres of hevea rubber in 1908-09 by A. O. Wallace was exchanged in 1910 for 20,000 £1 shares in Sogeri Para Rubber Plantations Limited of Sydney. This property, known as Koitakinumu or Koitaki, became the nucleus of a much larger estate and the best known of Papuan plantations under the continuous management from 1913 until 1953 of T. L. (Tom) Sefton. Nearby at Bisiatabu, the Australian Conference Association of the Seventh Day Adventist Church leased land in 1917 and proceeded to plant rubber in a small way, twenty acres by 1940.

Other Sydney based companies were the Papuan Rubber and Trading Company that developed a lease in the Sagarai valley, an isolated, fever-ridden and flood-prone district at the eastern end of Mullens Harbour in the Eastern Division, and Angabunga River Plantations Limited which took up the old Hall Sound Company lands in the Mekeo district beyond Galley Reach. The

²³ *The Age* (Melbourne), 17 Nov. 1905.

²⁴ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 552, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 1 Oct. 1912.

chairman of Angabunga was Sir Joseph Carruthers, onetime Premier of New South Wales.

A second estate in the Sagarai valley was that of Mullens Harbour Plantations Limited, known as Sagarai Plantation and managed by Charles Boxhall. Boxhall was also a director of a Papua Rubber and Copra Company of Christchurch, New Zealand, which obtained leases in the Elai valley awkwardly separated from a well protected anchorage at Port Glasgow by a range of hills. A related New Zealand company, Papuan Products Limited, engaged the Samarai merchant William Whitten as its 'local' director and developed an adjacent property later merged with Mamai, the Papua Rubber and Copra Company's estate. Mamai was to prove a heavy drain on the capital of its proprietors and to pass fully developed to the Steamships Trading Company in 1934 for a trifle.²⁵

An Adelaide enterprise, Papuan Plantations Limited, applied for 5,500 acres on both sides of the Laloki River at the '12 Mile' and a further 1,500 acres at the '7 Mile' on the track from Port Moresby to Sapphire Creek and the Sogeri district. The country about was savannah similar to the Fairfax Harbour lands being developed by Clarke and Whiting and thought suitable for sisal hemp. Under the management of Raymond Dubois, whose recent experience had been as a vigneron in South Australia, some 500 acres were planted with sisal by 1914. The company then became the first in Papua ever to pay a dividend - a mistaken gesture that was quickly followed by liquidation and purchase of its properties and assets by the British New Guinea Development Company just before the outbreak of the European war. A second Adelaide syndicate, Adelaide Papuan Rubber, held a brief lease on lands at Galley Reach that passed to Clarke's Kanosia estate.

Elsewhere on the coast between Port Moresby and Samarai development began in 1908 of two estates on the Domara River, one on a lease of 2,000 acres the property of Domara River Plantations Limited of Melbourne and known as Kauru or Domara, and the other on a lease of 900 acres held by the Port Moresby publican, Thomas McCrann and his wife, and called Baia. Further east on Amazon Bay a partnership between G. A. Loudon, then managing the trading operations of the British New Guinea Development Company (BNGD), and Campbell Cowley, son of a BNGD director, began the development of a plantation at Mogubo in 1914. Cowley went off to the Great War returning in bad health. He died in 1920 and G. A. Loudon became sole owner of the property.

In the Western Division new enterprise came from a different quarter. In 1905 the Reverend F. W. Walker resigned from the London Missionary Society

²⁵ See below p. 212.

to manage a mission-supported commercial and industrial training undertaking, The Papuan Industries Limited, based at Badu in the Torres Strait. In 1908 Papuan Industries obtained plantation leases at Dirimu on the Binaturi River that enters the sea twelve miles to the west of Daru, and at Madiri at the head of the Fly River estuary. Madiri became thus the most isolated plantation in Papua, and were it not that labour recruiters in the west found it convenient or a matter of honour to call there, it might have been the loneliest. Madiri produced rubber, Dirimu copra. Dirimu had the peculiarity of having the palms arranged in a cartwheel pattern. These two estates together with the property developed by John and Janet Cowling on Mibu Island were to remain the only plantations in the vastness of the Western Division. If the government rubber plantation at Kikori, headquarters of the Delta Division, and the Kikori Plantation Company's estate begun in 1914 nearby at Ogamobu are added, there were to be only five plantations of any size in the entire western half of the country.

The Kikori Plantation Company was formed in Adelaide in 1914 to plant coconuts four miles above the government station on the Kikori River. Issued capital was £7,500. The principals of the company included J. S. Burston of Adelaide, J. M. McComas of Collins Street, Melbourne, and the Commonwealth Electoral Officer at Broken Hill, Percy Robinson. It was Robinson who had instigated the enterprise after a voyage to the Northern Territory of Australia in which he had paused at Kikori and been captivated by its overwhelming verdure. In 1918, aged forty-five, he settled at Ogamobu taking over direct management of the plantation from his inept brother-in-law while meeting the costs of development from returns on the recruitment of Western and Delta labourers for the plantations of the Central Division.

It was soon obvious that coconuts did not grow well in the Kikori area, a region with some of the heaviest rainfall on earth, and from 1919 Robinson began the conversion of the plantation to rubber as clearing progressed. His very detailed letters to his wife until she joined him at Ogamobu in 1921, and Irene Robinson's letters to her mother and sister until 1929 form the only extensive private correspondence from a planter source that we have from any part of the colonial period in Papua, a unique and invaluable record of plantation development and life, reassuringly humane, and, saving Percy and Irene's personal reticences, completely unguarded. The Robinson Letters are extensively used in later chapters.²⁶ The Kikori Plantation Company was succeeded in 1918 by Kikori Plantations Limited with its office in Melbourne. In 1924 the second company was liquidated and ownership of Ogamobu was transferred to Ogamobu Plantation Limited in which Percy Robinson held a

²⁶ The Robinson Letters together with the Prospectus of Kikori Plantations Ltd made available by the late Mrs Penelope Hope of Canberra are now held by the family.

third of the shares with the other two thirds being held by G. A. Loudon, by then general manager of the BNGD Company, and by the Port Moresby hotel keeper, T. D. Ryan, respectively. In 1929 with the collapse of the market the plantation was sold to BNGD and the Robinsons left the country. For Percy Robinson, the defeat would gnaw at the heart.

In addition to the government nurseries established in 1907 at Laloki, on Hombrom Bluff, and on the Kemp Welch River in the Central Division, at Kokoda in the Northern Division, and at Nari Island and Wagawaga in the Eastern Division, among the most important of Staniforth Smith's projects, as he saw them, was the development beginning in 1911 of two large government plantations to be operated both for revenue and example. The first, Gobaregere (or Kapagere), on the Kemp Welch, was planted up with rubber, and the second, Baibara, on Orangerie Bay, with coconuts. Baibara became a showplace under the continuous management for thirty years of Harry Catt, previously a Burns Philp employee in the Solomons - he was 'a drinker, now reformed and a good worker' Smith wrote to Atlee Hunt at the outset.²⁷ Established with a special Commonwealth loan of £25,000, both government plantations were run on economic lines, but gained an advantage from savings in freight and government levies that made comparisons with private undertakings occasionally invidious and a little smug. Staniforth Smith became very proud of his own 'commercial' success with these ventures, the Commonwealth's loan being repaid in full by 1927 'entirely out of profits'.²⁸ Much smaller plantations established on the government stations at Ioma, Kokoda, Kerema and Kikori were worked with prison labour.

Enterprises of vast possibilities

Henry Alexander Wickham reminded the world of the place he had taken in the early development of the international rubber industry with the publication in 1908 of his second book and the patenting in the same year of a rubber smoking process he had developed.²⁹ His simultaneous emergence into the light of day in London after a long obscurity in the South Seas to promote a company to take over his interests in Papua was bound to excite interest. The new company was Mombiri Rubber Plantations Limited and floated with the backing of J. H. Houldsworth, Sir George Mannors and H. M.

²⁷ Atlee Hunt Papers, Item 444, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 9 Feb. 1908.

²⁸ *PAR* 1927-28, 1. A correspondence about the comparative costs of the government and private plantations is contained in the *Papuan Courier* of 2, 9 and 23 Aug. 1929.

²⁹ H. A. Wickham, *On the plantation, cultivation and curing of Para Indian Rubber* (London 1908). Henry Wickham believed that plantation rubber would grow best in conditions corresponding closely to those of the wild with the trees planted in cleared aisles separated by narrow belts of jungle scrub. In 1910 the BNGD board considered and rejected 'Wickham's System' for the company's plantations as impracticable. (BNGD Letterbooks, 12 Aug. 1910). His book contains several plates from drawings Wickham made in Papua.

de Courcy Hamilton, gentlemen investors. It received in addition to the claim to freehold of the Conflicts, the transfer of a lease (Mombiri) that Wickham had acquired at Collingwood Bay on the north coast in 1907. Further leases were obtained in the Kanosia district and on the Giriwu River near Buna. Management was to be shared between Wickham and R. Tweed Baird, but in 1911, on his returning to England again, Henry Wickham was fêted at an International Rubber Banquet, presented with 1,000 Guineas, and given an annuity for life by the Rubber Growers Association and the Planters' Associations of Ceylon and Malaya. He did not return to Papua.

Mombiri was managed until 1913 by George Whybrow who resigned to begin a timber milling venture with William Bruce at Manu Manu. The company was reconstructed that year and became the Pacific and Papua Produce Company managed from 1913 until 1942 by Arthur Jewell. The Collingwood Bay lands were never developed though there was interest in the area in later years when it was thought paper could be cheaply made from the *kurukuru* (*kunai* or *lalang*) grass which was abundant there.³⁰ The company's plantation near Kanosia, Lolorua, became a major rubber estate.

In May 1909 a second London based venture, the Papua Trading and Planting Syndicate Limited, was registered under the chairmanship of Admiral E.H.M. Davis. Davis had raised the British flag in the Gilbert Islands in 1892. He had visited Papua in 1906. His company acquired 2,600 acres at Patakalana on the Kemp Welch River and 10,000 acres on the Imila River at Marshall Lagoon from a prospector and speculator, Albert Hayes. As its name might suggest this enterprise sought to establish itself initially as a trader and a hotel site in Port Moresby and trading stations at Hula and Kalo on the south central coast were quickly obtained. When the prospectus of the British New Guinea Development Company appeared in January 1910, it contained a comment that disparaged the Patakalana property of the syndicate in comparison with lands to be acquired by the new company, and an action was commenced against British New Guinea Development for slander of title. By April 1911 the plaintiff had become a large debtor of the defendant, already established as a major supplier and wholesaler in 'Port', and was ruined when BNGD won the case on appeal. In 1914 the unfortunate directors were sued under the Director's Liability Act (U.K.) for more than £5,000 subscribed for shares in the syndicate by a Danish gentlewoman, Sophie von Holstein Rathlou. The equally unfortunate Mme von Holstein Rathlou had been first interested in the investment by Bert Hayes himself when in 1908 she joined the P & O ship at Alexandria that took him to London to promote the

³⁰ See below p. 242.

enterprise.³¹ Her two sons had subsequently visited Papua where the Rigo planter Albert English had commended Patakalana. She lost her case.³²

Speculating on the boom a Queensland Papua Lands Syndicate had been formed late in 1908 by a Brisbane commission agent, Claude Musson, to acquire lands in the Territory for disposal to plantation companies that might be formed. Among the members of the syndicate was the Chief Justice of Queensland, Sir Pope Cooper. In May 1909 a company, Papuan Lands Limited, newly registered in London, accepted the syndicate's options and proceeded to obtain further leases prior to seeking support in a buoyant capital market for an undertaking that might develop the properties. The promoters of Papuan Lands Limited were John Greeley Jenkins, American born former premier of South Australia and the then South Australian Agent General in London, and a promoter of 'colonial industrial undertakings', Duncan Elliott Alves of 'The Braes', Tunbridge Wells. Musson retained an interest in the new company and became its Australian 'local' agent.

Capital for the purchase of the leases was subscribed by an impressive list of public figures who then as vendors were prepared to guarantee subscription of over half of the initial issue of shares in the proposed plantation venture. These guarantors included the Earl of Ranfurly, a former Governor of New Zealand; Viscount Esher, an intimate of King Edward; the Hon. Geoffrey Howard, Liberal Whip in the House of Commons; and a number of prominent company directors in England and Australia. Among the Australians listed was W. L. Baillieu of Melbourne, an important Victorian investor, though one whose connection with this new company appears to have been brief. Late in 1909 Jenkins together with Charles Alfred Darling, a South Australian representing a family business in London, went out to Port Moresby to arrange the transfers and further purchases in subscribers' names of lands amounting to 112,000 acres distributed for the most part in large leases along the coast in both the 'wet' and 'dry' belts of Papua. Charles Darling was to remain in Port Moresby as general manager. In preparation for the prospectus for the planting flotation the best expert opinion available was engaged to appraise these leases together with several other properties that unconnected speculators hoped to sell to the company. Among the experts who reported to

³¹ In NAPNG & CRS179, Item 7/2, 'Return shewing Europeans charged with Criminal Offences in the Territory of Papua since 1st January 1910' 1921, Albert Hayes is listed. In January 1910 he failed to appear in the Central Court in Port Moresby on a charge of stealing. It can be assumed he was no longer in Papua.

³² *Financial Times* (London), 13, 14, 15, 16 Feb. 1914. The court ruled that the circular advertising the venture was not a prospectus.

Papuan Lands were Henry Wickham, Arthur Bloomfield, and Major A. J. Boyd of the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock.³³

There followed, with a considerable fanfare, the issue in January 1910 of the prospectus of the British New Guinea Development Company Limited (BNGD). This company was to become the largest planting enterprise to establish itself in Papua, large also by comparison with plantation companies setting up in Malaya and Sumatra at the time. The nominal capital was £1,500,000. This was to comprise 500,000 ordinary shares of £1 each of which 275,000 shares and £68,000 in cash were transferred in settlement to the vendors, Papuan Lands Ltd, and one million £1 participating preference shares of which 500,000 were immediately issued to provide the working capital for the venture.

Though not without its detractors among financial observers who thought that the Papuan Lands Syndicate had done rather too well out of the sale of unimproved tracts for which its members had paid practically nothing, BNGD appeared an impressive new enterprise, in name, scale and programme resembling a chartered company. And so at least some in the press regarded it, the correspondent of the *British Australasian* of 17 February 1910 noting that

One of the most important projects of Imperial development which have been brought before the British public since the Chartered Company was introduced by Mr Cecil Rhodes is that of the British New Guinea Development Company . . . an enterprise of vast possibilities; and the fact that it is backed by such well known names (to mention but a few) as Viscount Esher . . . gives some indication of how the project is regarded in high Imperial and financial circles.³⁴

In 1921 Judge Murray was to attribute all the difficulties he had had with BNGD in the intervening years to its 'chartered company' pretensions, but although the company did develop large plantation and trading interests, provided a coastal shipping service, drilled for oil, manufactured tobacco, and had looked around in 1910 for prospective tenant settlers, there is no evidence in the correspondence of the company's officers that they pretended to a 'chartered company' role. There was, nonetheless, clearly a presumption among its principals in London and Port Moresby that by virtue of the size of its investment BNGD should be accorded a certain respect, and its interests given special consideration. Murray would be contemptuous of such

³³ ANUABL Deposit 95, M37, Prospectus of the British New Guinea Development Company Limited, 1910. W. L. Baillieu did become a large investor in the Laloki copper mines during the war years.

³⁴ *British Australasian* (London), 17 Feb. 1910, p. 16.

expectations in the years ahead when he and the company clashed over policy as it tested the constraints under which it laboured in Papua.³⁵

In addition to J. G. Jenkins and Lord Ranfurly, who became chairman, the board of directors of BNGD comprised Sir Westby Brook Perceval, Tasmanian born and New Zealand educated, and a director of the Union Bank of Australia; Ferdinand Charles Stanley, a brother of Lord Derby, a director of the Santa Fe Land Company and future Brigadier General; William Austin Horn, born in New South Wales, a director of the Bank of Adelaide, onetime boundary rider and sponsor of Northern Territory exploration whose interests extended from Malaya to the Argentine; Sir Alfred Sandlings Cowley, sugar magnate and former Minister for Lands in Queensland and Speaker of the Queensland Legislative Assembly; and Duncan Alves. Cowley was to be the 'local' director of the company.

The BNGD plantations laid down in 1910-14 were Aroa near Hisiu on Redscar Bay, Bomana and Katea on the dry savannah lowlands of the Laloki valley, Itikinumu on a tributary of the upper Laloki on the Sogeri plateau, Jawarere on the Musgrave River beyond Itikinumu, Otomata at Cape Rodney, Baubauguina near Abau, Gadaisu on Orangerie Bay, and Waigani at the head of Milne Bay near Giligili and Hagita. Paili or Paile, on Marshall Lagoon, was bought from the Laka River Rubber speculators. To these were added Obu near Aroa bought in 1914 from Robert Hunter, Jaropa near Buna on the north coast established in 1917 partly as a recruiting station for Mambare labour, and Doa, situated between Clarke's Kanosia property and Mombiri's Lolorua at Galley Reach acquired in the same year in settlement of debts to the company of William Bruce. A very large lease of 40,000 acres on the Brown River was never developed and relinquished in 1921. While these properties taken together immediately established BNGD as by far the largest plantation interest in Papua, the company through its subsidiary British New Guinea Trading Company also became for a time a major trader with large wholesale and retail stores in both Port Moresby and Samarai.

The BNGD leases, excepting the Brown River lands, amounted to over 70,000 acres and plantings by 1919 exceeded 12,000 acres. In addition, W. A. Horn, chairman of the company from 1913 to 1922 and the major shareholder in the Kuala Selangor Rubber Company of Malaya, decided to take a further risk in 1915 by developing a separate estate at Robinson River near Abau planted and managed by BNGD until 1926. Of these properties, Aroa, Baubauguina, Obu, Otomata, Gadaisu, Paili, Waigani and Jaropa were

³⁵ See below p. 184. It is also very probable that for a time at least BNGD board members too readily assumed that Murray, being 'one of us' and a gentleman sharing their values, would make allowances for discrepancies that might exist between their unquestionably good intentions and the behaviour of their employees in Papua.

planted with coconuts, Itikinumu, Jawarere and Doa with rubber, Bomana with sisal and Katea with tobacco. Sea Island cotton was also grown for a period on Baubauguina, Gadaisu and Katea. Robinson River produced copra.

As well as requiring the employment of dozens of new managers and overseers of varying experience or none, the flurry of clearing and planting provided work for many of the old Papua hands who, it was presumed, 'knew the natives' and the country and now contracted to clear scrub, prepare nurseries, recruit labour and lay down estates. As mentioned in a previous chapter, several retiring government officers of the Barton faction, William Bruce, Guy Manning, Henry Griffin and Arthur Jewell, became contractors to the new companies - in the case of Bruce and Griffin at least, in order to provide a living while they built up properties of their own. Bruce and Griffin both worked on Bloomfield's estates at Galley Reach, Manning cleared Paili for the Laka River Company, and Jewell cleared the Fairfax Harbour leases of Clarke and Whiting to produce sisal hemp. These men otherwise all speculated in land, might have carried out alluvial mining in spells of inactivity or even shot birds of paradise illegally. They were prepared to turn their hands to anything that could help them re-establish the style of life to which their former office and education had led them to feel entitled. In unashamedly class and race conscious times and not wishing to descend to the level of the older resident knockabouts who openly consorted with the Papuans they must have found their predicament very trying.

Other contractors - Daniel Horan, Alec Clunas, James Driver, Charles Arbouin, Ernest Wythes, Robert Hunter, Elias Solomon, the Evenetts, the Auerbachs, and the Gors brothers were drawn from among the miners, recruiters, traders, small planters and just plain drifters of whom the Territory seemed never to be entirely free. To the management of estates though, were attracted a few men of experience from the larger plantation world. Clarke and Whiting's first manager at Kanosia, Wallace Westland, had managed an estate at Matale in Ceylon, a country to which he returned in 1912. William 'Giligili' Wright, Kitchen and Levers' manager at Milne Bay until 1929 and subsequently the partner with Arthur Bunting and 'Gus' Nelsson in a desiccated coconut factory at Ahioma, had also worked in Ceylon. Bloomfield's manager at Kemp Welch, William Jefferson, may have worked in the Cocos Islands prior to coming to Papua, and George Archibald Loudon, to be met with hereinafter as the strong-willed general manager of BNGD from 1915 until 1926, had spent four years on a cotton estate on the Zambezi, and two years in the Argentine and three years in Nigeria as an investigator for British estancia and plantation investors. Henry Griffin, William Jefferson, and Henry Greene of Sagoro Tano each went on later to obtain positions on Malayan estates on the basis of their Papuan experience.

Australian-born settlers probably comprised no more than half of the private white planters in Papua and fewer than half of the managers on the company owned estates. Many of these were Englishmen, Scotsmen or Irishmen. Names like George Bernesconi, Richard Thorvald Jensen, Helge Holm, Einar Johannessen and Kurt Hacke suggest other backgrounds. Plantation assistants were more likely to be Australians. Of other 'Britishers', most, like William Bruce, were quick to demand the 'rights' of Australians, as they understood them, and prepared at times to use Australian precedents to justify demands they made on the government. Most of the officials under Murray were Australians. Certainly most Australians strongly supported the imperial tie in the period under review and clearly settlers were divided by social class and employment status. Yet other divisions could also exist, and the effect of the country of birth, as indeed of religious loyalties, might have been more significant in influencing the attitudes towards each other of groups within the white community than the records show.³⁶

³⁶ W. C. Bruce was deeply anti-Catholic in his opinions and Captain Fitch's allegation in April 1920 that Judge Murray had given the Catholic Mission favourable treatment over customs dues tried to suggest sectarian bias in Murray and may suggest the same in Fitch. See below p. 162, note 6.

CHAPTER 8

Small men, officials, capitalists

Settlement by the 'small man' in the boom years

With the boom dozens of white miners, traders, and recruiters, many 'battlers' and a few remittance men, long or newly resident in the Territory, applied for leases in large and small parcels at many points along the Papuan coast and in the islands of the Eastern and South Eastern Divisions. In the latter Divisions the more successful of the new individual planters came from among the established traders several of whom accumulated small coconut plantations and became substantial figures in the 'east' and in the small social world radiating out from Samarai. Principal among them was Arthur Bunting, a former Burns Philp employee and Samarai storekeeper since 1903, who had brought out his brothers Fred and Bob from England to help in his business. Together the Bunting brothers were to separately hold or share with each other or others interests in more than twenty planting leases and to supersede the Whittens as the major private planters in the eastern Divisions. The Buntings began by planting on Imbert, Panamau, Teste (Wari), Meilai and Quessant (Miligili), all small islands to the south of Samarai, on Panawina in the Calvados Chain, and in the Engineer Group.

Another settler of this kind was the Swede, John Gusth 'Gus' Nelsson, a trader at Woodlark and since 1903 joint owner with the miner William Sheddson of a plantation lease over Doini Island near Samarai. In 1909 he obtained 5,000 acres at Kwaiapan Bay on Woodlark for a much larger plantation. Nelsson continued to expand his interests both in plantations and other businesses and was a Member of the Legislative Council from 1914 until his death in 1940.

Yet another was Elizabeth Mahony, trader to the miners on Sudest and Misima, who now developed small plantations at Moguiva on Sudest, on Motorina in the Calvados Chain, at Dunvara on Rossel, and at Bonagai on Woodlark. In periods spent in Samarai between 1914 and 1918 the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski came to know Mrs Mahony well and was impressed by 'this 63 year old woman, tall, strong, with an ultra-energetic Anglo-Saxon face, constantly using profane language (damn, blooming)', who intervened in Papuan village disputes and completely overshadowed her wayward and ineffectual husband in the management of

their interests.¹ Like other owners of strings of small properties in the eastern divisions, she lived much of her life aboard her boat collecting copra from her plantations in turn and leaving their operation between visits in the hands of trusted 'boss-boys'. Finally crushed with the onset of the great depression Elizabeth Mahony would retire 'south' in 1930, a woman then in her seventies leaving two daughters and a son in Papua.

Along the north coast of the Eastern Division between Bentley Bay and East Cape were now developed a string of small coconut plantations whose owners would remain dependent for a living primarily on trade and on recruiting 'Gosiagos' from the neighbouring D'Entrecasteaux islands or 'Iasi-Iasis' from East Cape who came to be the preferred labour on the rubber estates of the Central Division. These small trader-planters and recruiters included John Gray of Annie Inlet, Landen Erringstone Forrester of Polotana, and Fred 'Brassy' Evenett of Moununa. Brassy Evenett also leased Deirina Island southwest of Samarai. With his brother, Arthur, he contracted for a time and worked *bêche-de-mer* boats in the eastern divisions. This group was joined in the twenties by the Talbot brothers, Charlie and Dick, at Punipuni. On the other side of Goodenough Bay Hobart Spiller of Menapi also combined planting with trade and recruiting.²

Across the Ward Hunt and Goschen Straits the high islands of the D'Entrecasteaux filled the horizon. There John Olsen, another miner, planted a small property at Sebulagomwa on the southern promontory of Fergusson Island opposite the Methodist Mission head station on Dobu. Nearby at Kedidia a lease was taken out by George Harrison. When Olsen died in 1915, Sebulagomwa was leased by Harrison's brother Ernest, a former Methodist missionary on Woodlark, a notably unfruitful field in the evangelisation of Papua. Ernest Harrison had left the mission after his wife, a fellow missionary, fell ill and was forced to leave the country. Perhaps embittered, and like many of his new friends on plantations, Harrison became a heavy drinker. By 1920 Arthur Bunting in partnership with Burns Philp's manager at Samarai, George Aumuller, and others held planting leases at Sewataitai on Normanby Island, and at Sanaroa Island in the group.

¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (London 1967), 263.

² After the war Hobart Spiller was joined as partner by William Maxwell Middleton, later a prominent planter in the Mandated Territory. Max Middleton had come to Papua as a bank officer at Samarai in 1910. He went off to the war, was at Gallipoli, and lost an eye in France. In 1921 he was an unsuccessful applicant for a lease over the Duperré Group to the south of the Conflicts (NAPNG G67, Land Board Minutes, 10 Feb. 1921). Turning to New Guinea he became an assessor for the Board of Expropriated (German) Properties and acquired several estates on Karkar Island, Madang.

Nearer to Samarai, along the southern shore of Milne Bay, Fred Kruger, a miner retiring from the Waria gold-field, began planting in 1915 at Gamododo or 'Dodo' where his trade store became a well-known stopping place for coastal boats and canoes for the next twenty-seven years. On the opposite shore in the same year Hanorah and John Leetch established Hihila - another modest plantation dependent on its store to survive. Hanorah was a daughter of Elizabeth and John Mahony.³ Across from Samarai, Loani, planted with palms by the Walker brothers, was now managed and partly owned by Elias Solomon who proceeded to grow rubber and experiment with vanilla and cocoa. He supplied milk to Samarai from a herd of cattle that came with the property. Further up the coast opposite Sariba Island was Borebore or Boliboli, the plantation of George Eichorn, son of a naturalist who had accompanied Donald Mackay's expedition up the Purari River in 1908. There too was the Belesana slipway operated by James Ballantyne who, in 1907, also leased a planting block of 300 acres nearby. In 1910 he assigned this property to his wife, Meta Ballantyne, who developed it.

To the east of Samarai, in the Conflict Group, the plantation on Panasesa developed a decade earlier by Henry Wickham was managed after his departure by his onetime partner, Captain Herbert Holton, until Holton's death in 1910 and then by Holton's wife until 1912. Thereafter until the thirties it was managed for the Mombiri Company and its successor, Pacific and Papua Produce, by Alphonse and Helene Bernier, an eccentric French couple notorious for requiring their labourers to wash daily with soap. The Berniers planted a small estate of their own on Misima that failed to flourish and where Bernier went out of his mind. Another Frenchman, Prosper Charpentier, similarly regarded as an odd if charming 'character', held a planting lease on Woodlark. 'Charpy' had a penchant for writing highly idiosyncratic letters to newspapers and the government that made him occasionally a thorn in the side of those he attacked.⁴ In the twenties Charpentier settled on a small-holding, Naruna, on the Laloki outside Port Moresby.

On the numerous islands still further east and to the north of the Conflicts, the Calvados Chain, the Louisiades, Woodlark and the Trobriands, groups that made up the South Eastern Division, the scale of plantations was small though their number was large. Indeed here many

³ Hanorah later married James Driver. They were still at Hihila in 1941.

⁴ CRS A1 13/15743, 'Charges by Prosper Charpentier re: Papua', letter to Prime Minister [Joseph Cook], 10 July 1913; letters in *Daily Mail*, Brisbane, 17 Nov. 1910 (Papua's 'comic opera' Government) and 17 Mar. 1911; in *Papuan Courier*, 6 and 13 Dec. 1918 and 23 Feb. 1923.

trader-planters made no pretence to the title of 'planter' at all as it became increasingly a name appropriated by the managers and especially the owner-managers of the larger estates on the mainland.

On Nivani, a very small island in the Torlesse Group to the southwest of Misima, a government coconut plantation had been laid down in 1893 using prison labour when Nivani was briefly headquarters of the Division. In 1908 it was offered for lease and Elizabeth Mahony applied. She refused to pay the £300 the Lands Department asked for the palms and the lease was awarded to George Munt in 1909. Munt also planted on Panapompom nearby but failed to gain other holdings in the Torlesse under a policy whereby the government disallowed any further applications for the alienation of small uninhabited islands that might have been stopping places for Papuan canoes or visited by their fishermen. He established himself as a trader on Misima.

Elsewhere in the Louisiades memorable figures included John 'Jack' Anderson, one of the first prospectors in the Sudest goldrush of 1888, who set up as a planter on Panamoti in 1907 at the age of sixty-four, and Ah Gow, a Chinese settler from Protectorate days who planted coconuts and rice on Nimoa, an island opposite the Mahony's property at Griffin Point, Sudest. Across Sudest (or Tagula) on Hinai Bay, T. E. Craig developed Madaua, the property of Tagula Plantations Ltd, a venture of a group of old Sudest miners from North Queensland. Craig's father was master of a vessel murdered with his crew off Sudest by the men of Pana Tinani in 1886. In the extreme east of the Territory, the Osborne brothers, traders on Rossel, had also been planting there at Abuleti since 1903. In 1911 it would be found that the brothers had intimidated the islanders and exploited resources to which they had no entitlement.⁵ Their nearest white neighbours to the north, Richard Ede and his son Isadore, traders in the Laughlin Group and, were it not for their lugger, perhaps the most isolated Europeans in all Papua, now developed a small plantation on Woodlark at Guasopa.

Woodlark, or Murua, lies in the north of the Division and planters there have been mentioned in passing. Among others in the vicinity were Einar Johannessen and William Hughes, who together developed a property on nearby Madau. Hughes would one day buy out Charpentier's interest at Lauani. And to the northwest of this Division, in the Trobriand Islands, the brothers Samuel and Raphael Brudo held a small lease, Kavataria, on Kiriwina where they traded in pearls, and a plantation of 180 acres on Bomapau Island opposite where they cultivated coconuts. Malinowski said

⁵ See below p. 280-1.

of Raphael that he was the only man in the islands he could meet with who could bring him into touch with civilisation. He was to stay with the Brudos on a visit to Paris.⁶ Ten miles across the lagoon from Kavataria to the south were the Brudos' neighbours, Edward 'Ted' Auerback and his brother George, who traded at Sinaketa and planted coconuts on nearby Muwo Island which they leased after Nelsson and Sheddson had forfeited it in 1909. Ted recruited in the D'Entrecasteaux and was a contractor for BNGD on Waigani estate in Milne Bay. He was red-headed and a philanderer of note among Papuan women.⁷

Off the east coast of Kiriwina, Cyril 'King' Cameron leased land on Kitava Island. Cameron attracted a reputation as a Papuan Prospero who, it was believed, had forfeited a claim to chieftainship of the Clan Cameron on account of his Papuan children. He presided over his small domain for thirty years among a people the most beautiful and sexually free in Melanesia, resenting visitors who might interfere with 'his' women and in the thirties developing a passion for radio.⁸

East of Amazon Bay on the south coast, all of these settlers along with their neighbours among the miners, traders and missionaries - and perhaps increasingly also some Papuans - looked towards Samarai as their centre. The small town occupying nearly all of the fifty-two acres of an island in the China Strait at the very easternmost point of the New Guinea mainland and surrounded by other palm-fringed islands drew the kind of sentimental regard in Papua shown elsewhere in the Pacific for Levuka, Tulagi, Apia and Papeete. There were settlers in the eastern divisions who had never seen the parched streets and glaring roofs of Port Moresby and who took pride in saying so. In 1937 George Munt of Misima going on holiday could still claim that he was one of those white residents of eastern Papua who had 'never been to Port'.⁹

In the Northern, Central, and Gulf Divisions plantations developed by the 'small man' in the period 1907-14 were fewer if sometimes larger than those of the east. At Buna on the north coast, Ernest 'Ernie' Oates planted coconuts between recruiting sorties with his partner Les 'Jumbo' Joubert among the Orokaivas. A few miles away the goldfield trading partners

⁶ Malinowski, *Diary*, 214.

⁷ Much earlier, in April 1903, while recruiting for the goldfields, Ted Auerback was charged with fourteen offences under the NLO (1900). He was convicted on two charges of failing to repatriate workers, two charges of recruiting using false pretenses and another of arming his native crew with the intention of intimidating recruits. He was fined £60 and imprisoned for a month (BNGAR, 1902-03, Report of the Resident Magistrate, Eastern Division).

⁸ Interview: Fred Craig, Alotau, May 1975.

⁹ *Papuan Courier*, 25 Mar. 1937.

Alexander 'Alec' Clunas and Mort Clark leased land on the Yodda road at the Giritu River on which they grew cotton. Clark also leased 10,000 acres on Oro Bay but he died in 1912 and the land was passed in. It may have been the same land taken up by Oro Bay Plantations Limited in 1915 and called Wiresota, a property that would be owned by one of the Bunting partnerships by 1930. Government stations were established at Kokoda in 1904 and Ioma in 1905 to cover the activities of miners on the Yodda and Gira goldfields. As mentioned previously, small plantations - of *hevea* rubber - were subsequently laid down on both using prisoners to clear scrub and plant the stumps. In later years the Kokoda area was to attract interest and the Kienzle brothers began development of Mamba Estate in 1936.¹⁰

After 1910 there was little further planting by individual settlers in the Central Division where the larger companies had come to dominate commercial agriculture. On Redscar Bay, on the stretch of coast known as Hisiu, the brothers of Walter Gors - Leo, Otto and Arthur - established several small plantations alongside BNGD's Obo and Aroa, and the properties of A. S. Anthony and Dr Colin Simson.¹¹ 'The Palms', another small Hisiu plantation, was developed by Allan MacGregor Sinclair and his wife. Sinclair was one of those who assigned leases they had acquired speculatively to BNGD in return for shares in 1910. He was occasionally a relief manager on BNGD estates. Coconuts were planted further west at Ou Ou Creek near Delena by Louis Clunn, a son of the Milne Bay planter John Clunn. The BNGD general manager, G. A. Loudon, later became a partner in the property with Clunn and then sole owner. In the east of the Division at Cape Rodney a lease of 500 acres had been taken up in 1907 by Frank Horn. He died intestate in 1916 and the *Papuan Times* organised an appeal for his destitute family, the plantation being sold the following year to Domara River Plantations. Nearby at Baramata after the war a Papuan Government Soldier Settlement lease was granted to G. Harden and Partner but relinquished soon after. It was then leased to Arturo Carlo Pilotti, an apparently trouble-prone Sicilian some supposed wanted for rape in Australia who married a Papuan only to be stabbed by her father.¹² He was still alive there in 1939 when he sold the property fully developed.

¹⁰ For later developments at Kokoda see below p. 226. The station at Ioma on the Gira River replaced that at Tamata on the Mambare established in 1897.

¹¹ See below p. 102 for Dr Simson. The Gors plantations were later consolidated as 'Iki-ikina'.

¹² Pilotti shot himself in the knee in Jan. 1930. NAPNG & CRS Series G91, Abau Station Journal, 18, 19 Jan. 1930 (Report by Leo Flint ARM, 9 Feb.). Another soldier settler block had been taken up on the Upagau River at Aroma by Reginald Chancellor. See note 3, p. 194 and p. 282 below.

Further east still, on Baxter Bay near the Mogubo property of G. A. Loudon and Campbell Cowley, Alfred Greenaway, an Englishman 'from Ramsgate or Margate', planted coconuts. Malinowski recorded that Alf was 'married to a native woman and feels miserable in respectable company, particularly feminine. [He] Has not the slightest wish to leave New Guinea'.¹³ There were a dozen others like Greenaway along the coast.

Over 200 miles to the west, in the Gulf Division, coconuts were planted by the traders Ernest McGowan at Moveave; Donald McDonald at Vaiviri; Robert Mawson, father of the Antarctic explorer, at Orokolo;¹⁴ Braham and Pope at Kukipi; Mrs Ashton at Huiva on Ie Inlet; F. W. Clark at Koaru; and W. 'Scotty' Currie at Oiapu. Of these plantations, McGowan's, begun in 1908, was the earliest, and McDonald's by far the largest - 350 acres by 1937. Like the trader-planters of the northeast coast who recruited Gosiagos and Iasi-lasis, these men probably did some recruiting for the estates in the Central Division, as labourers from the neighbouring Delta Division, collectively called 'Goaribaris' and from the Gulf, the 'Keremas' and 'Orokolos', were in demand at various times. A much larger plantation begun before the war in the Gulf Division was at Maira, on the Vailala River above Vaiviri. The planter was Lewis Lett, first engineer on the *Bentlnck*, the tramp steamer that had brought out the supplies for the establishment of BNGD in 1910. Lett was co-discoverer of an oil show on the Vailala in 1911 and much later a writer and biographer of Hubert Murray. His house at Maira with a tiled roof and ornamental garden was the finest on the coast in 1918.¹⁵ After the war cotton was grown in commercial quantities for a period by Frank Mahony, son of Elizabeth and John Mahony of Sudest and a returned soldier, and by Robert Shaw-Moody, a former plantation overseer, at Keuru near Mrs Ashton's place halfway between the Vailala and Kerema.¹⁶

The only plantations in the Delta remained the government plantation at Kikori and its neighbour, Ogamobu, and in the Western Division development had ceased with the work undertaken by Papuan Industries Limited and the Cowlings. Until 1931 the Papuan Industries properties were managed from Madiri on the Fly by James Freshwater and for periods by a Daru recruiter, Hugh 'Percy' Beach. Ownership was then transferred to the Unevangelised Fields Mission which leased out Madiri to Janet Cowling

¹³ Malinowski, *A Diary*, 39. Greenaway's property was later absorbed into Mogubo.

¹⁴ Robert Ellis Mawson's lease at Kavauvau, Orokolo, was issued in 1906. He may already have been there for some time. He obtained leases totalling 2,500 acres on the Vailala in 1909 which he may have transferred to Lewis Lett. He died at Orokolo in 1913.

¹⁵ Percy Robinson, Robinson Letters, 14 Dec. 1918.

¹⁶ See below p. 235.

and Dirimu to Leonard Luff, the principal Daru trader. The only 'town' in the west, Daru, with a white population of perhaps twenty, lay on a low mangrove ringed island that barely escaped inundation by the tides. Depending on the trading houses of Port Moresby for supplies it remained essentially a recruiting station for Papuans indentured in the pearling industry in Queensland waters and on plantations in the Central Division and a place where the returning 'Kiwai' labourers alongside the plantation managers could spend accumulated wages.¹⁷

If the miners of the 1880s constituted the first generation of 'white pioneers' in southeastern New Guinea, the small planters who from 1907 came to take advantage of the 'most liberal land laws in the tropics' alongside the managers and assistants brought to Papua by the investment boom made up a second generation. Leasehold tenure had indeed provided opportunities for settlement in Papua by white men and women of small means who might never have afforded the purchase price of a freehold grant. Despite their hopes, and like their predecessors in the interregnum and before, most of these men and women never became planters independent of trading. Planting carried prestige but trade was to provide a surer living whether the enterprise was large or small throughout the history of colonial Papua. Like many of the nameless assistants on the larger company owned estates perhaps a majority of these settlers died in Papua, a memory for a time among their peers, labourers and servants and in not a few cases among Papuan descendants. In 1909 there were forty-five planters, twenty-eight traders and fifteen recruiters in the Territory among an adult white population of 489. By 1917, when the adult white male population reached 701, there were 139 planters, managers and assistants, twenty-three traders and nineteen recruiters. A further dozen settlers like the Whittens and the Buntings, while they were classified as 'storekeepers' in the *Annual Reports*, were also significant planters.¹⁸ In total, planters and their families comprised about a third of the European population. Another group of about half their number served them as agents and recruiters, operators of small ships, tradesmen and suppliers. It is doubtful that those engaged directly in planting in Papua were ever much more numerous than in 1917. In the period 1930-34 there were at times fewer than a hundred active planters.

¹⁷ For the peoples of the Western Division, much of which was low-lying and relatively infertile, indentured service remained the only channel open for satisfaction of the new needs European intrusion had brought. Often tall and strong above the average in Papua, workers from this region were regarded as especially valuable, along with the Motu of the Central Division, on coastal boats.

¹⁸ PAR 1908-09, 25; and PAR 1916-17, 12.

Officials interested in land

Government officials were as quick now to see advantage in obtaining an interest in land as were the 'unofficial' (non-official) population, and until an Executive Council meeting of 24 December 1907 decided that officers of the Lands Department could no longer apply for or hold leases there were no restrictions whatever placed upon applications for Crown Lands by officers of the Papuan Government. The service as yet provided no pension scheme for retiring officers and though A. C. English had been accused before the Royal Commission of a conflict of interest between his official responsibilities and his plantation and obliged to resign, his fellow officers had continued to acquire lands in their own names.

Up until June 1908 these interests included those of H. L. Griffin, RM for the Northern Division, who had applied for and been granted 640 acres on the Vama Creek at Galley Reach and who proposed to take leave in 1908 to float a company to develop the lease; and Charles Garrioch, Clerk of the Executive Council, who retained his half share with Henry Greene in Sagoro Tano. Garrioch along with John Bensted, Clerk of Government Stores, and Cyril Havilland and Albert Ardlie, field assistants to the Government Surveyor, each held £100 shares in the soon to be aborted Papua Para Rubber Company. This venture apparently succeeded where Randolph Bedford had failed in obtaining a lease between the Laloki and Koitaki at Sogeri. The master of the government yacht, *Merrie England*, Captain Archibald A. H. Hunter, held 600 acres near Garrioch's and Ballantine's blocks and was one of the syndicators in the BNGD flotation, his land being transferred to the new company as part of Itikinumu Estate in return for shares. The gaolers John MacDonald and Horace Hides each held a 500 acre lease on the lower Laloki, the Government Medical Officer at Samarai, Dr R. F. Jones, held a sixth share in Henry Wickham's Conflict Islands Planting Association, and the only Papuan appointed to the regular service, Teina Materua, a clerk in the Treasury, held a lease of 100 acres at Hisiu. The ARM at Samarai, Charles Owen-Turner, held an interest in 125 acres on Milne Bay acquired in the name of his wife - another daughter of John and Elizabeth Mahony - who indeed worked the property. Over the years many officers out of necessity purchased town allotments in 'Port' or Samarai on which to build houses.

That restrictions should be placed upon the nature and extent of the interests of officials in land became obvious at the end of 1907 when it appeared that members of the Lands Department had acted improperly in manipulating applications and in seeking subsequently to evade an

Executive Council Order that prohibited them specifically from having any direct interest in plantations.¹⁹

In October, Archie MacAlpine, assistant manager on the new Clarke and Whiting estates at Kanosia, had begun looking at land nearby for possible development by a syndicate comprising himself, the Chief Clerk of the Treasury, Herbert Champion, Champion's junior clerk, J. C. Watt, and the acting Chief Government Surveyor, Ralph Drummond, and his assistants, Charles Pinney and Albert Ardlie. Drummond had been an officer reprimanded by the Royal Commissioners for insubordination towards Anthony Musgrave in going past the Government Secretary to seek Captain Barton's support in a matter where Musgrave had opposed him. In J. H. P. Murray's confidential account of affairs that led the Prime Minister to establish the Commission, Drummond was described as a 'young man of very limited education, and his conversation, general demeanour, and general principles are such that he could never hope to command the respect of the officers of the Department'.²⁰ He survived in his acting position under Murray but was known to be of the Barton faction that chafed under the Judge's administration.

It happened that early in December, H. A. Mola, an agent acting both on his own behalf and for Bloomfield's Dundee River Rubber Company, saw Drummond about leases Mola wanted to obtain at Galley Reach. On the 13th, the day after he had lodged his formal application for the land, Mola was handed a sketch map showing that two 250 acre portions of the land he had chosen had already been applied for by Drummond and Pinney - the actual dates on Pinney's application being the 11th and on Drummond's, the 13th, - facts not communicated to Mola. At the Executive Council meeting held on Christmas Eve Drummond's and Pinney's applications were rejected on grounds that officers of the Lands Department were not to have the privilege thenceforth of acquiring lands in their own names though their interest in a registered company that obtained lands might not be deemed improper.²¹

Over the Christmas period Champion and Drummond were both house guests of Wallace Westland, general manager at Kanosia, while Pinney and Ardlie were staying nearby at MacAlpine's house at Rorona. In the course of

¹⁹ 'Correspondence relating to dealings in land by officials' was tabled in Parliament and printed in *CPP 1907-08*, pp. 1575-88. Other correspondence is in CRS A1 14/5145, 'Dealings in Shares and Land by Papuan Officials, 1908-1914'.

²⁰ Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 32, p. 43.

²¹ *CPP 1907-08*, 'Correspondence relating to dealings in land by officials: Précis of events etc.', p. 1575. Stanforth Smith had suggested Mola look at Galley Reach lands as the Dundee (or Walpara) River lands at Hood Lagoon were unsuitable (*ibid.*, p. 1585).

a week said to have been spent hunting *goura* pigeons and *magani* much of the area that included the portions refused to Drummond and Pinney was traversed and, no doubt, carefully examined by the holidaying parties. On the re-opening of the Lands Office on 2 January 1908 applications were lodged by MacAlpine and J. C. Watt for land that included the blocks previously applied for - just two hours before H. A. Mola resubmitted his applications for the same area.

As a member of the Land Board that made recommendations for the Executive Council's approval, Drummond met his immediate superior, Staniforth Smith, to constitute a meeting of the Board, the quorum of which was two, and, as with the previous applications by Drummond and Pinney, the applications with apparent priority - those of MacAlpine and Watt - were recommended. Drummond told Smith of his intention to take up an interest in any subsequent undertaking to develop the land and Smith understood this to be acceptable within the meaning of the Order of 24 December. Mola, now thwarted twice, appealed to the Executive Council accusing MacAlpine and Watt of being in a syndicate with Drummond and Pinney and effectively their instruments in an attempt to evade the Council's Order. At the February meeting of the Council, Drummond and Pinney were asked to answer this charge together with charges of attempting to obtain priority for 'their' application over that of a member of the public and of failure to render Mola proper assistance. The Council comprising Murray, Musgrave, Campbell, Staniforth Smith and Champion was divided, the first three finding Drummond and Pinney guilty on the first count at least. Drummond was suspended shortly to resign and Pinney's salary reduced. Staniforth Smith continued to affirm his belief in Drummond's good faith and privately believed the whole affair part of a scheme contrived by Murray's party to damage his credibility in the matter of the Lieutenant Governorship. He could

see the whole vile conspiracy now. Drummond was to be sacrificed although innocent in order to discredit the Lands Department of which I am the head. I have been the real prey and others merely the stalking horses . . . [It was] a carefully and maliciously organised plot to destroy my reputation and good name.²²

But the damage was done without Murray or his supporters' intervention since the propriety of Smith twice permitting Drummond to sit with him as the Land Board to consider applications in which the acting CGS had an interest was unavoidably brought into question. Murray could indeed permit himself to say in a letter tabled in the House of Representatives that

²² NLA Deposit 52, Atlee Hunt Papers, item 469, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 28 Apr. 1908.

Smith 'should have realized how absolutely it was opposed to all rules, not only of justice but of common sense, that Drummond should sit in consideration of his own application', but that it might be urged in Smith's defence 'that his total want of experience in departmental procedure and administration' was at fault.²³ The judgement was harsh but what else could he have said?

To retrieve the situation, Staniforth Smith offered Deakin his resignation. In a letter, also tabled, the former senator admitted his error of judgement finding it necessary now to defend himself against wild assertions in the Parliament that he had interests in land himself. His private humiliation seemed complete when towards the end of June A. S. Bloomfield revealed to Smith that Drummond had all the while held 1,000 shares in Clarke's Papua Rubber Proprietary and that this interest had entitled him indirectly to 250 shares in the subsidiary Fairfax Harbour Plantations that were taken up in his wife's name. The Director of Agriculture and Commissioner for Lands was deeply shocked. He had 'implicitly believed' Drummond's assurances given 'time and again . . . that he had no interests in any land transactions'.²⁴ He ordered the surveyor out of his office and was later to learn that both Champion and Campbell had known from the beginning of Drummond's involvement in shares in land.²⁵ Judge Murray could stand back almost benevolently and watch the self-destruction of his rival.

The outcome of the Drummond affair was the inclusion of a regulation under Section XVI of the Land Ordinance, drafted by Atlee Hunt on Deakin's instructions, that permitted serving officers other than members of the Lands Department to acquire a whole or part interest in lands other than for a place of residence only in those districts in which they were not employed, where they did not personally manage the property and where their official duties were not compromised. Shares could be held in public companies in the Territory provided officers took no part in the conduct of the enterprise and held no controlling interest. The regulation did not apply retrospectively although all existing interests were to be revealed to the Lieutenant Governor. By 1914 officers of the Lands Department were once more allowed to acquire land subject to an extended waiting period in which applications by others would be given priority. In the years ahead officers of the Papuan service continued to acquire plantation and other

²³ *CCP 1907-08*, J. H. P. Murray to Minister for External Affairs, 1 Mar. 1908 (p. 1577).

²⁴ *NLA Deposit 52*, Atlee Hunt Papers, item 478, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 25 June 1908.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, item 484 (n.d.), Staniforth Smith to Hunt.

leases subject to these conditions loosely applied where the need to transfer officers from division to division sometimes placed them near properties in which they were interested.

Government Medical Officers in particular were attracted to plantation enterprise. Dr Cecil Vaughan who had unsuccessfully sought to develop a block on the Musa River in 1899 and Dr Jones's shares in the Conflict Islands Planting Association have been mentioned. In 1906 Dr Colin Coape Simson resigned on taking up 500 acres at Hisiu adjoining A. S. Anthony's property. He continued in private practice in Port Moresby for a time before 1914, his plantation managed by Fred Weekley - an old prospector and a nominated Member of the Legislative Council. Dr Simson became a major shareholder in the Laloki Copper Mine and in 1915 was deputed by a meeting of citizens in Port to publicise the dissatisfactions of the white community of Papua in Australia. Living in Australia after 1918 Simson continued to make an annual visit to Hisiu until 1941.

Other GMOs to take up land were Dr Julius Streeter, Chief Medical Officer in 1910, who was partner with Robert Bunting in the purchase of leases in the Elai Valley at Port Glasgow developed by the Papua Rubber and Copra Company of Christchurch, New Zealand; Dr Walter Harse, a shareholder in the Milne Bay Rubber Company who in 1917 bought Tomanau, the plantation in the Sagarai valley of the Papuan Rubber and Trading Company; Dr F. Goldsmith who obtained a lease in 1910 of 5,000 acres on the Vanapa River in a partnership with an 'old-timer', S. F. H. Thoresby;²⁶ Dr W. E. Giblin who, from 1920, developed Nonowai Plantation opposite Samarai; and much later, Dr G. H. Vernon, GMO at Daru, who 'realised his ambition' by beginning a planter's life at Oni-Oni, Port Glasgow, in 1938.²⁷

Of other officers taking up land after 1914, Lionel Percy Barton Armit ARM, the son of an officer who served under MacGregor, and Alfred Edward Pratt, the then CGS, took up neighbouring blocks at Sogeri where Armit's widowed mother and Mrs Pratt planted rubber. Both properties were eventually sold and incorporated into Koitaki.

Capitalists

Sir Rupert Clarke and Geoffrey Syme were eminent men in Australian public life whose substantial investment might be expected to have stimulated interest in Papua among others of their class and wealth. Yet apart from the concentration of investment that derived from the

²⁶ Goldsmith and Thoresby's lease was not developed.

²⁷ *Papuan Courter*, 8 Apr. 1938. Dr Walter Strong, CMO 1915-37, planted an 'experimental garden' on his private lease at Sapphire Creek in the thirties. The *Annual Report*, 1934-35, p. 7, noted that he was testing tobacco. See below p. 231.

Bloomfield and Clarke connection and the coming together of Australians and Englishmen with antipodean experience to promote the formation of the British New Guinea Development Company in 1910, capital entering Papua in the boom years from 1907 to 1914 came from diverse and widely dispersed sources. Australasian investment proved more typically to come from small syndicates of middle-class business and professional men who, perhaps reassured by the risks taken by Clarke and Whiting, and prompted by an exceptionally favourable international investment climate for tropical agriculture, thought Papua now a safe place into which to put their money close at hand.

The lists of shareholders in two of A. S. Bloomfield's promotions have survived.²⁸ In Kemp Welch River Rubber Estates Limited there were seventy-seven shareholders in 1921, most of whom had taken up their shares at the outset. Of 19,710 £1 shares the largest parcel was one of only 1,273 held by Major General E. Tivey of Queen Street, Melbourne. Atlee Hunt held 500 shares, Geoffrey Syme of the Age 333, and Bloomfield himself 401. Most shareholders held fewer shares. About half were in the hands of Melbourne 'city' men who might have been clients of Bloomfield, the balance being held by smaller investors, widows and retired people. Several shareholders were members of the Melbourne Club or connected with Collins House, two of the principal gathering places of Australian capitalists, but they constituted no dominating group. Other noteworthy investors in the company were A. C. English of Rigo with 200 shares, Otto Gors of Hisiu with 150, Ernest Glass of the Barnet Glass Rubber Company with 174 shares, J. W. McComas of Collins Street and a director from 1914 of Kikori Plantations Limited with twenty-five shares, and one E. Griffin - perhaps the wife of H. L. Griffin - of 'Galley Reach Park', Fish Creek, South Gippsland, who also held twenty-five shares.

The company that developed the neighbouring plantation on the Kemp Welch, New Guinea Rubber Estates, had an issued capital of £25,888. It was in this company that Mr Syme held 10,500 shares and where he was by far the largest shareholder. His fellow investors were similar to and in a few cases the same people who had financed Kemp Welch River Rubber and included, again, O. C. Gors, A. C. English and E. Griffin.²⁹

The interests of Sir Rupert Clarke and R. S. Whiting were in enterprises almost wholly their own. In 1921, at a time when he had severed his connections with Clarke in a separation marked by some acrimony and had no reason to exaggerate, A. S. Bloomfield estimated that Clarke's and

²⁸ CRS A1 25/16087, Loans to Kemp Welch & N.G. Rubber Estates Ltd. Papua. 1921-1925. Lists of shareholders, 30 Aug. 1921.

²⁹ Ibid.

Whiting's personal investments in their Papuan plantations together amounted to £220,000.³⁰ Bloomfield's own investment in Galley Reach and the Kemp Welch plantations could hardly have been less than £20,000. Galley Reach was sold to Clarke and Whiting in 1922 in settlement of accounts after the failure with a considerable loss of Bloomfield's managing agency, the Moresby Trading and Agency Company, in 1921.

Of the 'English' companies, the principal shareholders in BNGD were the directors themselves and the Australian members of the Papuan Lands Syndicate who had promoted the development company. In 1923 Staniforth Smith agreed that the investment of the BNGD shareholders amounted to £620,000, no dividend at the time having yet been paid.³¹ Others in England interested in Papuan plantations were like those in Australia a dispersed group. The directors and shareholders of the Pacific and Papua Produce Company (later Anglo-Papuan Plantations Ltd), successors to Mombiri, were probably old friends or associates of Henry Wickham and whose only connection with BNGD or Admiral Davis's company was their common interest in Papua. One director of Pacific and Papua Produce at least, H. M. de Courcy Hamilton, was among the audience with Lord Ranfurly of BNGD and Sir Pope Cooper of the late Papuan Lands Syndicate at a lecture about commercial opportunities in Papua given by John Greeley Jenkins before the Royal Colonial Institute in 1911. The occasion was chaired by J. H. P. Murray himself on leave in London.³²

Undoubtedly many of the new white 'Papuan' or 'Anglo-Papuan', their number reaching 700 in 1909 and over 900 in 1914, shared the optimism in the years 1907-14 about the new Territory of Papua, a country which in their minds they had appropriated as their own. There was a prospect ahead of unlimited expansion, a confidence that they were present at the beginning of great undertakings. The infusion of new capital into plantation development exceeded £1 million in this period and provided work directly and indirectly for several hundred white employees and suppliers of services, and for numbers of Papuans indentured as agricultural labourers that were increasing by 1910 to over 5,000 annually.

With the outbreak of the European war in August 1914 the boom ended. While plantations might change hands thereafter, the planted areas

³⁰ Ibid., Arthur Bloomfield to Minister, 29 July 1921.

³¹ NAPNG, G69 23/5/1, Staniforth Smith to Minister, 14 May 1923. Smith's estimate was merely the sum of the paid up capital of the company in shares and debentures by 1922. The undistributed profits from the company's large trading operations ploughed back into completing plantation development or appropriated over the years to cover plantation losses might be claimed to represent yet further investment by the BNGD shareholders. See below p. 193-4 and note 14, p. 212.

³² *Morning Post* (London), 24 Jan. 1911.

expanded on the existing leases, and there were to be short flurries of interest and investment in the years after 1922 in cotton, sisal, coffee and sugar, there was no substantial expansion again in plantation agriculture until the late thirties when the threat of a second war rekindled Australian interest in securing supplies of rubber near at hand. The area under cultivation on land owned or leased by Europeans had risen from 1,500 acres in 1906 to 44,447 acres in 1914-15.³³ The total area under lease for agricultural purposes in the latter year was over 200,000 acres but no plantations had completed their development. Forfeitures of lands speculatively leased and for which development capital could not be found had amounted to 174,355 acres since 1910. Of the planted areas, 32,722 acres were given to coconuts, 6,203 to rubber and 4,244 to sisal.³⁴

By 1920 the cultivated areas amounted to 62,162 acres or about one hundred square miles in the 90,000 square miles of Papua. The number of plantations rose from seventy-six in 1908 with an average area of sixty-five acres, much of it just being cleared, to 259 in 1922 and an average area of 232 acres under cultivation. Many of these plantations were very much smaller than the average and more than half of them had no resident planter. Rubber would be planted on fewer than thirty properties all told, and of these, only Itikinumu, Koitaki, Lolorua and Kanosia would exceed 1,000 planted acres. Of the 200 coconut plantations only thirty would reach a size where they produced more than 100 tons of copra a year, and of these only five would be producing more than 500 tons in 1940.³⁵

The total of the areas under production declined to 61,122 acres in 1931-32 and to 58,241 acres in 1933-34. The expansion in rubber planting towards the end of the 1930s was masked by the reduction in the areas under other cultures and in 1940-41 only 63,609 acres were being cultivated. Rubber now accounted for over 18,000 acres, nearly 8,000 acres of it planted since 1936, with coconut plantations having declined in area from 48,000 acres in 1934 to 45,500 acres, and the area cultivated with all other crops now less than 800 acres.³⁶

³³ *PAR 1914-15*, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ For the copra tonnages in 1940 see NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 25/20, Treasurer to Acting Administrator, 21 Nov. 1940; for details of the number and size of rubber estates 1940, CRS A518 Item P812/1/5 Part 4, 'Papuan Commerce: Rubber Industry', 1938-1940, Return of Rubber Plantations, 15 May 1940. For copra and rubber exports see below, p. 310. The limits given here for the size of rubber plantations are for the period under review. They were exceeded after 1945.

³⁶ *PAR 1920-21*, 89; *PAR 1931-32*, 26; *PAR 1933-34*, 32; *PAR 1940-41*, 26. See Appendix A below, Tables 1 and 2, pp. 305-9.

PART III

Testing the constraints 1908-1921

My impression is that Mr Charpentier has hardly grasped the attitude of this country towards New Guinea. Our people desire that we should administer New Guinea in the interests of the natives.

E.L. Batchelor (Minister) commenting upon a letter from Prosper Charpentier published in the *Daily Mail*, Brisbane, 17 Nov. 1910.

The preposterous assertion in the Government annual report that Papua will never be a white man's country causes one to spring on to his hind legs, and ejaculate 'Whatfor'. Is the wish father to the thought for this ridiculous statement? Why this cry of 'stinking fish' when there is ample evidence that this is as much a white man's country as any part of the tropics.

Editorial, *Papuan Courier*, 12 Apr. 1918.

CHAPTER 9

Acting Administrator and Lieutenant Governor

IN HIS FIRST *Annual Report* as Acting Administrator, Judge Murray found it 'gratifying to be able to state that during the whole of the year, although land applied for had in most cases to be bought from the native owners, there is not a single case in which it has been alleged that the interests of the natives have been in any way disregarded'. He noted that 'the efforts of a conscientious and hardworking staff have shown that the white settlers may be placed upon the land without the slightest suspicion of injustice to the native owners'.¹

Mindful of the Drummond affair Murray knew that he could suspect several officers of 'land fraud' - at least to the extent of attempting to evade an Executive Council order.² And others were not quite sure that present justice had been everywhere dealt the Papuans in land purchases - or that an injustice to them might in future be thought to have been avoided. In July 1907, Alexander Campbell, then RM at Samarai, wrote to Atlee Hunt that great care was being taken in the Eastern Division to see that the boundaries of acquired land were marked and that villagers were 'quite willing to sell it, as anything like a breach of faith with regard to lands will be attended with grave danger'.³ In August he wrote that 'we are not having the least trouble in acquiring land from the natives', and submitted a scheme for compulsory acquisition for settlement where land seemed so abundant and Papuan claims to tenure dubious. In October Hunt responded that since there was no present necessity for such a measure there was no need 'to arouse the storm that would undoubtedly burst if we placed upon the statute book a provision contrary to promises made to the native'. He enquired

One point occurs to me . . . Do the natives get anything like a fair return for their land? The prices paid to them seem ridiculously small in comparison to the area acquired. I suppose they are satisfied but a child might be satisfied if you took from it a gold watch and gave it a penn'orth of sweets and a yard of blue ribbon.⁴

¹ PAR 1906-07, 20.

² Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 36, to Gilbert Murray, 19 Jan. 1908.

³ NLA, Deposit 52, Atlee Hunt Papers, item 174. A. M. Campbell to Hunt, 8 July 1907.

⁴ Ibid., item 185, Hunt to Campbell, 1 Oct. 1907.

In the same month a Samoan mission teacher from the Rev. Charles Abel's Kwato mission had begun spreading 'wild reports' around Milne Bay that the *dindims* intended taking all the land from the Papuans. Abel proceeded quickly to calm the man Judge Murray a little cruelly later referred to as a 'mad mullah' and by January the 'scare' in Milne Bay was apparently over.⁵

Campbell may have been embarrassed by this quite unexpected manifestation of Papuan anxiety in his Division. In the following month - and, it is possible mainly with a desire to redirect any concern there might be in Melbourne - he drew Hunt's attention to 'trouble at Port Moresby in land matters . . .' commenting that 'candidly speaking I do not at all like the manner in which land has been acquired from natives in the Central Division. In one instance an officer purchased some 21,000 acres . . . in the space of two hours'.⁶ And indeed in 1908 villagers at Saroa near Rigo regretted that in selling land along the Kemp Welch they had sold gardens still in use. This might suggest that they had been pressured into sale and certainly indicates that the purchase was too hastily concluded. The Executive Council granted them a year's access but the purchase was not rescinded.

Alexander Campbell was appointed Government Secretary to succeed Anthony Musgrave in 1908. The position at the time entailed responsibility through the Resident Magistrates not only for judicial and administrative services in the nine Divisions, but also for 'Native Affairs' - the supervision of the indentured labour system. In the rather tense atmosphere in Port Moresby where the remaining Bartonites and those who were prepared to work with Judge Murray could hardly be friends, Campbell generally sided with the new regime, keeping Atlee Hunt informed about developments. He now 'instructed the Land Buyers to interview the late owners of all land bought in the Central Division during the past two or three years and ascertain whether they are satisfied with the payment they received'.⁷ If Papuan sellers had been paid too little he undertook to authorise a further payment. He also noted that thirty-nine square miles of Woodlark (Murua) in the South Eastern Division had been declared waste and vacant, and 'all I can say is that the population must have died out very rapidly since I was there'. Two years later he reported that he had made additional payments in all cases where he was satisfied the Papuans had been underpaid.⁸ Conscientious, self-righteous and pedantic, Campbell could confidently assert that 'I have never yet to my knowledge

⁵ Ibid., item 265, Murray to Hunt, 4 Nov. 1907. See note 11 below.

⁶ Ibid., item 190, Campbell to Hunt, 18 Feb. 1908. The officer involved appears to have been Henry Griffin.

⁷ Ibid., item 221, Campbell to Hunt, 12 Oct. 1908. The complaint of the Saroakal villagers above is noted in NAPNG G66, Land Board Minutes, (Meeting No 24 of 1908).

⁸ Ibid., item 242, Campbell to Hunt, 11 Feb. 1910.

broken my word with a native'.⁹ There is no reason to disbelieve him. But outside the Central Division and despite the Government Secretary's commitment to fairness in land dealings, some cases of injustice - or at least serious misunderstanding - might yet have escaped his eye. C. B. Higginson RM, on patrol in the Eastern Division in 1911, could still report that labourers employed by George Auerback, contractor on Hagita estate at Milne Bay, were threatened by local villagers who claimed they had never been paid for some of the land being cleared. They said that they had refused an earlier offer of payment on instruction from a Kwato 'mission boy'.¹⁰

As long as his position was unconfirmed Murray remained very vulnerable in his dealings with both Melbourne and the new investors entering the country. He was expected to do everything necessary to ensure easy access to land and labour for the planters. To have begun to scruple publicly over the detail of land transactions at this point would have fuelled opposition from the groups who were likely at the time to extend him their support, and to have allowed the Bartonites an unexpected advantage. But in 1908 as Acting Administrator, he seemed still to share the settler assumptions about the future and there is ample evidence that he as yet saw no essential conflict between their interests and those of the Papuans. In March 1908, Fred Weekley and William Little, the 'unofficial' members of the Legislative Council representing the planting and mining interests, signed a petition supporting his candidature for the Lieutenant Governorship.

It was also imperative for Murray to gain the confidence of the 'hardworking staff', of whom some could be expected to feel that Captain Barton had been badly treated, by demonstrating his confidence in them. Among officers remaining in the depleted service who gained promotion was Herbert Champion, 'a most cautious and almost pessimistic person' who in 1914 succeeded Campbell as Government Secretary.¹¹ He responded to Murray's trust with many years of exceptional industry in maintaining order in the administration. Another was Bertram Bramell, a Bartonite whom Murray chose to consult on 'native' matters when his own understanding was still rudimentary. Bramell was soon won over and in 1910 appointed Commissioner for Native Affairs and Control, a position newly separated from that of the Government Secretary, and given the responsibility of policing the indentured labour system. Their function bound to be unpopular with planters, officers of the Native Affairs Department consisting of the

⁹ Ibid., item 236, Campbell to Hunt, 28 Feb. 1909.

¹⁰ NAPNG & CRS G91, Patrol Reports Eastern Division. Report of 1 Oct. 1911. The Kwato 'mission boy' was very probably Murray's 'mad mullah'.

¹¹ Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, letter No. 57, 30 Dec. 1913, Murray to Hunt.

Commissioner and two or three Inspectors were entitled to enter all places of employment of Papuans and to prosecute employers in breach of the Labour Ordinance.

With his appointment as Lieutenant Governor, Judge Murray's view of the government's responsibilities towards the Papuans began to alter. He was no longer sure that they were being too well treated under the regime Europeans had imposed upon them. At the same time, while land resources were more than sufficient for any foreseeable requirements of white settlement the native population was small and its capacity to provide an adequate supply of labour appeared to place a limit on development. There was still the possibility that Papuan numbers were declining as a result of European intrusion. Not only were epidemic diseases more severe in their effect on peoples until recently isolated but the increased leisure time made available with the introduction of metal tools and the suppression of warfare was widely supposed to create indolence and a despair that would lead to a decline in the birth rate. The problem - perceived much in these terms earlier by both Atlee Hunt and Staniforth Smith in 1905-06 in their reports to the Commonwealth Parliament - was to find meaningful work for the Papuans to do. Since it seemed unlikely that they would begin to produce commodities for export on their own behalf for many years, labour, educative and restorative, on European owned plantations and in mining seemed the only remedy to hand, for, as Murray repeated, 'if the natives won't work it appears to me that they are doomed; idleness does not do them any more good than it does to white men'.¹²

To overcome Papuan indolence and to prevent its supposed consequences, as Acting Administrator Murray had been willing to go so far as to press Papuans into service for the government through a forced labour scheme proposed by Alexander Campbell.

In September 1907, Campbell sent a draft of a proposal to 'tax' the Papuans to Atlee Hunt. Conceived not as a revenue measure but as a device to pressure into 'habits of industry . . . those indolent and licentious young natives who now spend most of their time hanging about the villages, living upon their more energetic fellows and interfering with the wives and daughters of those who may be absent from their homes',¹³ it provided that men between the ages of sixteen and thirty undertake compulsory unpaid labour and carry for the government for a month a year. It was a tax in the form of labour as a tax in cash might not necessarily compel 'the lazy' to work and the wages of those already under indenture might be stretched to cover the obligations of those who were not. Indentured labourers under the proposed scheme were to be exempt from its requirements since they already

¹² Ibid., letter No. 38, 14 Nov. 1908, to Gilbert Murray.

¹³ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 183, A. M. Campbell to Hunt, 13 Sept. 1907.

contributed substantially to the revenue through their purchase of goods upon which duty had been paid. A rebate of the compulsory service might also be allowed labourers whose indenture had ended and to growers of cash crops.

Atlee Hunt had himself recommended in 1905 the imposition of a tax on the wages of a compulsory levy of workers to be drawn from each village for labour on plantations. Campbell's scheme he now thought 'quite the best' he had seen and 'perfectly practicable'.¹⁴ He responded privately that it would receive his support if it was brought forward officially.

On 29 May 1908 the Legislative Council passed, subject to the assent of the Commonwealth Government, an ordinance embodying Campbell's proposals 'to encourage the natives of Papua in habits of industry'. The *Encouragement of Industry Ordinance* had the support of Judge Murray, who drafted it, and of the Treasurer, Herbert Champion, and of the three 'unofficial' (nominated) members of the Council, Fred Weekley, William Whitten and Bill Little. It was opposed by Staniforth Smith and the retiring Government Secretary, Anthony Musgrave. Smith was indignant that he had not been consulted in the drafting of the bill which touched substantially, he thought, on agricultural development, nor had he seen a copy of the draft before Whitten had - the integrity of his stand perhaps a little compromised by an opposition to Murray's handling of the administration that had become predictable. Musgrave, Smith reported to Hunt, regarded the ordinance as 'an abandonment of all the principles that have made the Empire great'.¹⁵

Though Atlee Hunt had indicated his sympathy with Campbell's scheme, he was caught at a disadvantage when attacks on the provisions of the legislation passed in Port Moresby began appearing in the Australian papers even before a copy of the ordinance had been received by his department. Obviously primed by persons in Papua opposed to the scheme either out of principle, or, as is more likely with a few, out of a desire to discredit Murray, the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* editorial of 17 June labelled the ordinance a 'slavery' bill. The measure was disallowed.¹⁶

Employers wanted a guarantee of a continuous stream of labour and to secure for themselves the benefit of the 'education' they were providing the Papuan through the experience of employment. The unpredictability of the supply and the burden of continuously inducting into the routines of plantation life batches of 'raw recruits' from the bush, most of whom in 1908

¹⁴ Ibid., Hunt to Campbell, 26 Nov. 1907.

¹⁵ Ibid., item 473, Staniforth Smith to Hunt, 31 May 1908.

¹⁶ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 17 June 1908. In the Atlee Hunt Papers (item 208) is a letter Hunt wrote to Campbell on 7 Aug. recording opposition in the British and continental press.

were on one year contracts - when few of their white overseers themselves knew how to proceed - placed a very great pressure on managers developing company owned estates, pressure that could only lead them to consider and propose alternative systems that might better satisfy the need for a skilled and 'reliable' workforce. For some the indenture of women as plantation workers alongside their husbands seemed to offer a solution.

In August 1908, Wallace Westland, general manager for Clarke and Whiting's Papua Rubber Plantation Proprietary at Kanosia, wrote to his directors drawing their attention to a prospective shortage of labour that made it difficult for him to justify 'asking you to spend more money in fresh extensions for next year'.¹⁷ Coming to Papua with an experience of planting in Ceylon, Westland was alarmed at the comparative cost of Papuan labour and recruitment. He thought the short term of indenture unsatisfactory because the training of a labour force was 'a gradual and expensive process', but that this difficulty could be overcome if women and children could be engaged. In the meantime he could 'not accept the responsibility of asking you to increase your stake in the country' and submitted his resignation.¹⁸ A month later in a private letter to R. S. Whiting he noted that with the opening of the Astrolabe copper mines the competition for available labour would increase. If the 'village' system could be established on the estates then plantations would survive as the 'Native will always prefer agriculture to mining and will sooner go where he can have his women folks around him than to the barracks of a Mine but we must have complete Villages and we must keep down the rates of pay'.¹⁹

In May Westland had submitted a scheme to the Government Secretary for the settlement of married Papuans on the Clarke and Whiting estates, the 'result of much earnest thought and some practical experience'.²⁰ He set out the social benefits he thought would accrue - the tendency labourers would have to enter successive terms of indenture with their families about them - and he listed the additional measures that would need to be taken, at some considerable expense to the planters, to accommodate women and children. He did not mention the economic advantage that planters would sooner or later acquire as a result of having a dependent labour force living permanently on the estates, an advantage he well knew had greatly benefited 'Far-Eastern' producers. Judge Murray forwarded the proposals on to the Minister for

¹⁷ Atlee Hunt Papers, item 277, Westland to the directors of Papua Rubber Plantations Proprietary (Clarke and Whiting), 15 Aug. 1908.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., item 276, Westland to R. S. Whiting, 15 Sept. 1908.

²⁰ CRSA518 S800/1/5, 'Indenture of Native Women' 1907-1925, Westland to Campbell, 12 May 1908.

External Affairs 'entirely in favour of the proposal which, in my opinion, will remove any difficulties that may be felt in connexion with the present system'.²¹ Twenty three residents including missionaries, planters, merchants and officials, were asked for their opinions about the indenture of married women under the scheme in a 'plebiscite'.²² A majority, thirteen, including three missionaries were in favour. Those against included the planters A. C. English and Guy Manning, and six missionaries. A tenth missionary, C. F. Rich, was prepared to support the scheme if labourers were obtained from the district in which the plantation was situated. As with his support of the Encouragement of Industry Ordinance considered by the Legislative Council in May, Murray's ready endorsement of Westland's proposals in June gave no hint of the transformation in his attitudes to come. Again there were misgivings in Melbourne - and the scheme was not adopted.

Privately the Acting Administrator confessed that accusations of 'judicial corruption', preferential treatment of friends, and official dishonesty being levelled at him at the time by those opposed to the confirmation of his appointment seemed 'so strange that I sometimes doubt my own identity'.²³ And if his enemies had misjudged their man, Murray was still coming to terms with both his new role and the limited outlook of those upon whose support he had been relying. In later years in letters to his family Murray would ridicule Atlee Hunt as 'a safe man for the capitalists',²⁴ but in 1908 it was Atlee Hunt and not Hubert Murray who hesitated to risk public opposition to schemes Murray's opponents at the time could readily attack as damaging to the interests of the Papuans. By 1913 when the question of the indenture of women in agriculture was again raised and considered by the Legislative Council, Murray, now firm in office and opinion, would be entirely opposed to the idea.

In July 1910 three planters managing for planting companies, Guy Manning of Laka River Rubber Estates, Raymond Dubois of Papua Plantations Limited, and Wallace Westland for Clarke and Whiting, complained that they were finding difficulty in getting labour.²⁵ One of the companies had had a schooner looking for recruits along the south coast between Kapakapa and Samarai for six weeks and had obtained only seven men, five of whom merely replaced members of the crew whose contracts were ending. Staniforth Smith, Administrator in Judge Murray's absence, was challenged to support the claims published a year before in the second edition of his *Handbook of*

²¹ Ibid., Murray to Minister, 1 June 1908.

²² Ibid., Schedule of replies to the Government Secretary's Circular No. 08/1625.

²³ West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, letter No. 37, 2 Oct. 1908, to Gilbert Murray.

²⁴ Ibid., Letter No. 76, 27 May 1921, to Lady Mary Murray.

²⁵ CPP 1910, Vol. 3, pp. 151-4, Papua: Native Labour Supply.

Papua, that there was 'apparently no difficulty . . . experienced in obtaining all labour required'.²⁶ A second letter bearing the signatures of the missionary Charles Abel and the BNGD general manager Charles Darling, together with those of eight prominent plantation managers and directors including Westland and Dubois, requested the setting up of a commission to inquire into labour resources.

Staniforth Smith forwarded the letters on to the Minister in Melbourne where they were tabled in Parliament together with an explanatory letter of his own. He was able to point out that of the 140 plantations of all sizes in the Territory, sixty-one of them in the Central Division, the managers of only five had complained of a labour shortage.²⁷ He attributed the current difficulty to the many deaths from dysentery on the Lakekamu goldfield that lay in the west of the Central Division. Men from districts east of Port Moresby did not currently want to work to the west. There appeared no dearth of labour in the Western and Eastern Divisions. In November Staniforth Smith forwarded a lengthy despatch, also tabled in Parliament, in which he set out, with a characteristic show of industry and care, projections of labour requirements and supply for the following twenty years.²⁸ His figures were based on a calculation that no more than 10% of the Papuan population could be spared simultaneously for employment by Europeans. Murray would use Smith's estimates whenever the question of the labour supply came up in subsequent years. No commission was appointed.

Meanwhile Judge Murray was in London and in September he was entertained to dinner by the directors of the new BNGD Company. The company's secretary, Samuel Thompson, in a letter to the general manager in Port Moresby noted that 'He [Murray] does not appear to think well of labour prospects in Papua'.²⁹ Thompson cautioned Darling not to arrange further contracts for the laying down of plantations until it was known if labour was available in sufficient numbers to proceed. He asked to be kept fully informed about fluctuations in the supply. The Lieutenant Governor was quoted in the *London Morning Post* in January 1911 as of the opinion 'that some gentle compulsion to labour is necessary for the Papuan'.³⁰ Beatrice Grimshaw, writing in 'a Colonial newspaper' in 1910 wrote that 'it was extremely improbable' that there would be sufficient labour in future secured on the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 3 (p. 153).

²⁷ *CPP 1910*, Vol. 3, pp. 155-9, Papua: Despatch from Administrator of Papua relating to Native Labour.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5 (pp. 158-9).

²⁹ ANUABL Deposit 95/1, British New Guinea Development Company Limited. Letterbooks, Vol 1. S. L. Thompson to Lewis Cowley, Sept. 1910.

³⁰ ANUABL Deposit 95/3, BNGD Volume of newspaper cuttings, *Morning Post* (London), 28 Jan. 1911.

existing voluntary basis. The choice was 'compulsory labour' or 'foreign labour' and she suggested that taxation be used to induce Papuans to enter employment.³¹

Planters on the larger company owned estates, relying on licensed recruiters to secure labour of unpredictable quality in distant districts, remained unreconciled to the situation. It was not that they thought that there was not sufficient potential labour available - it seemed to them that they were surrounded by a large population of Papuans who, for the most part, appeared not to work at all - but that the voluntary principle was too insecure a basis upon which to proceed with plantation development. In 1912, again finding labour hard to get for his sisal plantation on the Laloki, Raymond Dubois proposed that the government undertake the direct responsibility of providing a steady supply of labour for private employers by employing government officers as recruiters just as it did in supplying its own needs.³² J. T. O'Malley, RM in the Central Division, found that other plantations in the Division had sufficient labour and suggested that because coastal Papuans would not work inland, planters like Dubois with estates situated away from the coast should try to obtain their workers from up-country. Murray had no wish to compromise the government and its officers by having them recruit on behalf of the companies and Dubois' proposal was gently rejected.

As to the introduction of 'foreign labour', J. K. Samuel, the secretary in Adelaide of Dubois' company, had written to the Minister in February 1911 asking if Papua Plantations Limited could bring in 'one or two' Javanese to teach Papuans how to work decorticating machinery.³³ On a similar application by Dubois himself, Staniforth Smith, acting for Murray in June, allowed the request under a clause in the *Papuan Immigration Restriction Ordinance* that permitted the admission of a few skilled aliens. Similar applications were submitted on behalf of the Clarke and Whiting companies by A. S. Bloomfield in September and October.³⁴ Probably prompted by one of these interests a writer in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* raised the question 'Do we propose to let Papua be undeveloped for an indefinite period, or to accept the alternative which is the importation of coloured labour?'³⁵ But if

³¹ Ibid. Which newspaper is unknown.

³² CRS A1 13/71, 'Recruiting of native labour, Papua' 1912-1913, Dubois to Murray, 15 May 1912. Murray's comments and O'Malley's response to the Government Secretary's Circular No. 56/1912 are on this file.

³³ CRS A1 12/19567, 'Papua Admission of Javanese Labourers' 1911-12, J. K. Samuel to Atlee Hunt, 9 Feb. 1911; Staniforth Smith to Minister, 5 June 1911; Bloomfield to Murray, 31 Oct. 1911.

³⁴ Ibid., Bloomfield to Murray, 31 Oct. 1911.

³⁵ Reported in *Papuan Times*, 22 Nov. 1911.

larger companies were interested in exploring the possibilities, the white community were clearly not united on what was, for any Australian in that generation, a momentous issue, and one of several petitions submitted in September to the visiting Minister, E. L. Batchelor, contained the names of ninety-three residents of the Eastern Division who were opposed to the admission of 'Asiatic labourers'.³⁶ In January 1912, before any such workers had actually been admitted, Murray reported that his Executive Council had recommended that up to 10% of the labourers on rubber estates and 6% on sisal estates could be brought in from Java. They were in every case to be accompanied by their wives, be subject to strict medical checks, and be allowed to stay for a period no longer than three years. These conditions could only have been seen as placing a prohibitively high cost on such a scheme - as Murray may well have intended - though the numbers he seemed prepared to admit greatly exceeded those being requested.³⁷

In July at a public meeting of planters from around Port Moresby resolutions were passed urging the government to encourage longer terms of indenture and to admit Javanese 'instructors' for the rubber industry.³⁸ Perhaps Murray knew that no Australian ministry would ever allow as much as 10% of a labour force to be imported - he could now be politically devious - and in September he wrote to the planters to say that the Minister had refused to sanction the admission of the Javanese while approving the encouragement of three year contracts for Papuans.³⁹ A year later he told Lewis Cowley, Charles Darling's successor at BNGD, that he might consider the admission of a few 'Manilla men'. No planter pursued the matter.⁴⁰ The question of whether 'coolies' might be allowed into Papua was raised again in other years but would never be seriously considered.

By 1912, in spite of a widespread epidemic of dysentery in that year, Judge Murray could believe that there was no considerable population decline. In

³⁶ CRS A1 11/16363, 'Petitions of residents of the eastern division of Papua...1911'. 11 Sept. 1911.

³⁷ CRS A1 12/19567, 'Papua Admission of Javanese Labourers' 1911-12, Murray to Minister, 13 Jan. 1912.

³⁸ *Papuan Courter*, 31 July 1912, gave a detailed account.

³⁹ NAPNG & CRS G128 Item 2. Murray to Cowley et al., 21 Sept. 1912. Much earlier in June 1907, Murray had written to the Minister that the admission of Japanese and other imported labour 'would cause the ruin of the Papuan native'. (CRS A1 25/18522. 'Deportation of undesirables'. 1907-1925). It is likely that this was his real opinion and that in 1912 he was being forced to appear an 'honest broker' between the planters and the Commonwealth. Hunt had privately assured Staniforth Smith, acting for Murray in 1910, that while 'of course, we recognize here that you are up against a very big problem...There will be no assent by our Parliament to the introduction of coloured labour' (Atlee Hunt Papers, item 528, 12 Aug. 1910).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Murray to Cowley, 4 Aug. 1913.

December he wrote to the new Minister, Patrick McMahon Glynn, giving a general outline of the dual policy he thought the Commonwealth had endorsed, one 'combining the development of the resources of the Territory with the gradual elevation of the natives to such a standard of civilisation as they may prove themselves capable of attaining'.⁴¹ In the elevation of the Papuans, the pacification of the remainder of the Territory still remained the most important objective of the government. Subsequently employment by Europeans would teach the villagers 'industrial habits' so that eventually they might be taxed in their own interest. As for 'Development', this should be left to 'the skill and judgement of the settlers'.⁴² Apart from being provided with government services and sufficient labour, these people required, he advised, no other 'direct' assistance.

In his first book, *Papua or British New Guinea*, published in that year, he again affirmed the value for the Papuans of an experience of working for Europeans. Indeed by accepting employment villagers were already making a contribution to the development of the country. Murray wrote

Papua must be developed: can it be developed without evil results to the Papuan? Personally I think it can, not only without evil results but with the best possible . . . An official who expresses these opinions, who thinks that (altogether apart from the interests of the settlers) it is to the advantage of the Papuan to learn to work, and that the best available schools are the plantation and the mining field runs the risk of being looked upon as a hypocrite who seeks to curry favour with the employer while posing as a friend of the native.

But he added that it was 'no part of our policy to convert them [the Papuans] from what they are now, peasant producers, into a landless proletariat'.⁴³

The emphasis of policy had shifted since 1908. Having already provided the minimum conditions necessary for Europeans to undertake the work of development - sufficient land and sufficient labour - the duty of the government now lay in control, in policing the limits of reasonable change in order that Papuan society could transform itself. The implication, not yet spelt out, was that if work for the white man was a school where Papuans could obtain a present income and acquire the skills and habits of thrift and industry, the education they received might in the future lead to their direct participation in the production of exports on their own account. And if Papuan village society was not in the meantime to be overwhelmed then the maximum number of labourers that could be engaged under contracts of service in any one period would remain as estimated by Staniforth Smith in 1910 - 10% of

⁴¹ CRS A1 14/5413, 'Papua. Taxation and Education of natives' 1913-14, Murray to Minister, 9 Dec. 1912.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea* (London 1912), 361, 350.

the population calculated as two out of five of the 25% of the population regarded as 'able-bodied' males, or 25,000.⁴⁴ In the end the needs of employers were never to provide a demand for nearly as many as 25,000 workers before 1942.

In other respects also, Murray had changed his mind. In 1906 as the 'Australian' champion of development he had attracted the suspicion of the missionaries and the admiration of the miners - and in accordance with his stance in favour of Australian democracy he had suggested to the Royal Commissioners that the time had arrived for the system of nominating representatives of the white community to the Legislative Council to be replaced by elected representation. But the experience of office suggested caution. How could the interests of the Papuans be protected once the movement towards elected representation by a fiercely partisan white community was begun? His failure in the following years to proceed with the enfranchisement of the settlers together with his change of mind about so much else he had averred before the Royal Commission, while it perplexed some, could only have confirmed the opinion of others like William Bruce, that Murray had been an ambitious liar.

In 1908 Murray had seen Exeter Hall as an enemy and the influence of the Protestant missionaries in Australia as 'appalling'.⁴⁵ Yet here too he was to reverse his opinions. By 1912 the members of the London Missionary Society, the Methodist Mission and the New Guinea Anglican Mission, apprehensive in 1908 about a Catholic governor and seeing themselves as the only party disinterestedly concerned about Papuan welfare, had come to see Murray in a different light. His adherence to legal principle and resistance to settler pressures had secured their firm support. Here, after all, was an administrator to be trusted to consider the Papuan interest, his policies corresponding closely with their own benevolent and authoritarian outlook. In the years ahead Murray had good reason to value their friendship.

For even as his book was being praised by reviewers Murray was privately doubtful that settlers were either willing or able to deal justly with the Papuans. The interests of 'capitalists' and 'natives' were not, as he had said again and again, conveniently concurrent, but were in fact - without a very strong control being exercised by government - in profound opposition. In January 1913 he wrote to his brother, Gilbert Murray, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, that he was 'coming to the conclusion that any white community left with absolute power over "natives" would resort to slavery

⁴⁴ CPP 1910, *Despatch from Administrator of Papua relating to native Labour in the Territory*, p. 159.

⁴⁵ West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, letters No. 35, 16 Dec. 1907; No. 36, 29 Jan. 1908; and No. 38, 14 Nov. 1908.

within three generations - I can feel the tendency myself. In November he could 'see danger ahead with regard to the natives of the Territory' where 'the general sense of honour among the community is very low'.⁴⁶ And time was to intensify a conviction growing in his mind that the experience of employment by Europeans was of itself of limited benefit to the Papuans. By 1925 in his second book, *Papua of Today*, Murray would write of the plantation worker that

He has learned to chop, scrub and pick weeds but it is quite possible that he may have learned little else . . . And if we are going to keep him till the end of time as an unskilled labourer working for the white man at a wage of two and six a week . . . he will [not] have much to thank us for.⁴⁷

If for the settlers the logic of their position in the years ahead would dictate with an almost Marxian degree of predictability their stance in relation to the government's dual policy - that it was weighted against them and in favour of the undeserving Papuans - so also did the logic of his position form Murray's views. He alone bore the task of balancing the conflicting demands of development and protection. He alone could see the whole predicament that he faced, both moral and practical, increasingly accused of the same indifference to settlement that had brought Captain Barton, with Murray's help, into disgrace.

Perhaps also Hubert Murray, in a deep sense, was discovering his truer self. Though Australian born, he belonged to a class and generation of Australians, usually with a landed background, that moved freely between colonial society and the home counties. His later education had been in England and might have been that of many a late Victorian Anglo-Irishman of moderately privileged background. Like the Anglo-Irish he could distance himself from the English, his Australianness and a residual Irishness showing in the extent he was always to eschew empty ceremony and the 'dressing up' that some thought an essential accompaniment to the role of colonial governor.⁴⁸ But if as an Australian in England and South Africa Hubert Murray had found himself alienated by the condescension shown towards colonials by some and perhaps many insensitive Englishmen, he clearly

⁴⁶ Ibid., Letter No. 52, Murray to Gilbert Murray, 19 Jan. 1913; Letter No. 56, 3 Nov. 1913.

⁴⁷ J. H. P. Murray, *Papua of Today* (London 1925), 271.

⁴⁸ Murray was a second generation Australian. His father, Sir Terence Murray, pastoralist and onetime president of the Legislative Council of New South Wales, was Irish by birth. Hubert Murray's attitude towards the trappings of office drew criticism from J. F. Horn a director of Robinson River Plantation visiting Papua in 1932. Horn thought that Murray 'should ginger things up, starting with himself. Sentries on G. H., Guard etc. R.M.'s to wear some sort of uniform etc'. In J. F. Horn. (Diary of) 'Trip from Sydney to Robinson River to inspect property', in the possession of Commander J. F. Horn, Sydney 1975.

shared the education, ethical outlook and accent of yet other Englishmen. And in England and at Oxford in the heyday of late liberalism he had not remained uninfluenced by the ideals of honour, duty, and public service held by a ruling class still confident that Britain was the 'Tutelar Angel of the Human Race'.⁴⁹

It was a preparation that had laid in store for the opportunity and responsibilities he now faced, a grounding in a code of ethics and behaviour profoundly in opposition to the *petit-bourgeois* values (he would have called them 'capitalist' attitudes) of the middle-class settlers who came to Papua with the boom. His own assumption of superiority was effortless and much of the time quite unconscious. His attitude to the Papuans had much about it of *noblesse oblige*, the duty of care and consideration a gentleman owed members of a less fortunate class or race. His apparent empathy with the rough white miners in Papua too might at bottom have been no more than this. His 'Irish' concerns and his Catholicism might indeed be construed as the provisional loyalties, even eccentricities, of an isolated man, his Labor Party sympathies an attachment of a patrician to the only Australian party that by reason of its white working-class exclusivism was opposed to 'exploitation' of coloured people. And in the end he did not trust the white democracy that he had espoused so convincingly in 1906. Beatrice Grimshaw, shallow as her judgements mostly were, had been right in her appraisal of Murray to Deakin. He could, she said, have fitted easily as an administrator into the larger world of the Crown Colonies or an Indian Presidency.⁵⁰ In several periods Murray himself would privately hope for an imperial appointment - though in such a post and constrained by the career considerations and frequent transfers of the larger service it is possible that his merits might have seemed but average. He came indeed to measure his administration in the light of the imperial standard and towards the end of his life in his 1937-38 *Annual Report*, the onetime sympathiser with Great Britain's enemies in Ireland and South Africa could write, without a trace of irony, that 'after all, however far we may be from the important centres of civilization, we are still an integral part of the greatest empire the world has known'.⁵¹

Murray's private letters reveal the out of time out of place reality of his position as the governor of an Australian dependency, the *ennui*, the reluctant response to a sense of unavoidable duty that drove him on. Australians were

⁴⁹ In Peter Spartalis, *The Diplomatic Battles of Billy Hughes* (Sydney 1983), 77, Lord Esher to Sir Maurice Hankey, 29 Aug. 1918.

⁵⁰ In J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin* (Melbourne 1965), Vol. 1, p. 470, Beatrice Grimshaw to Deakin, 21 Mar. 1908.

⁵¹ PAR 1937-38, 1.

increasingly impressed by so rare a plant sprung from their soil while Murray became rapidly aware of how little he could trust his countrymen, their politicians, their press and their entrepreneurs. Publicly he affirmed again and again his confidence in the good sense of Australian governments and gratitude for the Australian subsidy while privately expecting betrayal. Certainly no one remotely like him was appointed to be Administrator of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea after 1919. Had such a one been sought he could not have been found.

Among settlers it was soon to become commonplace to regard the Lieutenant Governor as quite indifferent to the needs of industry and commerce, and to find in his natural aloofness a cold disregard for those whose work and risk-taking maintained the administration. One long-serving officer, certainly, took the view that Murray was quite unbusinesslike himself. J. T. Bensted, the Papuan Government Agent in Sydney from 1913 until 1922 and subsequently Director of Public Works, later recalled that 'Sir Hubert Murray understood little of financial principles or business methods and was quite hostile to any claim that system should enter into anything . . . He was not systematic himself and was impatient with others who were'.⁵² He had chided Bensted for running his department 'like a business concern', and Bensted commented 'I accepted it as a compliment but he meant it as a reprimand'.⁵³ If this assessment of Murray was accurate - and Bensted may have mistaken an attitude that Murray merely affected for something more substantial - then the Lieutenant Governor was well served by officers who *were* systematic. These included his Official Secretary and nephew, Leonard Murray, the Government Secretary Herbert Champion, the Treasurers William Kendrick and Edward Harris, Staniforth Smith certainly and Bensted probably, who maintained careful records and an effective control over expenditure. The thoroughness of the Territory's bureaucracy is indeed impressive. Murray's legal drafting, letters, reports, and occasional writings all demonstrate a high degree of internal organisation and indicate a systematic mind. His court notes are more casual but suggest that he could reconstruct a fuller account from memory. He may have casually derided business practices because he did not care for people who were obsessed with them.

In January 1911, the *Papuan Times* began publication as a weekly newspaper with a distribution of about 300 copies. It was a valuable amenity for the growing white population and quickly attracted advertisements and a readership of almost the whole community. Its owners were Edward Baker, a

⁵² NLA MS 2057, Bensted Papers, Series 1. Bensted was commenting on Lewis Lett's biography of Murray published in 1949.

⁵³ Ibid.

printer formerly working for the government, William Bruce, and Charles Baldwin the Port merchant. Baker became Government Printer within a year and relinquished his share in the paper to Charles Elston, another printer. Bruce was the editor and author of much of the copy, fitting the work into his overfull schedule as planter, planting contractor and timber merchant. From the beginning the paper became a vehicle for every hostile criticism of the government as well as a means by which Bruce could pursue his personal vendetta against Murray. 'Entirely independent' and 'run in the national interests', the *Papuan Times* derided as 'suicidal' the policy that was placing the interests of 'brown brother' above those of the 'law abiding sturdy white pioneers . . . the revenue producers'.⁵⁴ In one of a series of open letters Bruce assured the Minister for Home and Territories that

There are not many whites in the whole country who would not give the native an honest go! The Australian who crosses over to Papua does not lose his identity and become a different creature . . . He is exactly the same as on his native soil! but, he won't play second fiddle to the Papuan native not for all the tea in China, or, for all the politicians in Australia. Nor will his enfranchised brother permit such a thing . . . there is no doubt in their mind as to the inferiority of the brown person.⁵⁵

The editor looked forward to a 'distant future' when boat races would be held on Galley Reach, 'a glorious stretch of water . . . its banks, at present crowded with mangroves . . . [then] thronged with thousands of spectators'.⁵⁶ Without doubt he believed that those spectators would be representatives of a large, dominant and permanent white settler population. Indeed, the idea apparently held by 'the little crowd of sycophants' of the Lieutenant Governor in the southern press and some politicians in Melbourne that Papua could not in time become a 'white man's country' was anathema, held only by 'effeminate', 'hysterical' and 'misguided humanitarians'⁵⁷ given over to race betrayal.

James Fowler - much later a government officer himself, but briefly a settler on the Vailala in 1909 and a manager on various estates in the following decade - was among others who submitted verse for publication in the *Papuan Times*. His 'Wake up Papua' appeared in the paper in June 1911. In a pastiche of Kipling it caught the mood and sense of the extreme settler ethos.

⁵⁴ *Papuan Times*, 3 June 1914, 7 May 1913.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Papuan Times*, 9 June 1915.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 June 1914, 10 Feb. 1915. An editorial in the *Papuan Courler* in 1919, possibly written by G. A. Loudon of BNGD, declared that it was not climate that had in the interim prevented Papua becoming a 'white man's country' but the 'Government that do not want him' (*Papuan Courler*, 6 June 1919).

Wake Up Papua - The White Race Will Win Through

Haul up the white man's standard, fall in the little band
 Of plucky Europeans who suffer in this land.
 We can't be taxed for Papuans, [who] neither toil nor spin;
 The Papuans can't be 'lillies', or be preserved in tin.

The fittest must 'gang forward', the weakest lag behind,
 Despite the ranting bigots and people of that kind,
 The coloured races ere this have for the white made room,
 And so it ever must be until the crack of doom.⁵⁸

Contrary views expressed in letters to the editor were indeed given space, but more, it seems, in order to draw the enemy and expose his folly. Scorn came easily to William Bruce. In particular he used the paper to denounce again and again the 'pernicious nominee system' by which Murray chose the 'unofficial' members of the Legislative Council. He saw, and probably correctly, that elected representation was the key to gaining a better hearing for the Papuan pioneer interest in Australia. Settlers were not seeking responsible government - even Bruce could see that such a claim would not yet be credible - but to obtain the bargaining power of the franchise was imperative if the 'chief wowser' who ran the country was to be side-stepped or replaced.⁵⁹ Without the vote the pioneers would remain 'Unwept! Unhonoured! and Unknown!'⁶⁰ He was confident that though

Cranks may scream in opposition, interested parties may bellow their disapproval . . . it must come all the same. The most democratic Parliament in the wor[l]d cannot afford such a blot on its escutcheon for very long. Ministers may endeavour to shelve the question and local potentates struggle to fog the issue, but in spite of all it must come.⁶¹

Characteristically Bruce's, this kind of emotional writing repeated week after week, if it amused a few, set the agenda for conversation and did much to polarise the community, particularly in Port Moresby, into two camps. On the one hand were the derided officials, with their safe incomes at least partly squeezed out of the sweat of the private settlers. With their missionary allies many of these government officers were strong defenders of both the Lieutenant Governor and his policies. On the other hand there were the embattled settlers, perhaps like Bruce himself with a family to support, unfairly taxed and badgered they thought, precariously clinging to a job or

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21 June 1911. James Fowler, born 1871, was appointed ARM in Aug. 1918 (PAR 1925-26). He married a sister of Archibald and Alexander MacAlpine.

⁵⁹ *Papuan Times*, Editorial, 3 June 1914. The 'wowser' epithet had appeared in the paper of 31 Jan. 1912.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 9 Oct. 1911.

⁶¹ Ibid., 9 Oct. 1911, 3 June 1914.

developing a land-holding where profitability lay years ahead. Many of them came from the same social class as the officials and there continued to be movement across the divide. But the means of livelihood determined attitude, and interests seemed utterly opposed. Two contending moralities were at war in Papua among a white population hardly larger than a good crowd at an Australian country race meeting.

1. Samarai in 1905, taken from the deck of a ship. The picture is evocative of other nineteenth century Pacific port towns. The wharf has not yet been built and copra stored in the sheds is taken out to ships by lighter. Clunn's store is at the left next to his hotel. Whittens Brothers own the Cosmopolitan across The Parade.

[Louis Budérus, photographer, Samarai, 1905, Collection John Oxley Library, Brisbane]

2. Returning plantation workers at Port Moresby. Whittens' coastal vessel *Kla-ora* is at the wharf. The photograph conveys the busy atmosphere at times in the small ports, the heavy dependence on coastal shipping, and an order of things that seemed immutable.

[E. Nixonwestwood: New Guinea-Tonga Album, National Library of Australia]

3. Henry Alexander Wickham, (1846?-1928), pioneer planter at Panasesa, Conflict Group. That Wickham spent fifteen years in British New Guinea and Papua was a surprising discovery.
[H. A. Wickham, *On the plantatlon, cultivation and curlng of Para Indian Rubber*, 1908]

4. Sir John Hubert Plunkett Murray, KCMG (1861-1940), Lieutenant Governor of Papua, 1908-40. Routinely avoiding all such display, Murray nonetheless permitted the visiting photographer and broadcaster Basil Hall to take this portrait at Cape Nelson in 1938.
[The late Mrs Ellen Hall, Melbourne]

5. William Cunningham Bruce (1867-1924), Police Commandant 1903-06, later planting contractor, planter, timber miller and merchant, and newspaper editor bitterly opposed to Murray. Probably taken at the time of the South African War before Bruce arrived in British New Guinea.

[The late Mrs Ellen Bruce, Brisbane]

6. George Archibald Loudon (1881-1964), general manager of British New Guinea Development Company, 1915-26, and subsequently planter at Ellogo. [The late Mrs Winifred Loudon, Sydney]

7. The small planter: John Clunn and his workers at Ramaga, Milne Bay, c. 1910. Clunn came as a goldminer, became a storekeeper and publican, and attracted to the planter life began developing Ramaga in 1903. [Frank Burnett, *Through Polynesia and Papua*, 1911]

8. Clearing for rubber in the Astrolabe Range. This photo is believed to have been taken from the steps of the first plantation house at Koitaki in 1908; a scene representative of many estates at the outset. [J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea*, 1912]

CHAPTER 10

Contending moralities

BY EARLY 1914 the atmosphere had become uncomfortable and Hubert Murray privately anxious about his position. Others more influential than William Bruce had begun to make unfavourable, highly partial and generally inaccurate comments in Australia about the Papuan administration. In April, in connection with criticisms levelled at his policies by Sir Rupert Clarke in Melbourne, Murray wrote to his brother in Oxford that he had discerned in Australia 'a gang of capitalists interested in Papua who want to get rid of me in order to have a free hand with the natives'.¹ This suggested a conspiracy. If nothing nearly so tangible as a plot existed, undoubtedly the larger investors in Papuan plantations had concerns in common and were coming to view Murray as pursuing a 'native' policy at the expense of white capital. Sir Rupert Clarke was only an occasional critic, and Arthur Bloomfield, the secretary and a director of the Clarke and Whiting companies, remained on good terms with the Lieutenant Governor. Much more significant and sustained challenges to his administration would be an outcome of the appointment in Port later in the year of a new and resourceful general manager in the largest of the plantation companies, the British New Guinea Development Company.

Matters came to a head in May when while he was in Australia Murray was approached by T. J. Craig, a former employer of BNGD who had worked for five months on Baubauguina estate. Craig alleged that the manager, George Bernesconi, had seriously ill-treated the workers and had, among other things, attempted to hang a labourer for desertion.² Bernesconi had been previously convicted and fined late in 1913 for neglecting to treat a sick labourer who had died. Murray instructed Staniforth Smith, Administrator in his absence, to arrange a full inquiry at Baubauguina into the new charges before C. E. Herbert, the DCJO, and Craig was asked to return to Port Moresby. At the hearing in June, Bernesconi was acquitted of one charge of hanging a labourer to a bell post. As the labourer that Craig referred to had left the plantation, the particular 'hanging' accusation that he had made could

¹ Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 48, 22 Apr. 1914, Murray to Gilbert Murray. An article reporting Sir Rupert Clarke's opinions was published in the *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 22 Mar. 1914.

² NAPNG & CRS G126/3, Murray to Staniforth Smith, 21 May 1914.

not be immediately pursued. Bernesconi and an assistant, R. H. P. Marsham, were nonetheless convicted and fined on nine out of twelve lesser charges. The manager was subsequently convicted on yet two more counts of assault and in October, the labourer of Craig's allegation, Lauboiboio, having been found, the principal charge of causing grievous bodily harm was heard before Murray himself.³

Lauboiboio testified that at some date earlier than August 1913 he had been caught deserting the plantation and taken to Bernesconi who had bound his hands and hanged him by the neck from a rafter, clear of the ground, from 6 am. until 11 am. Three Papuan witnesses corroborated this account though they differed in details. The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Buchanan, declared it to be incredible as death would have resulted from such treatment within half an hour, and L. P. B. Armit, the RM at Abau, affirmed that he had dismissed a similar allegation after questioning Lauboiboio about it in August and September 1913. The man had been prosecuted for desertion three times and Armit regarded him as not sane. Bernesconi defended himself by saying that desertions were relatively frequent at Baubanguina not because of ill-treatment but because 'boys' preferred plantations closer to the coast. He admitted to having had Lauboiboio tied up on two occasions though not by the neck. The Criminal Code of Queensland adopted in Papua made it an offence with up to three years gaol to illegally confine a person. The manager was found guilty on this count on 30 October and sentenced to twelve months imprisonment.

Bruce in the *Papuan Times*, appalled by the outcome of the case, wrote that

Not everyone may be a judge of a native's evidence but everyone has a right to his belief whether this was a cock and bull story invented by a few cunning natives to get even with a master who had made them work hard or whether it rings like a true story.⁴

An appeal to the High Court in Melbourne was lodged immediately and the paper ran a public collection to support Bernesconi. Editorials and articles throughout 1914 attacked the government's policies in Bruce's most intemperate style. With allusions to the Bernesconi trial and to other prosecutions and inquiries under way that must have been obvious to everyone, the paper declared the Papuans to be children and often in need of chastisement. At the same time they were also 'crude savages' and 'minor assaults must occur on plantations'.⁵ The 'lying propensities' of the Papuan were proverbial and 'native evidence alone should never convict a white man -

³ The trial was reported in detail in the *Papuan Times* of 4 Nov. 1914. Murray's notes are in NAPNG & CRS Series G179.

⁴ *Papuan Times*, 4 Nov. 1914.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1914, 15 July 1914, 30 Sept. 1914.

unless there is very strong circumstantial evidence to corroborate the case'. The government by giving credence to every trivial or fabricated claim made by labourers wanting to desert and by applying punishments that were too lenient to Papuan offenders was contributing to a loss of respect for Europeans and a breakdown of order. Bruce prophesied that 'The time will come - and before very long - when the white man will have to walk in the road whilst the buck nigger occupies the footpath if things are not altered'.⁶

Settlers could indeed be shocked by the government's evenhanded policy in accepting the evidence of Papuans before a court. No doubt most of them would have accorded the law their formal assent but at the same time they did not expect to be held to account for the many 'petty' and 'inevitable' breaches of the NLO and the Criminal Code that occurred in 'temporary' circumstances or the extremity of the moment in the isolation of the estates or the privacy of the kitchen. As Murray had suggested in his remark about the tendency of settlers, if unchecked, to reduce 'natives' to slavery, white men in the predicament of settlers could readily see the laws as basically having application between 'civilised' men whose societies had developed them. Otherwise as in Papua, they thought, laws should exist primarily to protect the white residents. Only in time - and certainly not yet, it could seem - should Papuans be allowed something approaching legal equality. Settlers in similar circumstances in many parts of the world throughout the nineteenth century had literally 'got away with murder' as they were still to do in the Northern Territory of Australia itself for years to come where the same Federal Government that was so sensitive in its administration of Papua turned a blind eye. Settlers could not admit that their behaviour was cruel or unjust - so deeply had the popular version of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest penetrated; they were merely instruments of an irresistible historical and biological movement. Even the 'protection' of the Papuans as undertaken by Australia could be seen in this view as a voluntary act of restraint made entirely for reasons of humanity and in the face of historical necessity. Those planters with relatively humane attitudes who believed that the laws ought to be applied impartially were just as annoyed as those with a cruder outlook at interference in their affairs by officials who possessed neither experience in the management of Papuan labour nor any understanding of how to run a business. Until the twenties planters generally believed the visits of Native Affairs officers to be unwarranted intrusions and were inclined to give their peers charged with an offence the benefit of the doubt.

And to add to the frustrations of some planters in 1914 a drought in the Central Division unprecedented in the brief memory of settlers afflicted their

⁶ Ibid., 21 Oct. 1914.

plantations and tested their patience. In October and November fires lit by hunting parties from the Kabadi villages as they undertook their annual dry season game drive swept into Rorona where 200 acres of sisal were burnt out, and into Kanosia, Lolorua and Galley Reach destroying large quantities of young rubber. Archibald 'Archie' MacAlpine, Wallace Westland's successor as general manager of the Clarke and Whiting companies, gave way to his irritation in a circular letter to his managers telling them to rumour abroad among the Kabadis that they were 'apt to be shot' if found trespassing on the estates, and suggesting that staff should not be afraid to use the whip in chasing any actual trespassers away. The villagers 'apparently . . . think they can do as they like and if the Government won't protect us we'll have to do the best we can for ourselves', he wrote.⁷ Fires became an annual problem in this Division. In July 1917 thirty acres of sisal were destroyed at Bomana.⁸ The apparent inability of the government to protect planters from a hazard inseparable from proximity to Papuan communities could seem to provide yet further grounds for indignation even as Murray sought to have the Native Regulations enforced that forbade the 'wilful or careless use of fire' by villagers near the property of others.

Bernesconi's appeal, heard in the High Court in March 1915, was dismissed after long digressions into whether Commonwealth Law applied in Papua and whether a jury system was desirable in Papuan circumstances in which the Court deferred in every respect to Murray's opinion.⁹ Lewis Cowley, general manager of BNGD since 1911 and a member of the Legislative Council (MLC), chose December 1914 as the moment to resign. A sociable man who had sided with the government against the other two 'unofficial' members in the Council over the indenture of women in August 1913, Cowley had lost one of his children in the dysentery epidemic of 1912. He now claimed ill health as the reason for leaving.¹⁰ He may have found his position untenable as both general manager of BNGD and an MLC on good terms with the Lieutenant Governor when it was revealed he had known of T. J. Craig's allegations

⁷ Kanosia Letterbooks 1914-15, MacAlpine to Clarke, 5 Nov. 1914. Writing to A. S. Bloomfield on 10 Nov., MacAlpine noted that he had 'never seen weather like this before in Papua, the jungle all around us is burning'. Reporting the fires on 'Cameron's Block' [Rorona], the *Papuan Times* of 18 Nov. demanded that 'The white capitalists...be protected'.

⁸ *Papuan Courier*, 27 July 1917. In 1920 the Planters' Association would press, without success, to have Papuans required, as a fire control, to 'keep an area two chains wide cleared round their reserves from June or July onwards to the advent of the rainy season' (AL 20/9009, Planters' Association of Papua, *Bulletin*, No 3, p. 15).

⁹ George Bernesconi served his sentence in Badili Gaol. He is believed to have become much later a newsagent at Elwood, Victoria. (Interview, Mrs Haldee Champion, 21 Oct. 1973.)

¹⁰ NLA Deposit 52, Atlee Hunt Papers, item 349, Murray to Hunt, 13 Dec. 1914. Murray thought Cowley might be suffering from tropical sprue.

against Bernesconi since late 1913 and had failed to act upon them. A director of the company, Evelyn Metcalfe, was in Port Moresby having been sent out to Papua to find ways to check the alarming rate at which the development of its properties was drawing on BNGD's capital.¹¹ He immediately appointed the company's commercial manager in Port, G. A. Loudon, to the senior position. George Archibald Loudon, born in 1882, had been commercial manager since 1913 and was of a temperament very different from Cowley's. Handsome, capable and energetic, a taker of risks, he had come to Papua with a considerable experience of the plantation world. He was determined to 'bring the company to a dividend paying basis', to press for every advantage and oppose every restriction placed before his objective. Bertram Bramell advised Murray that the new general manager would 'need watching'. He was, Murray feared, 'a bit of a nipper'.¹²

At the same time as the Bernesconi affair was simmering, a recruiting scandal involving a Resident Magistrate came to light in which BNGD was to suffer considerable losses as an innocent third party. At an inquiry *in camera* ending in August 1914, Alexander Campbell, the Government Secretary since retired, had cancelled the contracts of thirteen Eroro labourers on the grounds that there had been collusion between the RM in the Kumusi (Northern) Division, A. E. Oelrichs, and the recruiters Les Joubert and Ernie Oates to pressure men into signing on. It appeared that Oelrichs had threatened to burn down villages and kill pigs if men did not agree to engagement.¹³ As the labourers so pressed into service were among a large consignment for BNGD, the company settled its account with Joubert and Oates for the remainder, 550 in all, after Campbell's decision was known. Campbell gave Loudon a verbal assurance that there would be no further action taken in the case. In July the government announced that new disclosures necessitated the re-opening of the inquiry and by February 1915 the contracts of a further 130 Orokaivas had been cancelled. BNGD submitted that the government should bear the cost of these cancellations, including the expenses in repatriating the labourers, since a qualified officer, if in illegal circumstances, had witnessed the contracts.¹⁴ Loudon at first seemed to flout the law by keeping the

¹¹ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 1, 10 Oct. 1913. Capital for development of the BNGD properties was being drawn upon at the rate of £5,000 a month while receipts coming in from BNG Trading were less than a sixth of this. See note 23, p. 158 below.

¹² Atlee Hunt Papers, Murray to Hunt, 13 Dec. 1914. For Loudon's previous experience see above, p. 88.

¹³ CRS A1 13/19589 and 16/15122 contain the correspondence dealing with the Oelrichs case.

¹⁴ NAPNG & CRS G126/3, Loudon to Murray, 23 June 1914. Binandere speaking labourers from the Northern Division were identified, not always very accurately, as 'Orokaiva', 'Eroro', 'Kumusi' or 'Mambare' depending on the general area of their recruitment.

Orokaivas at work after the decision of the court was made known. This led Murray to believe that the company was attempting a trial of strength with the government and that whilst BNGD may have been an innocent party in the recruiting scandal, it was now evidently prepared to challenge the law over its obligation to repatriate the labourers in question.¹⁵ Native Affairs demanded that the company immediately release the Orokaivas from service and return them home without delay or face an action that would deprive BNGD of the right to have labour signed on.

Murray's attention was also drawn to a recent report of the CNA that referred to an incident at BNGD's Katea estate where the manager, James Matley, had apparently sent a horse and rider to bring back an absconding labourer making his way to Port Moresby to lodge a complaint. Fortunately the labourer had evaded the pursuit which, Murray concluded, amounted to an attempt 'to terrorise' the man, and conduct on the part of the manager that could hardly be regarded as the 'fair treatment' to which RMs were expected to assign Papuans entering contracts of service. He asked that these details be sent to Loudon.¹⁶

On 2 January an interview with Evelyn Metcalfe in which he was highly critical of affairs in Papua was published in the Melbourne *Argus*.¹⁷ He accused the Murray administration of 'harassing [his] company out of existence'. Murray was prompted to ask the general manager why Metcalfe should have formed such opinions, and Loudon - no doubt with the director's advice - set out a long statement of grievances.¹⁸ In addition to the claim for the costs of the Orokaiva cancellations BNGD complained that the government had, without warning, reduced the permitted passenger complement of the company's coastal steamer, the *Wakefield*, from 106 to thirty-four at the very moment when it was obliging its owners to return the illegally recruited Orokaivas home. It was on the day that the restriction was lifted that the company was advised that its rights to engage labour might be cancelled. Loudon went on to complain of inconsistent treatment by the Customs Department, and of an excise tax being contemplated for locally grown tobacco while the industry was still in the experimental stage and certainly before it had become profitable. He objected that the Native Affairs Inspectors did not seem to accept the truth of plantation returns with regard to ration issues and that the Commissioner did not allow the payment of advances on wages to labourers on the estates, a measure that if permitted, Loudon suggested,

¹⁵ CRS A1 Item 17/10895. Murray to Minister, 23 Feb. 1915.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Melbourne *Argus*, 2 Jan. 1915. On 4 Jan. the paper published a reply by the Minister, Hugh Mahon, and on 5 Jan. the leader article covered the controversy.

¹⁸ NAPNG Series G126, Item 3, G. A. Loudon to Murray, 25 Feb. 1915.

would go far to making the period of indenture more tolerable. Implying that the administration was prejudiced against business in general, he referred to yet another hearing that had taken place since Bernesconi's in which 'the word of a native' was used to convict the manager of Clarke and Whiting's Fairfax Harbour plantation, J. R. A. Wilkes, against the sworn testimony of three reputable European witnesses.

Murray responded distantly to these charges through the Official Secretary. Loudon was, His Excellency had suggested, 'over-sensitive' in the 'misunderstanding' over the *Wakefield*, and in the matter of the Fairfax inquiry the Lieutenant Governor had observed that 'it is impossible to say whether the decision was right or wrong, - so much depends, sometimes, upon the demeanour of witnesses and the manner in which they give their evidence'.¹⁹ True as this may have been of the processes of law in Australia or England, it was an extraordinary remark for Murray to make and could only have been understood by Loudon to mean that the Lieutenant Governor believed it was more incumbent on the government to make the law appear impartial than that justice should be done. Murray added that it was 'clearly impossible to lay down a rule that a magistrate should always decide according to number and colour'. Loudon was hardly likely to see this as more than cant.

Indeed, Murray was to break off his private correspondence with Atlee Hunt in June 1915 over the Wilkes case when, after Arthur Bloomfield had protested to him, Hunt was inclined to agree that the judgement in the Port Moresby RM's court was questionable.²⁰ Wilkes had been fined for failure to provide good and sufficient food for six Bamu River labourers who had been admitted to hospital in February 1915 in a feeble condition. The defence had claimed that the 'boys' in question had been 'weedy' and 'thin' on arrival at the plantation having passed a government inspection and that 200 others on Fairfax Harbour had not complained of a shortage of food. The fines imposed on the manager were small and the costs involved inconsiderable in comparison with those incurred by the employer in the BNGD cases. An appeal was made against Wilkes's conviction and dismissed. Of this case Bruce indignantly noted in the *Papuan Times* of 19 May that 'some evil minded crank [had] sent to a southern paper a photograph of diseased and emaciated boys who were the cause of a recent prosecution' and had described them as 'Victims to Capitalism in Papua'.²¹

A subsequent letter informed Loudon that nothing on the Government Secretary's files could be found to show that Campbell had given BNGD any

¹⁹ NAPNG Series G128, Item 3, Lieutenant Governor to G. A. Loudon, 5 Mar. 1915.

²⁰ West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, letter No. 64, 16 June 1915, Murray to Hunt.

²¹ *Papuan Times*, 19 May 1915, p.2.

assurances after the first Oelrichs inquiry. Yet in this Loudon had not lied - Campbell later admitted in a letter that he had indeed given the verbal assurances Loudon claimed.²² In correspondence with the Minister, Murray argued strongly that as the law stood the government was not liable for the costs which BNGD, even as an innocent party, was now obliged to meet.

Murray also clashed with Evelyn Metcalfe more directly. A director experienced in Australian conditions, Metcalfe had managed a pastoral property in Queensland, and was prepared to play the rougher game thought by the other members of the board of BNGD to be necessary in dealing with Australians.²³ In an interview with the Papuan Treasurer, William Kendrick, he had referred to the Lieutenant Governor as 'a bloody liar'. Kendrick reported this to Murray who wrote declining any further contact.²⁴ Receiving the letter back in England, Metcalfe rejected the charge of using bad language - attributing it to the factionalism in Port Moresby that made misrepresentation always possible. He responded in a letter that his criticisms of the Australian and Papuan governments' policies were not personally aimed, adding with characteristic assurance that,

I go to Papua seldom, and when there rarely find you at home . . . I have just heard on my return . . . that things are if anything worse than when I was there. I trust therefore that you will give further attention . . . and endeavour to prevent a serious calamity. My Company is at all times willing to assist the Government in every way but some actions of your Government leave us powerless to even carry out the instructions of the Government.²⁵

In the *Melbourne Age* in May 1914 inflated reporting of the Bernesconi and Oelrichs cases had led to allegations that there was 'slavery' in Papua.²⁶ Papers in England took up the story. The *Melbourne* correspondent of the *London Daily Chronicle* of 1 July reported that there was 'no doubt that slavery has been flourishing in the Territory of Papua for years'. The *Papuan Times* did 'not believe for one moment' that there was the remotest cause for anxiety and that, on the contrary, the Murray administration was 'inclined to err in the milk and water manner' exactly in the opposite direction by 'coddling the natives'. Murray too felt the need to respond to the reports and in his next *Annual Report* noted that only sixty-five of 120 Orokaiva labourers

²² CRS A1 17/10895, Campbell to Hunt, 14 Aug. 1915.

²³ Evelyn Metcalfe had earlier been the member of the BNGD Board sent out in 1911 to straighten out the company's affairs. He had been selected as 'a strong man to go out and see what was the matter and to deal with the situation with no gloved hand' (ANUABL, Deposit No. 95, Microfilm M37, BNGD Annual General Meeting, 1911).

²⁴ NAPNG Series G128, Item 3, Murray to Metcalfe, 3 Feb. 1915.

²⁵ NAPNG Series G126 Item 4, Metcalfe to Murray, 19 Mar. 1915.

²⁶ CRS A1 17/4904 'Slavery in Papua. Protection of Native Races'. The *Age* (Melbourne) article appeared in May, that in the *Daily Chronicle* (London) on 1 July 1914.

whose contracts had been recently cancelled had chosen to return home. This spoke well, he suggested, for the general conditions of employment. And clearly to mollify Loudon's sense of injury, he now publicly acknowledged that

the employer certainly was rather badly treated. There was nothing in the very voluminous evidence which even suggested that he had done anything wrong -all he had got out of the affair was a lot of annoyance and the loss of 120 boys - and it did seem rather hard that on top of all this, he should be denounced as a slave-owner.²⁷

Elsewhere in the *Report* he noted that the 'haunting terror' of labour scarcity seemed to have disappeared and that this was due to the fair treatment Papuans could expect 'in the great majority of cases' when they engaged. He went on to add with an eye to his readers in Papua as much as to his wider audience that

Doubtless there have been, even in Papua, employers of violent and even brutal temper, as well as employers who regard the question of their employee's welfare with callous indifference; but so far as I know there has never been anything like systematic illtreatment of labourers either by miners or planters.²⁸

In London the directors of BNGD on hearing of the dismissal of Bernesconi and Marsham instructed the secretary, Samuel Thompson, to inform the general manager 'that ill-treatment of natives is against the policy of the Board and they regret to hear of this occurring. They think that every precaution should be taken to prevent such an occurrence in the future'.²⁹ In connection with the cancellation of the Orokaivas' contracts the directors noted approvingly that G. A. Loudon had sought the help of Sir Rupert Clarke in an attempt to quash the second enquiry, but when this could not be done they reluctantly supported the application for costs lodged by the Port Moresby office against the government.³⁰ The company's claim for over £2,000 was to be eventually met with a payment of £409 in compensation in May 1917.

At the annual general meeting of BNGD in London in July 1914, W. A. Horn, who had succeeded Lord Ranfurly as chairman, had drawn attention to the difficulties the company experienced in obtaining suitable white employees. A 'new' country, it seemed, tended to attract wasters and adventurers from the 'old'.³¹ This may have been an early allusion to Bernesconi but BNGD and other planting companies were to claim on many

²⁷ PAR 1914-15, 7.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 1, 25 Sept. 1914, Thompson to Loudon.

³⁰ Ibid., 25 Oct. 1914, Thompson to Loudon. The full correspondence over the claim is in CRS A1 17/10895.

³¹ *Financial Times* (London), 18 July 1914. ANUABL Deposit 95, M37.

occasions that the government could show sympathy to the larger employers in circumstances where it was difficult to police the conduct of subordinate personnel. On 11 March 1914 Archie MacAlpine at Kanosia wrote to his superintendent at Rorona, Edgar Collins, concerning forty-eight Mambare [or 'Orokaiva'] labourers, also among those recruited by Joubert and Oates in the Oelrichs scandal, who a few days before had deserted Rorona and gone off to Port Moresby to lay complaints against their overseers. The Mambares, he conceded, were a 'particularly troublesome lot ever since they learned that the Govt might be taking steps to enquire into the way they were recruited'.³² His concern to recoup any costs if the labourers' contracts were cancelled was uppermost in his mind but a lack of confidence in the reliability of his white staff is apparent in the letter. There was 'of course, probably nothing' in the Orokaivas' complaint 'but it has occurred to me as being strange that it is always from Rorona that boys desert and it might be well for you to consider your methods of handling labor [sic]'.³³ Rorona was known to be unpopular with Papuan workers both because they disliked working sisal and because the plantation was not directly on the beach. But it was only a few miles from Kanosia and from MacAlpine's eye. If he could be uncertain about Collins's dealings with his labour, how much more difficult might it have been for a general manager of much more widely separated estates to superintend his superintendents? It is very probable that dishonesty and want of care among white employees were generally much greater causes of anxiety for managers responsible to overseas directors and shareholders than the proverbial *vis inertiae* of the Papuan.

Indeed government officers would later acknowledge that some of the difficulties experienced with the law by the companies in general could be attributed to the unreliability of the staff they were forced to employ. But it is clear that by late 1914 the Lieutenant Governor had begun to believe that transgressions by employees of BNGD in particular were of another order and that this company, in the persons of its agents, G. A. Loudon and Evelyn Metcalfe, represented a real and powerful threat to his administration. On 9 March 1915 Murray wrote to his brother that

I have been doing battle with the British New Guinea Company, or rather they have been doing battle with me. This is the Company of which Geoffrey Howard was a shareholder - I hope he has sold out, for they are the weirdest lot of people I have met. We had to refuse to sign on any more labour to them until they complied with

³² Kanosia Letterbooks, 11 Mar. 1914. See below note 4, p. 143.

³³ Ibid. In a letter written on the same day to the ARM in Port Moresby MacAlpine could not 'imagine any reasonable cause that [the deserters] can have had for running away as I personally at all times do my utmost to rectify any differences'. A charge of assault made against Collins by other labourers was dismissed in June 1915 (*Papuan Times*, 16 June 1915).

the law about sending their labourers home. They have a notion that being a strong company we must be afraid of them, and are absolutely aghast when asked to obey the ordinary law. However I think they are fairly quiet now, though they require much watching.³⁴

The *Papuan Times* continued its unrelenting attack on his administration throughout 1915. On 3 March an editorial appeared that marked the high point of Bruce's incendiary journalism in which he compared the government to a 'Muscovite autocracy' and the settlers to the miners at Eureka who in 1854 had taken up arms to resist arbitrary government in the colony of Victoria. The 'people' were 'being "bled white" . . . finding the money to pay the salaries of servants whose chief aim is to penalise and torment their masters'. The 'breaking point', Bruce declared, had been reached.³⁵

It is difficult to believe that in a community as small as that of white Port Moresby such extreme statements could have been taken seriously, but on paper, at least, here was the suggestion that settlers might actually rebel. There is no other evidence at all that civil disturbance was being remotely considered, but here was seditious language meant to provoke a reaction and perhaps a crisis that Bruce, and no doubt others, hoped Melbourne could not ignore. Murray was determined not to magnify the significance of such desperate and dangerous press agitation by appearing to give it the slightest attention.

A 'Citizens' Meeting' to consider the community's grievances was called for 22 April and in the *Papuan Times* Bruce tilled the soil of righteous indignation in the preceding weeks with long editorials attacking the 'hypocritical Australian press', the 'breach of faith' by the Commonwealth in not proceeding with a previously approved railway line to Sapphire Creek, and the failure of the government to prevent the recent murder of a white man at Jawarere.³⁶ On 7 April, noting figures given in the 1913-14 *Annual Report*, the editorial bitterly reflected that while the 'territorial revenue provided by the white trash who are pioneering the Territory' amounted to some £54,000 or £6,000 more than the previous year, for every £1 being spent on development on roads and services for the white community, £20 was being spent on 'native' administration. On 14 April the editor questioned the capacity of any official still in the government service to work Papuan labour and attacked the prying

³⁴ West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray*, letter No. 62, Murray to Gilbert Murray, 9 Mar. 1915. Geoffrey Howard, younger son of the Earl of Carlisle, was Gilbert Murray's brother-in-law.

³⁵ *Papuan Times*, 3 Mar. 1915.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 'The hypocritical Australian press...always poses as the champions of the poor blacks', 10 Feb. 1915. Editorials on the projected railway to Sapphire Creek: 9 Dec. 1914, 17 Feb. 1915, and 10 Mar. 1915 when the failure to proceed was 'A Breach of Faith'. The report of Harry Ballot's murder appeared on 10 Mar.

inspectors who, if they badgered labourers long enough, were bound to find something 'wrong' - the whole liberally sprinkled with references to 'the lazy brutes' and 'the inferior race' and 'the present policy of the Government [that] belittles the white man'.³⁷

The Citizens' Meeting was well attended and addressed by Arthur Jewell, William Bruce, Dr Colin Simson and G. A. Loudon. In his speech Loudon claimed that labour could only be recruited on the verges of control because Papuans within the pacified areas quickly became slothful and dependent on government assistance. An irresistible conclusion to be drawn was that there was a 'want of sympathy on the part of the Government in regard to the industrial development of the country'.³⁸ And so it could seem.

Resolutions demanding electoral representation and 'democratic' rights were passed and sent to Murray, and Dr Simson was deputed to publicise the dissatisfactions of the white community of Papua in Australia. Aware of the importance of keeping public opinion in Sydney and Melbourne well informed of his side in any controversy, Murray instructed the Papuan Agent in Sydney, John Bensted, to spread information contradicting Dr Simson's assertions. Although it had been his view that J. R. A. Wilkes had been unfairly treated in the Fairfax Harbour case, Arthur Bloomfield too was prepared to defend the government against its detractors in a letter to the papers.³⁹ Bruce castigated him in the *Papuan Times* for believing 'it wise to keep in with the government at any price'. Murray was lampooned through the year as readers of the local paper were invited to regard the Lieutenant Governor as 'this dreamer' and as 'a crusty incapable old Tory', his policy as 'suicidal' and 'claptrap', his administration as 'a relic of feudal times'.⁴⁰

In London, the BNGD directors had accepted Evelyn Metcalfe's account of the hostility of the Papuan Government towards the planters. At the annual general meeting in August 1915, W. A. Horn accused Australians of inconsistency. They had dispossessed their 'own' natives of their land and were allowing the remnants to slowly die of starvation and disease. No one, he suggested, wanted this to be repeated in Papua. Yet, if Papuans retained the ownership of their land and were permitted under control to sell it 'there is

³⁷ Ibid., 7 Apr. 1915, 14 Apr. 1915.

³⁸ Ibid., 28 Apr. 1915.

³⁹ NAPNG & CRS G128/4, Murray to Bensted, 15 Aug. 1915. Murray forwarded a copy of a speech by Bloomfield praising the government for publication in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which in an article Simson had named Bloomfield's companies as among those 'persecuted' by Native Affairs.

⁴⁰ *Papuan Times*, 21 July 1915, p. 4; 2 June 1915; 6 Jan. 1915; 24 Mar. 1915; 23 June 1915; 21 July 1915 and 1 Mar. 1916.

little advantage in that unless the purchasers are assisted in the development'.⁴¹

But Loudon had been wrong in his claims about the pattern of labour recruitment made at the Citizens' meeting in April, and Murray in an obvious response in the 1915-16 *Annual Report* would draw attention to the evidence that most labour still came from 'the old recruiting grounds' and not from newly opened up areas.⁴² This he put down to the dependence on imported goods among coastal Papuans and the confidence that experience of indentured labour had given them. And qualified as Murray's view had become about the developers he could not admit that his commitment to the development of Papua by settlers was less than it once had been - nor indeed, once he had finally mastered them, would he prove less than a persistent and eloquent advocate for the planters and their interests in straitened times. There was much to be settled in the years ahead before this would become clear.

⁴¹ *Financial Times* (London), 5 Aug. 1915, p. 3. ANUABL, Deposit 95, M37.

⁴² *PAR 1914-15*, 6.

CHAPTER 11

Papuans and progress

THE BERNESCONI AND Oelrichs affairs had bruised both Murray and the management of the largest of the plantation companies. A mutual distrust had emerged that would be re-inforced by other irritations and further prosecutions in the next seven years in which both the government and BNGD - and neither perhaps without justification - could assume hostility and bad faith in the other. If Murray now had little confidence in the good intentions of plantation companies even as he depended on the revenue they generated, planters had no confidence in his government's capacity or desire to work to secure remunerative conditions for commercial agriculture. The larger employers assumed that economic rationality would oblige the Papuan administration to cheapen the cost of labour whilst ensuring the maintenance of the supply, to lower charges and duties, to make allowances over the supervision of white employees, and in consideration of their economic difficulties, to press for and secure from the Commonwealth preferential tariffs, bounties, development loans and increased subsidies - sufficient tariffs, greater bounties, higher subsidies, cheaper labour or lower taxation as the exigencies of the times dictated. But Australian willingness to under-write the development of Papua proved much too slight and the margin that Murray was resolved to preserve for the Papuan labourer seemed far too slender for there to be much room for manoeuvre.

Publicly accused of indifference to the difficulties encountered by settlers - an accusation he could deny claiming that his government was determined to maintain a balance between the interests of white and brown - Murray privately might well have come to the conclusion that given the strength of settler hostility his position and reputation did indeed rest finally on the defence of his 'native' policy. He could now consider only minor changes in the NLO provided these did not diminish the broader safeguards for Papuan workers that he had inherited and since strengthened. These safeguards, he tried to remind settlers again and again, were in their own best interest if the continuation of the labour supply was to be assured. He also saw danger in proceeding with any development that could outstrip this supply and open up demands by employers for a compulsory labour system. Large enterprises, once admitted, constituted a particular threat not only because of their greater capacity to lobby members of Parliament and receive press coverage but because, as major contributors to the revenue, their very existence could

hold an administration to ransom. In January 1917 the Lieutenant Governor gave Atlee Hunt his reasons why he did not want a policy allowing oil prospecting by private interests in Papua. If such a policy were permitted and large oil deposits discovered there could develop

what most of those concerned with the Government of tropical dependencies will, I think, agree is a very common and sometimes dangerous feature of administration. This is the presence of some powerful company, financially perhaps stronger than the Government, and determined if possible to 'capture' the Government and make Government's policy subordinate to the company's interests. The result is a continual conflict (the nature of which is of course misrepresented outside the dependency), in which the Government is sometimes successful, and sometimes, I am told, is not . . .¹

It is impossible not to think that Murray had British New Guinea Development specifically in mind as the chief contender in Papua for the part of a 'powerful company financially perhaps stronger than the Government', and such an attitude could hardly be construed as favourable even to what might be regarded as the legitimate activities of a large enterprise wishing to expand its business in the country. Indeed, BNGD had already declared an interest in securing oil concessions in the Gulf Division. The company was the first to carry out serious exploration when in 1912 at considerable expense it sent out a German geologist and drilling plant. By 1917 BNGD's planting and trading interests were by far the most extensive in Papua, the developed area of its estates amounting to 12,000 acres or nearly a quarter of the total for the Territory. Its properties were widely distributed. The company's store in Port was as big as Burns Philp's and there was a large branch at Samarai. BNGD ran the principal coastal steamer, a tobacco twist factory, a joinery, and an engineering workshop. Employing eighty Europeans and 2,000 Papuans it was indeed only rivalled by the government in the size of its operations.²

It is also difficult to believe that the Lieutenant Governor did not now find that the limits he and Staniforth Smith - and by its continued acquiescence the Commonwealth too - had set on the labour supply in Papua formed a convenient restraint on further large scale development. In the Report made of a visit to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1916 Murray had defined a principle of his administration that he now re-affirmed in his letter opposing private oil-drilling, - 'that the progress of development shall bear some proportion to the labour available'.³ An oil-field requiring large numbers

¹ NAPNG Series G128, Item 4, Murray to Hunt, 3 Jan. 1917.

² CRS A1 18/1463, Loudon to Minister, 20 Dec. 1917.

³ NAPNG, Series G128, item 4, 3 Jan. 1917, Murray to Hunt. Murray's Report on the British Solomon Islands is in the Public Records Office, London, CO225/148, 29 Apr. 1916. I am indebted to Peter Corris for sight of this. The same words are used in CRS A1 17/1418, Address by Murray in Melbourne: Native Labour in Papua, May 1917.

of labourers, Murray proposed, should remain under firm government control so that the demand for additional labour 'should come not suddenly but by degrees' and excessive pressure on the supply under the existing constraints could be avoided. If there was to be no compulsion for Papuans to work for Europeans, and if no 'foreign' labour was to be imported into the country, then, within the 10% of the population available, the willingness of the Papuans to enter contracts would continue to depend on the sufficiency of the inducements in wages, conditions and excitement that indentured service offered. And this, he thought, was quite enough.

With other costs out of their control, the pressures on planters to make savings in labour costs, if these in any way could be achieved, were considerable. Several of the more noteworthy contests in the courts in the years ahead, like the Wilkes case before them, would be over the supply of 'good and sufficient' food to indentured labourers. The NLO Regulations set down the minimum to be issued, and some employers, particularly the companies, tried to maintain only the minimum, the managers being under a general instruction to be efficient and not wasteful. Where overseers could be neglectful in supervising food distribution and some labourers could intimidate others, the supply of food to the labour lines at the minimum rate could only lead to inequities and, in effect, the starvation of some workers. The desertions that could result might appear to plantation managers and company officials as quite unjustified. In test cases in 1918 and 1921 examined in succeeding chapters, both fought out with BNGD, the government sought to establish in the minds of employers their overriding responsibility for the proper feeding of all their Papuan workers, and by the 1920s few planters would restrict the food available to their labourers to the amounts prescribed in the regulations.

And there were the pressures imposed on the size of a work force by the way the indentured labour system operated in Papua. Since, where labour was recruited at a distance, to have more workers than were currently necessary on a plantation was a very heavy cost, prudent managers preferred to have too few rather than too many labourers on their estates and the larger Papuan plantations generally employed fewer workers, if more European overseers, than did estates of a corresponding size in the East. The big employers were constantly anxious about fluctuations in the numbers of Papuans offering for work just as individual plantation managers were sensitive to quite small variations in the numbers of 'boys' on an estate. The Kanosia Plantation letter-books, surviving for the years 1914-15, contain what seems at first a surprising amount of attention to the health, reception, and whereabouts of individually named labourers punctuating the general correspondence over shipping, plantation development and the arrival and breakdown of machinery. It was an imperative for managers to maximise the return from the

service of every labourer for whom recruiting fees of £3 a year had been paid, and, at least at Kanosia, it was an urgent matter to keep abreast of labour health and disaffection.⁴ Bazel Wharton-Kirke, manager for a time at Jawarere, was delegated by the Returned Soldiers' League in 1920 to investigate the opportunities existing for members in Late German New Guinea. In a report that made biting comparisons between Papua and its northern neighbour he concluded that 'at the present moment there is not a plantation in the whole of Papua that has an adequate labour force to develop it to its full extent. This is a serious statement I know'.⁵ In 1918 George Wiseman of Glenealy Estate, Perak (FMS), was brought to Papua by BNGD, Pacific and Papua Produce (formerly Mombiri), and Clarke and Whiting to advise on their rubber plantations. In a report to the BNGD directors he remarked that an estate in Malaya the size of Itikinumu would require 350 'coolies' whereas Itikinumu had only 150 'boys'.⁶ Figures supplied to Murray by the governors of the FMS and British North Borneo suggested that this was only a small exaggeration.⁷ In the rubber industry in those dependencies, about thirty-five workers were employed for every hundred acres. Thus in 1919, Itikinumu, with 907 acres and 198 labourers, might have 'required' over 300.

The higher ratio of white assistants and overseers to Papuan workers, and the higher salaries these Europeans commanded in comparison with those paid to Chinese overseers and Tamil *kanganies* in Malaya, may also account in part for the less than optimum numbers of Papuan labourers that could be afforded. Indeed, to this ratio would be attributed at least part of the chronic cost disadvantage Papuan commodities were to bear throughout the colonial period.⁸

After 1916 when most of the plantations laid down in the boom years were coming into production, the size of the workforce needed on estates depended partly on the profitable sale of the commodities produced. In 1919 there would be a surplus of Papuans offering for work, in 1920 a dearth, and in 1921-22 an urgent need to reduce the numbers of labourers to maintenance levels as

⁴ Kanosia Letterbooks, 3 Mar. 1914 - 2 May 1915. Nearly all letters were written by Archibald MacAlpine, Clarke and Whiting's general manager 1912-16. While MacAlpine was away accompanying Sir Rupert Clarke on his expedition up the Fly River in June and July 1914, Richard Walshe - then the company's accountant - acted in MacAlpine's place.

⁵ *Papuan Courler*, 13 Mar. 1920.

⁶ CRS A1 Item 18/12377. A copy of Wiseman's report was sent by G. A. Loudon to Atlee Hunt. The report was dated 25 May 1918.

⁷ NAPNG Series G126, Item 9, pp. 1178, 1179. Figures were also obtained from the Government of Ceylon. They included information about the very large numbers of workers required seasonally for tea picking and Murray suppressed this in a copy of the report sent to the Planters' Association. (Ceylon letter, 20 July 1920.)

⁸ See below p. 222, and note 48, p. 224.

the markets for the Territory's products collapsed. The NLO permitted no standing down of labour and employers were still bound to bear the costs of provisioning and repatriating labourers whose contracts were abruptly cancelled for want of a return on production. Conversely, once the force was reduced, no immediate advantage could be taken of rapid increases in prices until the number of workers could be restored to an operating level.

The time taken in recruitment, signing-on, transport, and training had led planters to press for three year contracts in 1912 as they could get no more than nine months' labour from a 'one year boy' who at the expiry of his contract was promptly lost to them - only to be replaced by yet another inexperienced recruit. The three year contracts that then became normal on larger estates allowed employers the longer benefit of trained workers and some staggering of labour turnover.⁹

By the late 1920s, the government was to try to encourage a return to one year terms because it was thought that there were by then many skilled former labourers in the villages who might wish to work but who balked at signing on for three years. Murray thought that 'free' labour could be subsequently encouraged and the system of indenture gradually allowed to wither.¹⁰ Yet, if planters were not to be permitted to have a reservoir of dependent labour confined in plantation *kampongs* as in the East that might allow them to respond promptly to price movements, they certainly did not want free labour in a scarce labour market able to desert estates at any time on account of a temporary grievance, real or imagined, or asking for time-off to attend local feasts. Murray had to observe in 1930 that Papuans too seemed to prefer the system that bound employers to known conditions, and that it would be many years before indenture could be dispensed with.¹¹ While some of the smaller planters, especially in the eastern divisions, did come to rely wholly on local casual labour, most others preferred under the existing dispensation to secure their workers from more distant districts just

⁹ See Appendix A, pp. 316-8, for a discussion of recent research into the indentured labour system in Papua.

¹⁰ In 1927 the *Natives (Non-Indentured Service) Ordinance* was introduced. Papuans could now undertake 'Casual' employment for unrestricted periods provided the work was within twenty miles of their homes. Previously contracts were mandatory if employment was to be for a period longer than three months.

¹¹ *PAR 1930-31*, p. 6. In his report in the *Annual Report* for 1927-28 (pp. 62-6) J. T. O'Malley CNA set out the arguments in favour of free labour in some detail using the experience of South African employers in illustration. He also conceded there were some 'rare' Papuans like those from the Purari delta who would willingly re-engage for successive three year contracts of employment if they were permitted to do so. Perhaps they were not so rare. The Goaribari villagers of Belovo and Gebumiri in the Kikori delta formally changed the village names to 'Baboguina' and 'Paille' respectively to commemorate plantations upon which many of the men had served, and we might suppose, had worked happily.

as Papuans had come to look on a term of indentured labour in some part of the country other than their own as a rite of passage, an indispensable experience, an adventure.

J. F. Horn, a son of the former chairman (1913-1922) of BNGD, W. A. Horn, and a director of Robinson River Plantation visiting Papua in 1932, recorded the 'all-in' average cost to the company of an indentured labourer as 32s. a month.¹² This cost can hardly have changed much in the whole period 1910-1940, and since the information was for the eyes of the other directors only, it is likely to be reliable. Papuans, it seems, could be employed for as little as a shilling a day. If the salaries paid to government officers are a guide, the incomes of employed Europeans on the other hand increased by over 70% in the period 1906-1925. The war had brought inflation and the collapse of the gold standard. The purchasing power of Papuan wages had certainly diminished. And perhaps the real incomes of whites had not risen, the £370 paid to an ARM in 1925 purchasing scarcely more than the £225 of 1906.¹³ The *Papuan Annual Report* 1912-13 shows the salaries of the managers of the government plantations at Baibara and Kemp Welch River to be £250 and that of an assistant £200. By 1925-26 these had risen at Kemp Welch to between £420 and £510 for the manager, and between £328 and £400 for the assistant. Private employees generally were paid less, though Percy Robinson of Ogamobu recorded that Tom Sefton of Koitaki had an income of £800 a year in 1919 - probably the highest salary paid to an employed plantation manager in Papua and equal to that of the Papuan Treasurer.¹⁴ Robinson was drawing under half this amount. Many smaller planters might have subsisted for long periods on a quarter or less of Sefton's income, and on their fishing, cattle, chickens, eggs and fruit.

And Papuan workers were not entirely without bargaining power. They could respond in the market for their labour if the value of wages fell too quickly or conditions to which they were accustomed were suddenly altered - by refusing to 'sign on'. This they did in 1920 *en masse* as prices for trade goods rose rapidly and rice became unavailable as food on many estates. At other times, knowing their worth with a particular employer, Papuans with experience and skills did not hesitate to ask for more than the 10s. a month that by 1910 had become the minimum recognised as 'fair remuneration' by RMs witnessing the signing of contracts. Wages of £1 10s. a month or more were commonly paid to valued boats crew and boss-boys, in some cases bringing their total earnings in cash and keep to above a half of what a locally

¹² J. F. Horn. [Diary of] 'Trip from Sydney to Robinson River to inspect property, 1932'. In the possession of Commander J. F. Horn, Sydney, 1975.

¹³ *PAR* 1912-13, p. 25; *PAR* 1925-26, p. 33.

¹⁴ Robinson Letters, 13 Aug. 1919.

employed white overseer might cost an employer. In January 1919 Percy Robinson of Ogamobu was forced to increase the monthly wage of Heagi, skipper of his recruiting boat, the *Varoe*, from £7 to £8, because Whittens' recruiter Butterworth had offered the Hanuabadan as much as £10.¹⁵ Such Papuans earning sixteen times the minimum wage were receiving considerably more than skilled Asian artisans and clerks on plantations in the East. The NLO and Native Labour Regulations laid down no scale of wages for private employers to observe, but 10s. a month was the minimum paid to Crown servants - so setting an actual standard. In their ninth year of service the one or two Papuan clerks working for the government could be paid £8 a month and retain their entitlement to rations and a clothing issue.¹⁶ By comparison many unskilled Australian workers were still earning less than £16 a month in 1938.¹⁷

The campaign of public opposition to the government throughout 1915 had been without result and Judge Murray's position remained quite secure where Australians were pre-occupied by a far greater conflict further afield. In 1916 there was a lull. In March and April there had been the Lieutenant Governor's visit to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. On his return he asked the businessmen of Port Moresby to prepare proposals for discussions 'relating to the welfare of the Territory'. Bruce could write in the paper of 17 May that there was 'no doubt that since the big public meeting held in the Institute twelve months ago the policy of the Administration has changed for the better . . . now the tension is over, matters which in the past have been used as sticks to beat the Administration with, can be discussed in an amicable way and adjusted'.¹⁸ It was the nearest he was ever to come to a conciliatory word, the article elsewhere bearing his unmistakable stamp. At a meeting held on 25 May attended by three principal merchants, F. O. Greenwood of Burns Philp, Charles Baldwin, and Robert Whitten, J. C. Smith of the Bank of New South Wales, G. A. Loudon (as both principal planter and merchant), and the planters Arthur Jewell of Lolorua and Tom Sefton of Koitaki, quite innocuous proposals were prepared for Murray's consideration. Coastal beacons, the Sapphire Creek road, Asians as domestic servants, an agricultural expert! Nothing related to the demands of 1915 for elected representation, trial by jury, or policies more 'sympathetic' to those engaged in the 'industrial

¹⁵ Robinson Letters, 27 Jan. 1919. 'Civilised' Papuans, like Heagi, from villages close to Port Moresby, Samarai or Daru could be exempted by the CNA from the repatriation conditions of the NLO and repeatedly re-engaged.

¹⁶ *Laws of the Territory of Papua 1888-1945*, Vol 4, Notices relating to Government Employees, Notice of 25 Nov. 1925, p.3416.

¹⁷ See Appendix A, pp. 316-8, where in a discussion of recent research into the indentured labour system in Papua wages are further considered. See also pp. 201-2 below.

¹⁸ *Papuan Times*, 17 May 1916.

development of the country' was included, except perhaps the suggestion that the Papuans be taxed at last.¹⁹

In September, in response to a protest from the Samarai Chamber of Commerce, Loudon defended the increase in duty on imported American twist tobacco that the government had found it convenient to impose to protect the new local 'Bung' twist produced by BNGD.²⁰ The directors in London congratulated the general manager on the apparently 'better relations' prevailing with the administration.²¹ For eighteen months the government stores were a major purchaser of the company's tobacco grown and manufactured at Katea before the 1917-18 crop was wiped out by disease.

With the tree crops planted in the boom years coming into full bearing the value of the agricultural exports of the Territory exceeded that of gold for the first time in 1915-16. It is true that proceeds of gold production had dropped from nearly £70,000 in 1910-11 to under £40,000, but the value of Papuan rubber had risen from only £1,500 to £14,846 in twelve months. In the following year, 1916-17, the value of copra alone, £40,000, exceeded that of gold, and rubber proceeds approached £30,000. By 1919-20 copra exports would be valued at £124,000, rubber at £41,542 and sisal hemp at over £12,000.²² Yet the returns were deeply disappointing in terms of outlay, costs and expectations. With shipping scarce on account of the war, freight charges were increasing, inflation rapidly raising the prices of the imported rice, calico and blankets supplied on issue to indentured labourers just as it lowered the real value of receipts, white salaries and native wages. In 1913-14, 929 vessels had entered and were cleared from Papuan ports with a combined displacement of 358,506 tons, some sixty-six of these clearances being for 'foreign' - mostly Dutch - ships. The figures included coastal shipping but the tonnage was very large indeed for two ports the size of Port Moresby and Samarai with no week passing, it seems, without an overseas vessel in one or both ports. From 1918 until 1923 no foreign ships at all called, the number of vessels cleared falling to eighty-six all told in 1919-20 with a combined tonnage of only 59,189 tons.²³ And for much of the produce only the Australian market was accessible. Southern buyers were greatly advantaged. Sisal hemp could not be sold in Sydney for as much as £30 a ton when it was fetching £60 in London and more in New York.²⁴ Able to sell all its rubber in Australia, Koitaki was alone in being able to pay a dividend of 5d. a share in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 Aug. 1916.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1916.

²¹ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 2, 16 Jan. 1916, Thompson to Loudon.

²² *PAR* 1919-20, 77-8.

²³ *PAR* 1921-22, 108.

²⁴ See below p. 232.

1917.²⁵ But for anyone producing copra and unable to find shipping to the European markets a return on investment in Papua seemed unlikely for years.

The general manager since 1912 of the Clarke and Whiting properties at Kanosia and Fairfax Harbour, Archibald MacAlpine, resigned in 1916. A conscientious, short-tempered, red-haired Scot, 'Archie' had been in Papua since 1908. He now left the country but would return again in 1918 as plantation inspector for BNGD. Out of necessity or the opportunity presented by MacAlpine's departure, Arthur Bloomfield, as public officer for the Clarke and Whiting companies, and a principal in the two Kemp Welch River ventures and Galley Reach Plantation, established the Moresby Trading and Agency Company to manage all these interests. A frequent visitor to Papua staying for months at a time, the 'magnificent' Bloomfield remained based in Melbourne employing a manager and accountant in Port. The Moresby Trading and Agency Co. was perhaps conceived also in the expectation of an expansion to follow the war but would be a casualty of the collapse of trade in 1921. The role it pioneered as a small 'agency house' was taken up in 1922 by G. A. Loudon and Co. and subsequently the British New Guinea Trading Company, both wholly owned subsidiaries of BNGD that acted as managing agents for the plantations of BNGD and Clarke and Whiting from 1922 until 1934 when the parent companies resumed direct control over their estates.

In 1916-17 planters generally were pre-occupied with the change in plantation management and routines brought on by the transition from 'development' to production. Opposition to Murray's administration from the editor of the *Papuan Times* also lost some of its intensity as William Bruce's other business interests deteriorated. His indebtedness to BNG Trading, the BNGD commercial subsidiary, reached an alarming degree as the company had been prepared to allow him extended credit - apparently on account of 'the business he could bring the company's way'.²⁶ It is perhaps more likely that it was for his editorials in the local paper that he was shown particular forbearance. But in April 1917 on instructions from London the company sought to recover £600 out of over £1,300 he owed in a court action and to meet the debt Bruce was forced to transfer to BNGD the proceeds of the sale to Houlder Brothers Ltd of his timber licences and of his half share in the Manu Manu sawmill enterprise, The Papua Company.²⁷ Shortly afterwards he also sold his rubber plantation at Galley Reach, Doa, to BNGD so that he could settle other accounts. He could no longer maintain his interest in the

²⁵ *Papuan Courier*, 9 Nov. 1917.

²⁶ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 2, 24 Feb. 1916, Thompson to Loudon.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Bruce's debts amounted to £1,353, those of Richard de Moleyns to £731, and those of Captain Archibald Hunter and his family to £3,353. Hunter was a BNGD shareholder. The action against Bruce was reported in the *Papuan Courier*, 18 Apr. 1917.

Papuan Times. Under a changed name, the *Papuan Courter*, the paper limped through the year appealing to readers to buy rather than borrow copies and in February 1918 a company, the Papuan Courier Ltd, was formed to take over publication, with G. A. Loudon a substantial shareholder. Bruce continued to live on Touaguba hill in Port in increasingly desperate straits. In 1918 year he was forced to pay fines in a case brought by the Collector of Customs. In 1920 his house was burnt down in circumstances where arson was suspected.²⁸

G. A. Loudon might himself have been the author of some of the editorials in the *Papuan Courter* of the next two years as the frustrations of the disappointing market in Papuan commodities and the shipping shortages were prolonged into the post-war period - confounding the hope that peace would bring prosperity, and bringing tensions to the surface again in several court actions where the paper seemed to speak exclusively as the voice of BNGD. With the failure of its tobacco manufacturing industry the company was no longer obliged to tread carefully in its dealings with the government. While Murray could not be blamed for a tobacco disease - he responded with the appointment of J. T. Zimmer as an 'agricultural expert' in 1918 - somehow his administration could still seem responsible for the general malaise. It just did not appear to have tried hard enough to secure for the planters the conditions that would assure them profits.

Indeed, from the planters' point of view, the Lieutenant Governor now appeared to be taking a new direction in development in which they had no part at all. In 1918, perhaps disappointed at the progress of settler based agriculture and affected by planter hostility, but certainly becoming aware of the limited value of plantation work experience for the Papuans, Murray prepared two measures to stimulate cash crop production in the villages. In January 1919 the *Native Taxes Ordinance* came into operation. It levied a tax of 10s. a year on indentured labourers and £1 (20s.) a year on 'natives other than native labourers' in areas to be declared tax districts. The latter could, however, remit their tax in the form of a given amount of produce or through labour on 'Native Plantations' which were to be established in many places under a separate ordinance. The proceeds of the tax on wages and the sale of tax in kind, together with approximately a half of the value of the production of the native plantations reserved as the government's share, were to be placed in a Native Education Fund.

This was a carefully planned attempt to encourage Papuans to participate in production on their own behalf and at the same time contribute towards

²⁸ Bruce died and was buried at Sapphire Creek on 30 May 1924. Mrs Bruce had only recently returned from hospital in Port recovering from blackwater fever. After her departure for Australia the Executive Council agreed to write off her hospital bills.

the costs of their 'elevation'.²⁹ But by making it appear that villagers were being taxed more than indentured labourers while allowing them to pay in kind, it seemed to planters that the new taxation scheme was another of Murray's tricks and likely to prove prejudicial to recruitment. If plantation agriculture was not flourishing, should not the tax have been in cash alone to encourage indenture rather than to discourage it? The Lieutenant Governor admitted that the object of the ordinance was not to increase recruitment. He

²⁹ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8, 11 June 1920. The government's Native Plantations scheme never fulfilled the sanguine hopes held out for it at the outset. While for many years villagers had been at times compelled to plant coconut palms and other useful trees under the Native Regulations there was also the hint of compulsion in the way RMs put pressure on communities to plant the new Native Plantations. These were to be 'jointly-owned' by villagers and the government. Like the planters, villagers were disappointed by the low returns they obtained - returns for them even further reduced after the government's 50% share was taken out of the proceeds of sale. Getting villagers to co-operate was 'up-hill work', Murray noted in the 1926-27 *Annual Report* (p. 10) where it was calculated that the total area of commercial crops cultivated by villagers - under both the Native Regulations and the Native Plantation Ordinance - had reached 7,000 acres. But by 1932-33, a year when it might very well have been 'difficult to keep the natives interested in copra', only sixty-seven tons with a return of £671 was produced under the Native Plantations scheme for the whole Territory (PAR 1932-33, p. 15). In the following year villagers of the South Eastern Division, the main producers, received only £176. Even Papuan grown coffee did better in 1933-34 with 55,552 pounds produced in villages of the Northern Division being sold for £1,541, the Papuans' share being £762 (PAR 1933-34, 29). The substitution of locally grown rice for imported rice was also promoted after 1920. Yet rice cultivation in the Mekeo under the guidance of the Catholic Mission remained 'desultory' when the effort required to produce ninety tons of paddy that was reduced to fifty-seven tons of milled rice brought only £389 in 1932-33 to a community probably expecting much more. Papuans were not starving. Once their minimum needs in trade goods were met and short of a 'miraculous' transformation in the terms of trade they were not prepared to work very much harder for little further reward. Indeed, it might reasonably have seemed to many that only an actual miracle could now redress the inequities of their predicament *vis-à-vis* the whites. In the end it is likely that the cash-in-hand return from the sale of copra to the white traders was greater than sale through the government's scheme. While the quantity of copra bought by the traders could not be measured, it was estimated in 1938-39 - a year it is true in which there had been a marked revival in village production - to be between 2,500 and 3,000 tons. This was an amount which, if nearly correct, might have returned as much as £25,000 to the traders and their village suppliers, a sum certainly much higher than the proceeds of the Native Plantations scheme (PAR 1938-39, 28, for the estimated tonnage). The traders could cheat, of course. In Mar. 1924 A.P. Lyons noted that Isadore Ede was paying only £4 a ton to the Laughlin Islanders for copra then fetching £18 in Samarai (A. P. Lyons, Journals (MSS), 22 Mar. 1924). In June he thought the Mahonys too were not paying a fair price in the Calvados Chain (ibid, 6 June 1924). It is possible that as prices had only recently risen from those of the depression of 1921-22 these traders were but seizing a temporary advantage where villagers had become accustomed to a low return. It is possible, even probable, that the quality of the sun-dried copra being offered was very low. If its exposure could be embarrassing unequal trading was in any case hardly illegal. The Edes and the Mahonys, seldom scrutinised and without nearby competitors, were particularly well placed to drive the hardest of bargains.

thought its effects would be quite neutral and pointed to a large increase in the labour available in the year immediately following the introduction of the tax.³⁰ In the meantime, in 1918, there had been a further major confrontation with BNGD over the treatment of Papuan workers by employees of the company on Itikinumu.

³⁰ Indeed in Oct. 1920 A. P. Lyons, the then RM at Daru, was suggesting to villagers who possessed little land suitable for development as 'Native Plantations', and who could not therefore find the means to pay the new tax, that in order to do so they seek work with Freshwater at Madiri or with Cowling at Mibu, or sell their copra and sago to the planters. A. P. Lyons, Journals (MSS), 14 Oct. 1920.

CHAPTER 12

Crisis at Itikinumu

ON 10 MAY 1918 twenty eight labourers from BNGD's Itikinumu estate who had left their work and walked thirty miles to Port Moresby were prosecuted by the company for desertion. The Native Affairs Department provided a defence for the labourers on the grounds that they had had reasonable cause to refuse to work. Between the desertion and the hearing, Stanley Greenland, one of the three officers of the Department, made an inspection of the estate, the first in nearly two years. His report set out a long list of breaches of the labour code he found had occurred in the interim. These included failure to supply food from the plantation stores in the prescribed way, overworking labourers, and illicitly imposing Sunday work on rubber tappers. Two plantation assistants, William Voysey and John Simpson-King, were interviewed and reported as saying that the manager, Richard Jensen, and another assistant, Percy Nunn, had continually beaten labourers. Voysey said he had remonstrated with Jensen whose response had been that 'I will not allow a bloody nigger to get the best of me'.¹ Jensen had barely escaped conviction on a charge of grievous bodily harm a few months earlier when he had thrown a lamp at a labourer causing the loss of an eye. What particularly disturbed Greenland now was the failure of the management to provide proper eating utensils as required under the NLO Regulations. Such neglect suggested not only disregard for the law but contempt for the labourers on the part of the management.

At the hearing the company's complaint was dismissed on 'reasonable cause' for desertion being shown. Native Affairs immediately made a counter claim for cancellation of the contracts of the twenty-eight. Jensen was obliged to give his consent to the terminations as the employer's agent. The Executive Council met and considering Greenland's report ordered that no labour was to be hired or transferred to Jensen or Nunn again. The company was called upon to show cause why the remaining 125 labourers on Itikinumu should not also have their contracts cancelled.²

G. A. Loudon protested to Murray that BNGD was being 'punished' for what had been the 'unauthorised' behaviour of an employee whose

¹ CRS A1 18/12377, Greenland's report of 7 Jan. 1918.

² Ibid.

misconduct should first have been reported to the company so that an attempt to remedy the situation could have been made before the matter reached a court. No notice had been given BNGD, as the employer, of Native Affairs' intention to apply for cancellation of the contracts of the twenty-eight, as required under the NLO, and Jensen, Loudon maintained, had no authority to consent. He quoted precedents where a notice of intention to cancel contracts had been given and suggested that the company had a claim on the government for the loss of labour it had suffered.³

Murray replied in the third person that if there was evidence that the 125 labourers would in future be treated fairly then perhaps their contracts might not be cancelled. He added that the 'Lieutenant Governor does not intend to interfere [with the Native Affairs action] but the Company's bona fides will be revealed if Jensen and Nunn are retained in employ or if the 28 labourers whose contracts have already been cancelled are not paid their wages without further delay'.⁴

With the possibility that Itiknumu would be left entirely bereft of labour as well as of management, Loudon was forced to take control over the estate himself, where an outbreak of 'Pink' disease had occurred to complicate matters.⁵ He carried out his own enquiries into labourers' complaints and concluded that Jensen's principal 'error' had been to require workers to dig sweet potatoes for their evening meal after they had finished work at 2 pm instead of issuing the food from the plantation stores. Loudon found the desertions had been incited by Okari of Kokoda, a man who had been convicted of desertion previously. George Wiseman, the visiting expert from Malaya, accompanied the general manager to Itiknumu and observed that an offence similar to Jensen's in the FMS would have brought the manager a fine of \$100, or between £11 and £12, whereas BNGD stood to lose over £1,000.⁶

The termination of the contracts of labourers essential to the continued running of a distant estate because subordinate managers or assistants there had breached the labour code or assaulted labourers was a vexing problem for a general manager located in Port Moresby. And in asking for advanced notice that grounds existed for prosecutions which might be avoided if action was quickly taken, Loudon was not asking for consideration that the government did not extend to others. Indeed, in defence of the necessity to proceed with serious charges from time to time, Murray could show later that warnings

³ NAPNG & CRS Series G/128, Item 6, Loudon to Murray, 28 May 1918.

⁴ NAPNG & CRS Series G/128, Item 6, Murray to Loudon, 29 May 1918.

⁵ Pink disease: *Corticium Salmonicolor* - a fungal disease of rubber.

⁶ CRS A1, Item 18/12377, Submission by Loudon to Hunt, 22 July 1918.

were much more frequent than prosecutions.⁷ In 1920 when an inspector reported unfavourably on the labourers' quarters on Kemp Welch River Plantation Murray sent a telegram to Arthur Bloomfield in Melbourne forewarning him and promising that his officers would not take action if Bloomfield would arrange to 'clean things up'. Bloomfield and Murray were on good terms, but was Loudon asking for more than an opportunity to 'clean things up' in 1918?

At a second hearing in June no complaints made on behalf of the 125 remaining labourers on Itikinumu were sustained and Native Affairs' application for the termination of their contracts was dropped. There is no evidence that Murray interfered to prevent the matter getting out of hand but the failure to find that these workers had also been neglected threw doubt upon the previous decision to cancel the contracts of the twenty-eight. And so the company's lawyer, R. D. Bertie, advanced in a claim for compensation.⁸ In a letter to the Government Secretary he pointed out the inconsistency in the findings and contended that the Lieutenant Governor's remark about the company's *bona fides* constituted a threat. Bertie also claimed that officials had since placed obstacles in the path of BNGD as it sought to re-engage the twenty-eight for work on another of its plantations - despite an assurance given by Murray that 'if the 28 discharged labourers want to work at Waigani - every facility will be given them to "sign on"'.⁹

In a letter to Murray, Loudon proposed that since his company like the government had its inspectors of plantations, these employees and officials might together share the responsibility for working out the difficulties that arose over labour from time to time. He did not, he said, object to the summary punishment of employees who failed to carry out their duties under the NLO, but suggested that as the government also found difficulty in finding suitable white staff, 'some sympathetic consideration' might be extended to private employers in such circumstances.¹⁰

Loudon was the complete businessman. His proposal was for a relationship between government and private employers based upon mutual interests and private understandings like that which obtained between businesses. No suggestion could have been made more calculated to receive a rebuff from this Lieutenant Governor, trained in the law, who could only regard such a relationship, were it to come about, as corrupt, and Loudon's proposal as an invitation to set the law aside. And the imputation that government officers

⁷ See below pp. 277-8. For the warning to Bloomfield: NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8, Murray to Bloomfield, 18 May 1920.

⁸ CRS A1 Item 18/12377, with Loudon's submission to Hunt, 22 July 1918.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ NAPNG & CRS Series G128, Item 6, Loudon to Murray, 7 June 1918.

might be of doubtful integrity, or less than competent, was one - whatever the truth in it - Hubert Murray could hardly entertain as ground for co-operation.

There is some evidence the BNGD did discipline its managers and assistants who were in breach of the NLO or who were known to have committed offences that risked prosecution under the Criminal Code - just as the company frequently sacked employees for other kinds of incompetence. Michael Burgess, an assistant who would make allegations in 1921 about maltreatment of labour on Itiknumu, Jawarere and Baubauguina, noted in his deposition that the manager at Baubauguina, Meredith, had dismissed an assistant for assaulting labourers. Meredith was himself subsequently dismissed for similar behaviour on the basis of a complaint Burgess had written to Loudon.¹¹ It is possible that these instances coming at the end of the 'development' period may prove little about the proper supervision of white employees in the previous decade and more about the extent to which the company was lately becoming careful. It is equally possible that Loudon could have done little better over the years than he claimed to have done in the supervision of his managers given the quality of white employees available. Bertram Bramell, writing in the 1915-16 *Annual Report*, conceded that it was 'possibly the inexperience of plantation managers and overseers with Papuans' that had 'a great deal to do with complaints and desertions'.¹² In a letter to the *Papuan Courier* in December 1918, Prosper Charpentier, the Woodlark planter, wrote that only the larger companies had labour problems because they were forced to employ 'inexperienced and irresponsible young overseers and assistants' who competed with each other.¹³ But even single plantation enterprises employing assistants could have difficulty. The letters of Percy Robinson of Ogamobu in the period 1918-1924 suggest that competent and sober white overseers were very difficult to obtain in Papua. The record of convictions of Europeans working on plantations is examined further in Chapter 19.

Murray was later to ridicule the suggestion that BNGD should have a special immunity from accountability for the conduct of its employees.¹⁴ If Jensen and Nunn were held directly responsible for their failure to observe the requirements of the NLO on the estate in their charge, and could as a consequence have their right to control Papuan labour curtailed, the company, like any other employer, had to accept the further consequences brought about because of its failure to adequately supervise its agents. Unless it was to be imputed that the company everywhere treated its labourers badly

¹¹ Ibid. See note 10, p. 181 below.

¹² *PAR 1916-17*, 27.

¹³ *Papuan Courier*, 6 Dec. 1918.

¹⁴ CRS A1 18/12377, Murray to Hunt. See also below p. 188.

and had attempted to 'economise' in their maintenance, then the law could take no other course. Conditions on other BNGD estates in 1918 were not called into question and in September in a letter to Loudon, and almost certainly to make a point, Murray complimented the company on labour relations at Waigani.¹⁵ Loudon responded that he had always found labour contented on his own visits to the plantations in the 'east'.¹⁶ Without attempting to defend the conduct of Bernesconi in 1913 or Jensen and Nunn in 1918 it is quite possible to conceive that at least some of the labour discontent and desertions in the Central Division originated in restlessness among Papuan recruits unhappy at having to work on a plantation away from the sea. On the Sogeri plateau where Itikimumu is situated, where nights could be cold and the work of rubber tapping exacting and boring, Papuans were also denied the excitement of ports and ships to which young men looked forward as a major attraction in indentured service. As a consequence 'control' might indeed have been more difficult. Archie MacAlpine, BNGD plantation inspector in 1920, noted in a report submitted to Native Affairs, dealing with yet another crisis at Itikimumu, that the Sogeri district was unpopular with labourers.¹⁷ The same may have been true to some extent of Baubauguina and Rorona, plantations which, while much closer to the sea, were not on the beach. Bernesconi had pleaded as much in mitigation of his conduct at Baubauguina in 1914. J. T. O'Malley, RM in the Central Division in 1912, suggested that Raymond Dubois might well be having difficulty in obtaining labour at Bomana because 'natives accustomed to the sea hate to work on a plantation inland'.¹⁸

Correspondence continued over the Jensen and Nunn affair for the remainder of 1918 with Murray obtaining further ammunition from a letter sent to him by Jensen in July asking that the ban denying him the right to control Papuan employees be lifted. He had, Jensen wrote, been working labour in Papua for more than ten years without previous convictions and attributed his difficulties at Itikimumu to pressures from 'head office' in Port Moresby to 'economise'.¹⁹ In a letter to Atlee Hunt, Murray made telling comparisons between the claims of Jensen and Loudon without conceding anything to either. Indeed that Jensen had not previously been convicted of assaults may have been chiefly due to want of witnesses as he was by this time suspected on good grounds of being a particularly violent man. His plea

¹⁵ NAPNG & CRS Series G128, Item 6, Murray to Loudon, 17 Sept. 1918.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Loudon to Murray, 18 Sept. 1918.

¹⁷ CRS A1 18/12377 MacAlpine's report on conditions at Itikimumu, Sept. 1920.

¹⁸ CRS A1 17593, 13/71.

¹⁹ CRS A1 18/12377. A copy is in Murray's report to Hunt. Jensen's letter was dated 29 July but Murray does not appear to have replied until 9 Nov.

that he had been subject to pressure from Loudon might have had some substance but a hint that he had attempted to 'blacken the name of the company' having leaked out, Loudon wrote in October to the Government Secretary, Herbert Champion, listing items from his circulars directed to the managers of BNGD plantations since June 1915 in which he had stipulated actions to be taken to ensure compliance with the food requirements under the NLO Regulations.²⁰ Also writing to Atlee Hunt, Loudon set out the company's version of events from the beginning, adding intimately the suggestion that as 'the Minister and yourself are Chairman and Director of Papua Limited for the Commonwealth and Murray is the general manager; don't you think it is time you had a board meeting?'²¹

To further embitter relations between the government and the largest company in Papua, hard on the heels of the crisis at Itikinumu came the destruction in January 1919 of the *Merrle England*, the Lieutenant Governor's steam yacht used for his tours of inspection. BNGD was held liable as an employee, killed in the disaster, had caused an explosion while carrying out repairs. On the principle of *respondeat superior* the government proceeded to recover £11,000 from the company.²²

By 1919 shareholder capital in BNGD was exhausted with over £500,000 having been outlaid on its plantations and other enterprises. Barely 12,500 of its holdings of 70,000 acres had in the end been developed. The company was forced to make the first of several debenture issues to meet the continuing drain on resources. Already known locally in jest as the 'bung company' after its initials and its unfortunately named 'Bung' twist tobacco, BNGD suffered from having at the outset undertaken to develop in Papua too many properties too widely distributed. The company's large experiments with sisal, tobacco and cotton - considered in a later chapter - proved expensive failures. As the largest private employer it is very likely that it suffered most, despite G. A. Loudon's drive and resourcefulness, from the difficulties increased by the war in obtaining competent subordinate staff.

Murray and his officers would look back on the whole period until 1922 as the pioneering or development phase in Papua, one where they had worked to educate an assertive and insensitive settler community, 'indifferent to native suffering', in its responsibilities towards the Papuans. It is surely predictable in retrospect that the white employees of companies developing plantation properties in those years, coming as most did quite inexperienced in tropical agriculture and bringing with them all the confident racial

²⁰ Ibid., Loudon to Champion, 1 Oct. 1918.

²¹ Ibid., Loudon to Hunt, 2 Oct. 1918.

²² This was the second vessel of the name. An earlier *Merrle England* was wrecked in 1912.

assumptions of the imperial age, would indeed have been far more pre-occupied with their employers' instructions and the problems of estate development than with the care of their 'savage' workers beyond the minimum requirements the law could enforce or the market in labour could demand. It was in the very nature of capitalist enterprise that this should be so. Only industrial unionism and a century of political struggle had secured even for 'civilised' workers some measure of protection against the power of landed proprietors and factory owners and their agents 'indifferent to the suffering' of tenants and employees. If, as it was, the provisioning and organisation of Papuan labourers required much time and attention, the costs of labour had to be contained. In the eight years before full production of perennial tree crops commenced shareholder's capital represented in most cases the whole of 'income' and the pressures upon and from directors and general managers to conserve funds were considerable, the costs of plantation development in Papua generally, it appears, greatly exceeding the estimates.²³

Increasingly, as government succeeded government in Melbourne, it became Murray himself who embodied the continuity of Australian policy in Papua as he was compelled to explain the complexities of colonial administration to each new minister. His reputation had begun to bring credit to Australia in the management of its dependency. Yet if politicians publicly praised the Lieutenant Governor, the failure of Papua to prosper led some privately at least to doubt the practicality of his uncompromising line if it were to be applied in the government of another territory.

For in the meantime, with the seizure by Australian forces in September 1914 of German New Guinea and the subsequent determination of the Hughes ministry that the Commonwealth should secure the occupied territory as a prize of war in any peace settlement, another possible arena for Australian enterprise in tropical agriculture was opening up - one which would soon overshadow Papua as an object of national interest. Its plantation sector by 1920 three times the size of Papua's, its administration before the war underwritten by much larger subsidies from the former imperial power and undertaken by a government believed to have been far less ethically fastidious than Papua's, German New Guinea seemed to provide an opportunity for

²³ Expenditure on development of BNGD estates in the first nine months of 1913 had amounted to £36,000 when the estimates had projected expenditure of £22,000. In the following year funds remitted to Port Moresby by the London office were averaging £5,000 a month (or £60,000 a year). At the same time, while the proceeds of the company's trading and sale of its produce had been estimated at £16,940 for 1913, only £7,946 was realised. (BNGD Letterbooks, 14 May and 26 June 1914, S. L. Thompson to Lewis Cowley). In 1918 with the plantations in production the sum of £14,000 had still to be remitted to Papua for the first half year when £5,537 had been all that had been estimated as needed for the whole year (*ibid.*, June 1918).

Australia to reap a bountiful harvest where it had not sown. After 1920 when the mandate to govern, and profit from, northeast New Guinea was indeed awarded to Australia by the League of Nations, Papua would always seem the lesser Territory.

In August 1919 Judge Murray was appointed chairman of a Royal Commission to consider the future of the former German colony, the other members being W. H. Lucas of Burns Philp and Atlee Hunt. Murray found himself in the minority, his recommendations about the constitution and development of the new acquisition rejected, he supposed, because of the humanitarian concern for native welfare uppermost in his administration of Papua, and he was quickly disabused of any idea that he might have held that he should head a combined administration.²⁴ In the years ahead, if they travelled to and from Sydney or Soerabaya on a Burns Philp or KPM boat, Papuan planters met with the new settlers who had succeeded the expropriated Germans in the Mandated Territory, but no strong connection was established generally between planters in the two Australian island Territories. There developed some rivalry between their respective private settlers as between the two administrative services, 'Papuan' asserting their primacy as residents of the senior possession and in later years making a claim to a share in Murray's 'humane' approach among the 'gentle' Papuans, the New Guinea 'Territorians' displaying their greater collective power and hardheadedness in a 'wilder' country. The minimum wage for indentured labourers in the Mandated Territory remained 5s. a month, half the Papuan rate, and the administration - perhaps because it continued to be in the hands of former military officers, or perhaps as many thought, because of a pattern set in the German period - appeared less sensitive in its dealings with the native people than the Government of Papua. In 1921 a few Papuan settlers and government officers were attracted to New Guinea by new opportunities and a few others would move there in the thirties drawn by the gold discoveries at Wau.

²⁴ The Royal Commission into Late German New Guinea and the implied rejection of Papuan practice in developing policies for the Mandated Territory are discussed in C. D. Rowley's *The Australians in German New Guinea* (Melbourne 1958). The struggle to secure German New Guinea for Australia is considered in Peter Spartalis's *The diplomatic battles of Billy Hughes* (Sydney 1983). J. H. P. Murray was in favour of a united administration in 1919 but twenty years later, he, together with most Papuan settlers, would be very opposed to amalgamation.

CHAPTER 13

Bringing matters to a head

AT A MEETING of the revived Planters' Association in February 1919, held while Judge Murray was in Australia, members considered the *Native Labour Ordinance* and ways in which it might be modified to better suit the needs of planters. An attempt was made to be constructive within the existing political and economic boundaries, and H. W. Champion, in telegraphing the recommendations of the meeting on to Murray noted that they were 'couched in very courteous terms'.¹ Like the businessmen's group which had included Loudon, Sefton and Jewell that Murray had asked to make proposals for improvements for the 'welfare of the Territory' in May 1916, so with this meeting of planters in 1919 - once they sat down to work out and agree upon practical action much the same people who wanted Murray's removal could betray a moderation or, at least a sense of political reality, hardly hinted at in the rhetoric of the public meetings and the *Papuan Courier*. They now agreed that very little amendment in the law could, in fact, be justified. The principal difficulties planters faced were in the administration of the ordinance. Large discretionary powers had been given to young and inexperienced officials who felt bound to carry out the letter rather than the spirit of the law. In cases of illegal recruiting involving a government officer, the responsibility, the planters suggested, lay with the government to recover for an innocent employer any losses he might have suffered. RMs should have the power only to recommend the cancellation of contracts where white employees were at fault; the decision in such matters, they proposed, should be reserved to the Executive Council. Or, if this was impractical, employers should have the right of appeal against the ruling of an RM. Women should be permitted to 'sign on' with their husbands, and though this was conceded to be to the employer's advantage, it was also, the planters thought, in the 'native' interest. Wages should only be payable from the commencement of work, and labourers should be allowed to agree, if destined for a rubber estate, to work by rotation on Sundays, as on any other day, with a compensatory payment

¹ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 6, Champion to Murray, 10 Feb. 1919. Also in CRS A1 19/10372.

offered in encouragement. Labourers should be allowed during the period of service advances of up to a sixth of the wages due.

Here was nothing very new. Planters were appealing for leniency in the application of the law, to have some restraint placed on the summary jurisdiction of RMs and inspectors, and perhaps to be given opportunities from time to time 'to clean things up'. They wanted the indenture of women and unrestricted Sunday tapping on the rubber estates. These were proposals, the Association told Champion, 'from the practical point of view'² but they suggest that, whatever planters might say, it was not the NLO that was the chief cause of their difficulties. Five hours of tapping on Sundays - provided the tappers were not Christians - had already been conceded and the government was soon to allow the payment of advances on wages just as the Association recommended. The indenture of women in agriculture was a lost cause. Planters, it seems, were clutching at straws.

With the dearth of shipping by May 1919 there was scarcely any rice left in the stores of either of the towns for the plantations dependent on imported food, and by August the *Papuan Courier* could declare that there was a 'famine' in Port Moresby. No overseas vessels at all called between the end of August and 13 October. Percy Robinson of Ogamobu recorded that

The native situation is extremely serious on most Plantations and Industries where native food is not grown. It does not worry us but it is no joke for most of them with a large labour force depending on them for food and no food obtainable. Of course the stores are "out" of everything you want & altogether the arrival of the 'Suva' is considered with more interest as to what she is carrying than [is] the visit of Lord Jellicoe.

Staying at Koitaki for a few days he noted that the Seftons could eat 'real butter, bread, fresh beef and other things we haven't seen in Port for many weary weeks'.³ By Christmas the stores were emptied and the apparent inability of the government to do anything about the situation stood out in bold relief. In July when it had seemed possible that the Commonwealth Income Tax might be applied in Papua the question of the franchise was once more raised and the newspaper began a campaign under the slogan of 'no representation: no taxation'.⁴ Editorials and leaders appearing in the remainder of the year - some at least, it is likely, written by G. A. Loudon, possibly others by R. D. Bertie, the recently

² Ibid. The five hours of Sunday tapping had been permitted since 1915 (Papua. *Government Gazette*, 4 Aug. 1915, CRS A1 19/10372).

³ Robinson Letters, 28 July, 11 Aug. 1919.

⁴ *Papuan Courier*, editorials 11 Apr. and 22 Aug. 1919. The paper adopted the motto on 18 July. In his letter of 30 Jan. 1920, Percy Robinson wrote to say that he had written a 'leader' for the paper, his 'second' contribution.

arrived lawyer in Port, and at least one by Percy Robinson of Ogamobu - were increasingly hostile to the government.

The shipping shortage introduced another actor onto the Papuan stage in 1919. Algernon Sydney Fitch, a master mariner who had spent eight years with the Hooghly Pilot Service at Calcutta and time since as a settler in Tasmania, now brought a tramp steamer, the *Queenscliffe*, to the Papuan coastal trade. Captain Fitch became a successful merchant in Port and his Steamships Trading Company by the late thirties would be second only to BNGD as an owner of plantations.⁵ In 1919 he had quickly decided that the government of Papua was in the hands of a recluse unsympathetic to business.⁶

In the new year the *Papuan Courter* called for a mass public meeting to press for electoral representation and on 13 January 1920 a new Citizens' Association was formed with Captain Fitch in the chair.⁷ In February with a continuing strike of marine engineers in Australia food remained very scarce in Port and the new Association used the recently established radio telegraph link with Melbourne to ask Murray, then on leave, to secure a relief steamer. A second public meeting held on 15 March demanded Murray's removal and the appointment of Staniforth Smith in his place as a man who could command the confidence of the white settlers. The occasion of the meeting was the publication of a report written by Judge Murray in response to an article in a Japanese newspaper critical of 'British' rule in Papua. Rinzo Gond, a journalist, had suggested that Papua had fallen behind German New Guinea because of the failure of the administrations of British New Guinea and Papua to give sufficient encouragement to white settlement and their prohibition on the importation of coloured labour.⁸ In his report the Lieutenant Governor conceded that Europeans were less efficient in the tropics than they were in temperate countries and that Papua could indeed be developed more rapidly with cheap labour from Asia, 'but that from motives of patriotism and self-protection we preferred to do without such labour'.⁹ At the

⁵ Steamships Trading Company Ltd was formed in 1924 taking over the assets of Captain Fitch's original company, Steamships Pty Ltd.

⁶ In a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 14 Apr. 1920 Captain Fitch accused Murray of according Customs concessions to the Catholic Mission at Yule Island. He claimed that the Lieutenant Governor was 'inaccessible to those outside the official circle'.

⁷ *Papuan Courter*, 16 Jan. 1920.

⁸ CPP 1917-1918-1919, Vol. 6, p. 1623, Report by...the Lieut. Governor of Papua...on an article 'Three Power Rule In New Guinea', by Mr Rinzo Gond. The chairman at the meeting of 15 Mar. was W. C. Bruce.

⁹ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8, Murray to the Public Service Association, 17 Mar. 1920.

meeting the twist his remarks had taken about the capacities of the white settlers was easily exploited to attack the author - though Murray, probably correctly, was to suggest in a letter to the Minister that few attending could have read either his report or Gond's article. He attempted to persuade the Samarai Chamber of Commerce not to endorse the Port Moresby resolutions but failed. The agitation he attributed directly to the old antipathy of the former government officers, Bruce and Jewell, and to the 'packing' of the meeting by BNGD. The officers of the company, he suggested in a letter sent to the Papuan Agent in Sydney, J. T. Bensted, were 'particularly bitter against the government now for they appear to be losing their case [over the destruction of the *Merrle England*] and will probably have to pay heavy damages'. He thought that 'in addition to employees they probably induced their customers to vote for the resolution especially those who were in their debt'. He asked Bensted to see that a correct report containing these charges appeared in the Australian press with the comment that 'the proper view to take is that the division is a triumph for the Government for our native policy naturally makes us many enemies and it is a matter of surprise that the majority was not very much larger'.¹⁰

There was some casuistry here and the mark of the lawyer. The whole settler community was experiencing the consequences of the decline in trade and shipping, and BNGD, if its employees might have been obliged to take part in the protest, had no need to apply direct pressure upon its customers to join them. Stung by Murray's quick resort to print, Loudon retorted that it had not been BNGD but the government that had attempted to 'pack' the meeting, that those who had opposed the resolutions had comprised only the officials present, and that they had failed to avert defeat.¹¹ Murray was accused in the *Papuan Courler* of dragging in the 'native labour bogey' to mask his unpopularity and Loudon telegraphed the Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, to deny that Murray's difficulties with the settlers had anything to do with native labour.¹²

While the Lieutenant Governor sought and obtained expressions of confidence in his administration from missionary and humanitarian groups in Australia, Bensted reported that BNGD had sent one of its employees 'south' to stir up opposition.¹³ This was Charles Jackson, the company's

¹⁰ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8, Murray to Bensted for distribution, 16 Mar. 1920. The reserved judgement of the court in the *Merrle England* case was handed down on 24 Mar. with the government being awarded £11,016 damages. An appeal in the High Court was dismissed in Aug. with damages reduced with the government's consent by £400.

¹¹ *Papuan Courler*, 30 Apr., 7 May 1920.

¹² NAPNG & CRS G126, Item 8. Bensted reports to Murray, 12 May 1920.

¹³ *Ibid.*

labour inspector and the secretary of the Planters' Association. Murray wrote to the Minister, alerting him to a previous despatch that showed Jackson had once been employed as a patrol officer and permitted to resign under a cloud.¹⁴ There is little doubt that Murray now felt that to distinguish between the Association and the company that employed Jackson was quite unnecessary. The man was clearly G. A. Loudon's agent. Reflecting later on what had been 'a rotten time'¹⁵, Murray wrote to Atlee Hunt that since the *Papuan Courler* had fomented much of the discontent and the handbills advertising the protest meeting had emanated from its press and offices, then Loudon and Bertie, BNGD's solicitor, who between them owned more than half of the shares in the newspaper, were directly responsible for all the agitation that led to the meeting and which followed it.¹⁶

Samuel Thompson, the London secretary of BNGD, visited Papua for the first time in May. While in Port Moresby he was received by Murray, their exchange, it seems, characterised more by correct pleasantries than frankness. Before leaving in June, he wrote to the Lieutenant Governor expressing anxiety about the decline in the numbers of Papuans willing to enter agreements and the evident unwillingness of the government to encourage 'signing on'. In reply Murray affirmed that there had been a dropping off in recruitment but could not agree that the responsibility was the government's, and in a telegram sent to Thompson in Sydney he invited the secretary's attention to an article by Charles Jackson in the *Sydney Morning Herald* attacking the administration over the Itikinumu affair. 'Believing as he does the sincerity of the desire you expressed to him recently of avoiding all causes of difference with [the] Government', he pressed his point home, [the Lieutenant Governor] 'cannot think that [you] will allow these attacks to continue'.¹⁷

¹⁴ CRS A1 20/13556, Murray to Minister, 7 June 1920.

¹⁵ Francis West, *Hubert Murray: The Australian Pro-Consul* (Melbourne 1968), 193, Murray to Gilbert Murray, 14 Dec. 1920.

¹⁶ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1, Murray to Poynton, 17 June 1921. This correspondence is also in CRS A1 20/13556. Three days before the meeting of 15 March the paper had also come out in support of the suggestion of an anonymous correspondent that W. C. Bruce be nominated as a candidate for the Senate in a seat with limited voting rights that the federal government was apparently considering for Papua. He possessed 'a charming personality', was 'an educated man' and had 'an abiding faith in the Territory'. (*Papuan Courler*, 12 Mar. 1920). In April, Arthur Bloomfield - a candidate more likely to be supported by Murray if Senate representation for the Territory was indeed being discussed in Melbourne - also offered himself as a candidate with the argument that as he was now again a resident of Melbourne his election could save money.

¹⁷ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8, Murray to Thompson, 16 June 1920. Also in CRS A1 20/13556.

Thompson replied that BNGD would comply, that the attacks would cease and that the general manager would sever his connections with the *Papuan Courier*.¹⁸ Perhaps he had become alarmed at the degree to which Loudon had become engaged in a personal contest with Murray. Perhaps he saw how pointless it was to expect to discredit the Lieutenant Governor when, if a choice between profits and native welfare in Papua became a public issue in Australia, those cast as 'exploiters' could not hope to prevail. If the BNGD management in Port Moresby had worked to topple Murray, there is no doubt that outside the fellowship of officials the feeling against him was running high at the time and it was to his advantage to place responsibility for the agitation on those he could represent as having manipulated the community into protest out of a desire for gain. Bensted had kept Murray well informed of events in Australia and support had been rallied to the administration through sympathetic journalists, in particular H. S. Nicholas of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*. In a telegram to Nicholas over Jackson's articles appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Murray could both cast blame and contain damage - 'it is true [there has been] more trouble with this company than all others but [I allege] no systematic ill-treatment'.¹⁹ Bensted reported that the confidence of the 'Federal Ministry' in the Papuan administration remained unshaken and that the Prime Minister had issued 'a press telegram' to say that no inquiry would be held to investigate the causes of the dispute with the 'British New Guinea Development Company'.

What had Loudon, or indeed Bertie, Jewell and Captain Fitch hoped to gain? Did they expect that the settlers of Papua would be able to 'make free with the natives' with Murray gone? This was the impression that Murray always sought to give of their motives - though he did not impute to them malice towards the Papuans, only 'indifference to native suffering'. Certainly when considering the NLO in 1919 the planters could propose few changes. Neither Loudon nor Bertie themselves managed labour directly nor does it seem that Loudon particularly wanted to protect brutal managers any more than he would indulge incompetent ones - though undoubtedly he found it inconvenient to deal with the consequences of their exposure and conviction. Jewell's record in managing labour at Lolorua was unblemished. Tom Sefton, if a hard man with his Papuan

¹⁸ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8 and CRS A1 20/13556. Thompson to Murray, 25 June 1920. The disposal of G. A. Loudon's shares was announced in the *Papuan Courier* of 18 June.

¹⁹ NAPNG & CRS G128, Item 8. Murray to Nicholas, 8 May 1920. Articles by Jackson appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 24, 26, 29, and 30 Apr. and 4 June 1920. Bensted had urged Murray to respond. H. S. Nicholas was also a lawyer and subsequently a judge.

workers, ran the most successful of the plantations without much trouble. Fitch was a newcomer.

Or did the basis of opposition lie, just as Loudon and the others said, in their conviction that Murray did not have a sufficient commitment to the success of their enterprise in Papua, that it was not any threat settlers posed to the well-being of the Papuans at all but the Lieutenant Governor's indifference to the settler struggle that was in question? His obsession with the Papuan interest, and the costs of his native policy - borne they believed disproportionately by the white community - were merely proof of this indifference. Without elected representation planters could feel powerless to promote change and have no share in the responsibilities and frustrations of office. Where but upon Murray's lack of effort, or the Commonwealth's neglect, could they lay the blame for hard times? Above all, they wanted profits and these eluded them. Staniforth Smith, practical, bold and uncomplicated, could indeed seem a man more likely to speak up for them, and Murray a man just too cleverly bent on achieving a perverse personal apotheosis.

But was Murray wrong? It seemed to him, as it seems obvious in retrospect, that his critics had mistakenly placed the blame for the disappointing outcomes of their great expectations in the wrong quarter - in an apparent failure of this Lieutenant Governor's administration to work for them - when in fact they were all the while victims of circumstances over which he, like them, could have little influence. And was not an 'indifference to native suffering' implicit in the planter demands? It would be the Papuans who would pay for any relaxation in either the law or its application or any reduction in the meagre conditions guaranteed them under the NLO. Clearly, white men settling on the land in Papua, unrestrained by government and beyond the scrutiny of humanitarians and the press, might indeed have gone farther in reducing the Papuans to 'slavery' if they had had the power - as by telling contrast they had succeeded in doing with dispossessed Aborigines in the Northern Territory of Australia itself - and all the while protesting their concern for the welfare of both the native people and the country.

A third though much smaller 'committee' meeting of the Citizens' Association held in September and chaired by Captain Fitch adhered to the March resolutions urging Murray's replacement. The chairman afterwards thought himself justified in sending a telegram to the King claiming that Murray's despotism was 'leading to [a] serious and dangerous uprising of [the] white people in Papua'. The 'honour of the Empire' demanded

intervention.²⁰ Fitch had clearly 'over-stepped the mark', and his action was repudiated at a further public meeting. It had been a gesture - most could immediately see - that impugned the competence of the Commonwealth and one hardly calculated to advance the credibility in Australia of the five or six hundred 'citizens' of Papua clamouring for electoral representation.

A lengthy review appeared in the local paper on 5 November. It was written by R. D. Bertie, one of the two solicitors practicing in Port.²¹ Robert Dugald Bertie had arrived in Papua two years before. He became the planters' lawyer, joining their Association and, as noted earlier, buying shares in the 'new' newspaper. He quickly acquired a reputation as a procrastinator, irritatingly slow to answer letters or carry out instructions - Elizabeth Mahony once sat on his doorstep refusing to move until he attended promptly to her concern - but he was certainly a shrewd and articulate advocate for the 'opposition'. His review was a perceptive analysis of another review, the *Review of Australian Administration in Papua from 1907 to 1920*, a small book of sixty pages written by the Lieutenant Governor, a copy of which the author had sent to the paper.²² In the hostile climate then at its worst Murray had been very anxious to have this document published 'with the concurrence of the Commonwealth Government', for it was essentially a careful defence of his own policies and administration disguised as a more general account of 'British' colonial practice as it had been applied by Australia in Papua. The time was overdue for Murray to explain himself at length, seriously, and without the detached irony with which he sprinkled his *Annual Reports*. These, 'southern' readers could find masterpieces of official prose, free of grandiloquence, at times almost intimate, always fresh and interesting; their readers among the Papuan planters could think them exercises in self-promotion and evasion and find them infuriating.

Murray's *Review* is indeed an impressive essay in justification, not only of the policies he had come to adopt and which he now could defend with complete confidence, but also of the whole enterprise of colonial administration in Papua as the work of reasonable and humane men, who, at a given point in time, were faced with circumstances of great inequalities in power and with cultures in collision. Certainly the Lieutenant Governor, if in many ways isolated and alone, was intellectually well equipped and possessed of an independent mind. Through an experience that for any

²⁰ *Papuan Courier*, 8 Oct. 1920.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5 Nov. 1920.

²² J. H. P. Murray, *Review of Australian Administration in Papua from 1907 to 1920* (Port Moresby, Government Printer 1920).

colonial administrator was already exceptionally long in one territory, through his correspondence and the reading that his solitary personal life had probably facilitated, he had acquired a very wide knowledge of colonial policy and practice, one such as no other Australian could possibly match.²³ Simply, he now set down the basic choices open to governments of dependencies once the decision to annexe them was made - the options in pacification, white settlement, development and 'civilising' policy; the problems of land, labour and the raising of a revenue; and the reasons why the particular choices made in Papua were made. A government's duties towards Europeans encouraged to settle and invest in a territory are set down. These obligations were clearly not unlimited. A 'British' colonial administration's overriding duty, as it had come to be seen since the mid-nineteenth century, was towards the survival, welfare and advancement of the native people. Moreover, 'the unpopularity of a Governor [with settlers] may be in direct proportion to his performance of his duty' in this respect.²⁴ This suggestion appearing so naturally in the argument was, in the circumstances in which the *Review* was written, at its heart. Overall the *Review* placed Murray in a morally unassailable position.

Bertie readily admitted that

No one can read the paper without being impressed by its power and force, and our only regret is that it was not produced years ago. If such a document had been available, many misconceptions concerning the Government policy would perhaps have been avoided . . . We commend it . . . as the most able and interesting statement of native policy which it has been our privilege to read.

Nonetheless he saw through Murray's disguise and recognised the *Review* as an 'apologia' that 'camouflaged' much that was contentious in the administration of Papua.

With the large knowledge which we in the Territory possess of his subject matter we cannot sufficiently admire the delicate choice of words in a great many cases [where] in the present state of public opinion he is often treading on dangerous ground.

To the heart of the matter Bertie was quickly drawn. If a 'Governor can . . . only gain popularity by neglecting his duty towards the natives' then many popular colonial governors were being maligned for 'We cannot believe that they have all neglected their duties towards the natives'.²⁵ Murray's unpopularity, Bertie suggested, was not due to his native policy at

²³ Murray's wife Sybil had been unable to tolerate Papua. She died in London in 1929. A second marriage ended in separation.

²⁴ Murray, *Review of Australian Administration*..., xi.

²⁵ *Papuan Courier*, 5 Nov. 1920, p.6.

all but to his hostility towards those engaged in the development of the country. He concluded with a rhetorical protest that

The Europeans in Papua may be a band of exploiters "wringing dividends out of the blood and sweat of the natives" (Vide Commonwealth Hansard). We may be something lower than the Europeans discovered by the late lamented Sir Roger Casement in the Congo and Putamayo (Vide Southern papers of March and April last). Yet it is hardly possible that the wave of true feeling for the natives which has swept over all the English-speaking countries has passed us by. We think that we are capable of appreciating a sound native policy.²⁶

Planters could feel besieged by the criticism directed at them by opportunist politicians, armchair humanitarians and, in their view, irresponsible journalists in Australia who knew little of their problems or 'native' peoples but presumed to know all. In the aftermath of world war the intellectual and moral climate in the West was rapidly changing, the late Victorian certainties under challenge. Perhaps Bertie's parting thrust conveys some of the bitterness settlers could muster at their neglect by the nation that had so recently and confidently called upon them to commit their fortunes to the Territory. And the claim that planters had a genuine concern for native welfare and an appreciation of what 'a sound native policy' might be, as they saw these things, cannot be entirely dismissed without imputing to them a degree of callousness that few actually possessed. If in much of their routine conversation white men found comfort in polarising racial differences - to be bothered with the subtleties of the situation could be threatening - and some of them were indeed prepared to bully and cheat Papuans, most had certainly learned the economic value of their employees. Above all, they saw themselves as deserving as settlers in Australia itself of the assistance of governments - governments they supposed should represent their interests first and those of the Papuans second. Murray can hardly have been wrong in believing that the social costs Papuan communities would be forced to bear would be vastly increased if policies that fully met these settler expectations were adopted.

To whom did the future of Papua belong? Both Murray and his opponents could have agreed that the Papuans might be dependent indefinitely. For Murray this implied that the country must be administered in trust for them. In this scheme white settlers had a limited if necessary place. But for the settlers before 1914 there was little doubt that they were pioneering a 'new' country and that the future was theirs - theirs, that is,

²⁶ Ibid. The Putamayo atrocities committed by the employees of rubber companies among the Indians of the upper Amazon were exposed by Sir Roger Casement in 1912. See below p. 183.

failing a loss of will by the governing power. White minorities elsewhere in the British Empire had been conceded responsible government, they knew. If Murray was afraid that granting the settler community elected representation would open the door to future demands for a similar degree of self-determination - the outcome of which could only result in Papuan interests being permanently relegated to second place - settlers believed that without a franchise to elect representatives in either the Legislative Council or the Australian Parliament their interests would receive no hearing at all. Murray, it seemed to them, was by virtue of his position as a public official hamstrung, and by personal disposition indifferent to their struggle, and a poor advocate for the Territory's real interests. Yet while it was disappointment that gave to the the demands and denunciations of the opposition their bitter edge, it is possible that by 1921, when the agitation for the franchise reached a new peak, elected representation might well have been foregone as an aspiration and settlers 'bought off' if the Commonwealth had then extended tariff concessions to its dependency and underwritten Papua's development. Rendered captive, settlers could have their teeth drawn.²⁷ If, on the other hand, the prosperity all had thought assured in 1914 had come to pass, with all that this would have entailed in an increased and more formidable white population, pressures for greater political power could have proved irresistible.

In November 1920 also came the blow that the government intended to levy an export duty on copra of 25s. a ton. This drew a strong protest from the Planters' Association, and Arthur Jewell, as vice-president, wrote to Murray to remind him how much the administration already depended for its revenue on an unprofitable planting industry. He claimed that in its effect even the 10s. 'head tax' paid on behalf of indentured labourers by the RMs out of wages deposited with them was a tax really met by employers as the expectations held by Papuans about the moneys to which they were entitled at the end of their contracts had not diminished. The recent increases in the salary scale of officials made as a result of a review of service conditions had compounded planters' difficulties as salaries for private employees were also forced to rise. The plantation sector could not bear the burden of the copra tax which would be 'a direct tax on Capital . . . not upon the profits of an industry'.²⁸

²⁷ Certainly a decade later in times even more desperate, when a preference was finally obtained for the Territory's rubber and a small bounty offered the copra producers by the Papuan Government to save their industry, planters clearly accepted the price to be paid in political acquiescence. See below pp. 201-2.

²⁸ NAPNG & CRS G126, Item 9. Jewell to Murray, 30 Nov. 1920.

The revenue had fallen considerably in the previous twelve months and the Lieutenant Governor felt no need to deny Jewell's contentions or to justify the administration's actions. While Murray would later defend an export tax as a contribution to territorial self-sufficiency, it is very probable from its timing that the copra levy was principally introduced to cover the deficit that would otherwise have resulted from the public service salary increases. It was a tax, he wrote to Jewell, that was simply a necessary measure and similar to one recently introduced in Late German New Guinea. It was not likely, he said, to be waived.

Yet Murray well knew and privately acknowledged that he depended for about a third of the revenue on indirect taxes and fees levied on the 'shareholders'.²⁹ With the annual subsidy to the revenue from the Commonwealth of £30,000 in these years accounting for another third, and the heavy import duties levied on trade goods purchased by the Papuans for the remainder, the government was expected to maintain balanced budgets with any deficit met by borrowings from a small reserve or the pension fund, or by increased stringency in the following year.

For the plantation companies, with their leases only partly developed and having waited eight years for the perennial tree crops to come into production, more money had to be found. The small 'profits' that BNGD alone could show on its large local trading account or derive from the modest proceeds in the war years of the 'catch' crops, tobacco and sisal, and declared to buoy up the confidence of shareholders, could not be distributed - they were still being greatly exceeded by outgoings on the plantation development account - and were appropriated annually to expenditure in the succeeding year. While small planters relied heavily on their trade stores to survive, the other larger planting enterprises engaged in little trading and remained overwhelmingly dependent on shareholder funds or the first returns on production to complete their development. In order to carry on as they reached the end of their issued capital, or, as in many cases, ordinary shareholders failed to respond to further calls on their shares, most of the companies were forced to take out bank loans or to issue debentures on the security of their properties. The repayment of these borrowings represented a first claim on earnings and had the effect of delaying even further the time when the industries would reach the dividend paying stage. Very large sums of money had been expended, and the savings of many investors, not all of them wealthy, had now been exhausted. Much depended on the maturing plantations proving profitable.

²⁹ West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 52, Hubert to Gilbert Murray, 19 Jan. 1913.

Capital entering the country during the 'development' years when plantations were being cleared and planted and before trees came into production could be expected to support a considerable trade deficit. This represented investment in expectation of profits. But the extent to which the value of imports continued to exceed the combined value of the exports and the annual Commonwealth subsidy to the revenue after 1916-17 - when production began on a large scale - represents one measure of the extent to which the new Papuan economy remained dependent upon private capital inflow to pay its way. Indeed as production and exports increased, the unfavourable balance of trade deteriorated further with low prices, the shipping shortage, and greatly increased costs bringing expectations down. The value of exports would exceed that of imports after 1905 only in 1925-26 before the great depression forced the Territory to live within its means between 1930-31 and 1936-37. And the experience of the territorial economy as a whole corresponded closely with that of plantation enterprise. BNGD would pay a first dividend in 1926 and not another before 1936 - a year in which its capital was reduced by 60% partly in order to do so. The lesser companies would fare even less well.

The total trade deficit for the early years of 'production' between 1916-17 and 1924-25 inclusive amounted to £1,152,870. If the sum of the Commonwealth grants over the period, £360,000, together with a large investment in the Laloki copper field, and perhaps £100,000 in funds directed to the Christian missions by their supporting societies, are subtracted, the remaining deficit must have been more than £500,000.³⁰ How was this met? Mostly still, it seems, from the capital of Australian and English shareholders - principally those interested in plantations - whose resources continued to be called upon and increasingly used merely to sustain their properties well into the period when a large return had once been confidently predicted. The BNGD Debenture Issue of 1919 sought £100,000 from subscribers all of which was applied to meeting expenses in bringing already planted areas into production. Little or none was used in further development of the company's leases, the unused areas of which

³⁰ These calculations, drawn from the *Papuan Annual Reports*, assume that in the absence of dividends for planters there was also a complete absence of savings and that all income was ultimately spent on imports. Clearly the government maintained a reserve and trading enterprises must have remained at least barely profitable. It is unlikely that some of the proceeds from gold production were not also remitted. Any savings and remission of profits or proceeds overseas by some sections of the community could only have increased the burden of the trade deficit upon the primary producers. The figure for mission income is generalised from Murray's estimate that the missions received overseas contributions of £10,000 in 1921. (CRS A1, Item 21/15815) BNGD dividends are noted p. 212 (Note 14) below.

still amounted to nearly 60,000 acres. The sum of the cultivated areas on BNGD estates actually declined in the period 1917-1923 from nearly 12,000 acres to under 10,000 acres as lands planted with tobacco, cotton and sisal were abandoned. In 1923 the debenture holders agreed to increase their risk with a guarantee of a further \$50,000 held as collateral security on bank loans negotiated to keep the company afloat.

In these circumstances to those engaged in the development of agricultural industries government levies and charges could seem an insupportable burden and the size of the 'official class' a large extravagance. Until 1916-17 the customs duties the government levied on most imported items whether for trade or issue to Papuans in indentured service were seen as adding materially to the heavy costs of plantation development. Beyond 1916-17 planters could only regard these 'taxes' as placing a severe brake on the profitability of industries scarcely able to pay. The government had to raise a revenue, no doubt, and planters enjoyed the security and services it provided. They did not have their personal incomes taxed directly. Unless Australia was to bear the full cost of providing the Papuan administration, the burden of contributing to the costs of government, like the burden of developing and maintaining their properties, it seemed, had to be carried by the investors whether they were drawing profits or not.

The customs duties were the principal item in the government's internal revenue, never amounting to less than half - the balance consisting mainly of rents, fines, and fees for services, licences and utilities - and Murray could reasonably claim that through them the Papuans also made their contribution to the costs of administration of their country. Certainly white people in their capacity as private residents rather than as employers were not heavily 'taxed' in this way. Much that Europeans imported for their own consumption, except for alcohol and tobacco, was not dutiable. Staniforth Smith calculated in 1910 that the white population of under 900 at the time contributed 28% of the customs receipts, or £7,032 in the year 1909-10, and the Papuans 72%, or £17,868 in the same year. In terms of their personal consumption settlers thus contributed to the revenue no more than about £8 a head.³¹

But as employers planters could feel excessively and prematurely taxed. Much later, in the 1933-34 *Annual Report* when considering the consequences for the revenue of a decline in the labour force, Murray estimated that 'a native labourer employed at 10/- a month is worth 46s. [per annum] in customs duties alone so that a decrease of £28,124 [in

³¹ NLA Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 690.

wages paid since 1927-28] means a loss to the customs of over £10,000'.³² The loss to revenue represented a contribution shared between Papuan workers and their employers as the calculation included not only the duty paid by time-expired labourers in the purchase of dutiable goods but also the duty paid by the employers on the tobacco, blankets, cotton cloth and rice issued to indentured labour under the NLO Regulations. Thus for employers failing to make profits the duties on these items could seem a large imposition and a clear target for attack on government policies. Even so, it should be recorded here that Papuans, whether receiving wages or producing copra on their own account for cash, were indirectly 'taxed' through the import duties at the rate of 10% on most items they bought and at 200% on tobacco, the major purchase item.³³

³² PAR 1933-34, 15. The calculation was actually the Treasurer's in Circular No. 290, 31 March 1932. NAPNG, G91, Outstation records, Series 485, Box 806 (Cape Nelson). Of course any reduction by the government in its own labour force would have represented a net saving to the revenue.

³³ The Custom Duty of 3s. a pound on tobacco was reduced to 1s. 9d. a pound in Oct. 1921.

PART IV

Coming to terms 1921-1926

We claim that a sympathetic Government would have assisted us in our bad times, or, at the very worst, left us alone. Instead of which they have added very materially to our burdens, and in doing so have created such a feeling of distrust that we are precluded from getting sufficient further capital to pull through.

The Planters' Association of Papua, *Conditions in Papua*, 1921.

In these quinine latitudes small town criticism grows rancorous . . . Papuan settlers should realise that, bad as it may be, Papua is about the best Territory in the Pacific today. Instead of howling for the moon, they should turn to and show Murray (who is a greater man than his generation realises) that they are willing to assist the Administration on practical lines . . . Try a 'pull together' campaign.

Leslie F. Gill, a planter of Vella Lavella, British Solomon Islands Protectorate,
Papuan Courier, 26 Oct. 1923.

CHAPTER 14

The turning point

G. A. LOUDON was in England at the time of the September meeting in Port Moresby and the fiasco of Captain Fitch's telegram. At the annual general meeting of BNGD he attacked the government's 'ban' on the employment of Papuan women on plantations and allowed the chairman of the company, W. A. Horn, to suggest that the *Merrle England* at the time of its destruction had been a 'dilapidated' vessel whereas it had been barely two years old. Murray's attention was drawn to the published account of the meeting. He wrote challenging Loudon's facts. Women could work on plantations if they accompanied their husbands at the employer's risk. They could not, it was true, be indentured except for domestic service. With regard to the *Merrle England*, Loudon had obviously allowed a plain untruth to pass - presumably so that the government's claim on BNGD could seem to the shareholders all the more unfair.¹

In his report delivered at the London meeting held in October at Winchester House, Old Broad Street, Loudon gave the planters' view of the benign transformation undergone by Papuans as a result of a period of plantation service. He also suggested that it was the company alone who ensured the strict observance by its managers of their responsibilities under the NLO and Regulations. In language reminiscent of Staniforth Smith - or even an earlier Murray - he assured the shareholders that

The Papuan, in his native state is a wild, rather dirty, scraggy, cannibalistic gentleman, sometimes rather truculent and not easy to deal with. After one, two or three years' service on one of our plantations we return him to his village a new man, well nourished, with glossy skin, and good physique. We have the strictest regulations regarding the housing, care and attention of our natives, and any white employee disregarding such regulations is dealt with promptly.²

This was, no doubt, what his audience wished to hear. But Loudon was unquestionably sincere. Such a perspective was possible even if it is obvious that it understated the regulatory hand of government in Papua. And the

¹ ANUABL Deposit 95, M37, BNGD Annual General Meeting, Oct. 1920. Murray's comments on the report of the meeting are in NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1. Atlee Hunt wrote to Horn to question the statements made. The chairman apologised for errors in his speech but defended what Loudon had said as 'candid criticism of legislative enactments'.

² Ibid.

standard for comparison his description would have suggested to those present was that of Indian Tamils who, until recently, had been readily available in large numbers to undertake indentured service in Malaya and Fiji. Surely a similarly well regulated system of indenture offered the Papuans, and their womenfolk, a valuable opportunity to ascend the ladder of civilisation a rung or two! Or so it must have seemed.

In transit in Sydney in January Loudon called on J. T. Bensted after the Papuan Government Agent had complained to BNGD's Sydney agent, F. C. Tracy, about Loudon's speech in London. In an account of their conversation sent to Leonard Murray, Bensted reported that Loudon had claimed that government officers, unlike employees of private enterprise, were not being brought to account for ill-treatment of Papuans, and that he had evidence, 'supported by photographs', which could be produced to uphold the allegation. When on his return Murray wrote asking him to explain, Loudon disputed Bensted's account. All he had said was that both government and employers were bound to acquire some unsatisfactory employees and that the misdemeanours of officials were not made public. He reasserted his company's desire not to offend the administration.³

In Brisbane Loudon had given an interview for the *Courier Mail*, later reprinted in the *Melbourne Age*, in which he had again used facts loosely - this time to explain the failure of the cotton industry in 1916. The industry had collapsed, he said, because women and children had not been permitted to assist with the harvest as they were in other cotton producing countries. Women, he again claimed, were not allowed to work on plantations though they would benefit from doing so.⁴ Whilst it is doubtful that Australian readers understood the implications of his remarks, Loudon was making here another appeal for the indenture of women in agriculture, for the consequent development of a 'plantation village' system and ultimately, we can be sure, for a radical restructuring of Papuan society to assist plantation agriculture. It was characteristic of the man that he would continue to press hard despite adversity even as he would certainly have taken advantage of successes to struggle for further concessions. It must indeed have been wearying for Murray to have had in these years so energetic, persistent and devious an opponent as George Archibald Loudon. For Loudon also the long contest with Murray was undoubtedly a deeply serious matter. Working away at another obstacle he had taken the opportunity of the Brisbane interview also to attack the Commonwealth's tariff indifference to the products of Papua.

³ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1, Bensted to Leonard Murray, 7 Jan. 1921; Loudon to Murray, 10 Jan. 1921.

⁴ The *Age* (Melbourne), 29 Jan. 1921.

While G. A. Loudon was on his way home to Papua, though probably with his knowledge, the acting general manager of BNGD, Samuel Wills, lodged a formal complaint in February 1921 'against . . . harsh and vindictive treatment recently meted out to the Company by the Department of Native Affairs and Control'.⁵ In many ways, this complaint, though it did not refer to events occurring before 1920, marked the climax of the contest of principle and will that had developed since 1914 between BNGD and the government and between Loudon and the Lieutenant Governor personally. Again, the immediate issues were allegations of ill-treatment of Papuans working on Itikimumu plantation.

Following the desertion of more than fifty labourers from the estate, the acting CNA, Leslie Bell, after carrying out a preliminary investigation, instituted proceedings against BNGD for failing to provide sixty-four labourers with 'good and sufficient food'. The hearing, in what the *Papuan Courier* referred to as the 'famous "bean" case', occupied fourteen full sitting days in the Port Moresby RM's Court spread over thirty-eight days from December 11 until January 27, and though the charges were dismissed it was not before the company had incurred very considerable expenses.⁶ Wills suggested that this affair together with another recent case involving desertions from BNGD's plantation at Aroa were two more instances of ill-considered actions being brought in a discriminatory manner against his company by Native Affairs, and that BNGD had a large claim for costs. These were likely to exceed £700 in transport, the salaries of European witnesses, the maintenance of the deserters and other Papuan witnesses, and in legal costs of which the company had been allowed £54. The indirect losses in suspended production caused by the absence of staff and labour from the estates could not be calculated.

In the Aroa case, Wills claimed that contrasting treatment had been administered to Arthur Bloomfield's Galley Reach company and BNGD over desertions of labourers recruited at the same time and place, and who, after only a few hours on the estates, had run away complaining of a food shortage. Native Affairs, Wills alleged, had assisted the Galley Reach management to secure convictions against the deserters without it even being necessary for the manager to leave his plantation. Convictions were later obtained against the Aroa deserters also, but as the Itikimumu case intervened before the Aroa case could be heard, BNGD had been compelled under protest to maintain the Aroa labourers in town for the whole period of the Itikimumu hearing.

⁵ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1, S. A. Wills to acting Administrator, 1 Feb. 1921. The full correspondence over the BNGD complaints against the administration is also in CRS A1 21/20615 'British N. G. Development Company Ltd. Complaints against Admin.', 1921.

⁶ The 'famous bean case' was reported in the *Papuan Courier*, 21 Jan. 1921.

Wills's charges were serious and could hardly go unanswered. In a report to the Acting Administrator, Bell set out the basis for the *prima facie* case against the company over the Itikinumu desertions.⁷ BNGD had not proceeded immediately against the deserters as was customary, but had asked for time in which Archie MacAlpine, the company's plantation inspector, could make an investigation. Suspicious, Bell set aside the report MacAlpine then submitted as it gave him the impression that it had been especially written for him to read. An examination since made of the deserting labourers by the GMO, Dr Harse, had indicated they were unfit to work and it had been principally upon this evidence that the decision was made to press charges. Bell rejected the planters' argument advanced by Wills that where some labouring gangs on an estate were contented and well fed others on the same estate with a different overseer were similarly so, and that an expression of contentment on the part of labourers at a visit by one of the CNA's inspectors necessarily implied that all had been well before the visit. He denied that the Aroa and Galley Reach cases corresponded and called the suggestion that there had been a conspiracy to obtain the convictions against the Galley Reach deserters 'preposterous'. The Aroa deserters, unlike those from Galley Reach, had alleged that they had been beaten. Bell had acted, he said, on the principle that when

batches of natives . . . walk about 30 miles to Port Moresby . . . to complain of insufficient food, and the Government Medical Officer supports them in this evidence before the court, something must be radically wrong . . . If these particular natives had been treated properly they would not have become discontented and left their work to complain . . . with the risk of being sent to gaol for desertion.⁸

Bell went on to ridicule Wills's own knowledge of labour management. There was, he concluded, no foundation for the claim that Native Affairs held any 'animus' against BNGD - as the dismissal of the Department's case would seem to prove. Yet, if not animus, then prejudice was at least likely - so acrimonious had relations become between the government and the company. Bell gave no hint that the previous contests had added any weight to the decision to prosecute BNGD but he was to imply later that this was indeed the case, and among its officers the company's pyrrhic victory in the court did little to reduce the old suspicion that BNGD was being harassed.

The Department's charges in the 'bean' case were dismissed because BNGD had been within the NLO Regulations in issuing haricot beans to plantation labourers in place of the customary rice then unavailable on account of the shortage of shipping. Haricot beans needed to be repeatedly soaked before cooking with the water changed regularly to prevent fermentation. They were

⁷ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1, 8 Feb. 1921.

⁸ Ibid., 1 Mar. 1921.

very unpopular as the plantation staple with the Papuans who, refusing to eat them, might well have become hungry, rebellious, and unfit for work. These circumstances must have been well known to Native Affairs officers, and Murray would attribute the general falling off in recruitment in late 1920 at least partly to the unwillingness of labourers to eat the substitutes offered for rice.⁹ While Bell denied one of Wills's assertions that Port Moresby had been 'flooded' with deserters from the nearer plantations, the diet of beans might indeed have prompted the desertions at Galley Reach and Aroa.

The Executive Council met and considered that Wills's statement disclosed no justification of his company's complaint of vindictive treatment and that a claim for compensation couched in the terms the acting general manager had employed could not be entertained. It was at this point that Michael Burgess, a disaffected former employee of BNGD on Itikinumu, Jawarere and Baubauguina plantations, called on Bensted in Sydney alleging that charges made by him to an RM, Edwin Bastard, about the treatment of labour on the three plantations had not been acted upon. Murray attempted unsuccessfully to persuade Burgess to return to Port Moresby for an inquiry. When Loudon in a letter to Atlee Hunt accused the government of trying to bring Burgess back to further damage the company, Murray denied that he had done so.¹⁰

In June 1921 the incumbent Minister for Home and Territories, Alexander Poynton, visited Papua and the new Mandated Territory of New Guinea. It was the first ministerial visit to Papua in ten years. G. A. Loudon sought a private interview - hardly a request, coming as it did from the most prominent businessman in the Territory, that could easily be refused. Yet it was, ostensibly because Poynton's stay in Port Moresby was to be for only three days.

Loudon had attempted to prepare the ground for a meeting with a letter giving a resumé of BNGD grievances. He referred to the old hostility directed towards the company. He could 'never find the reason for this antagonism. Sometimes I am told that it is a personal matter, but it existed a long time before I came into the country'. If anything he had done was considered to be the cause he offered to have his conduct 'made the subject of the closest inquiry'. Of BNGD, he continued

The Company is directed by a body of gentlemen in London who have a very real feeling that the company is doing good work for the Empire in assisting in the development of this out-lying part,

but that there appeared to be in the Papuan service

⁹ PAR 1919-20, 6.

¹⁰ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/1, Loudon to Hunt, 5 May 1921; Item 23/3 contains Murray's correspondence with Bensted over Burgess. Murray could, of course, readily deny Loudon's charge taken literally.

a feeling that anything can be done against us with impunity, and our complaints will be disregarded, that any report to our detriment will receive credence and that any attempt at assistance to us will not be conducive to promotion in the service . . .

He added,

I am prepared to do anything to satisfy the requirements of the government. I have long since given orders that so far as possible the Company's officers are to comply strictly with the directions of any official, however unreasonable . . . for the sake of peace.¹¹

Whether unable or unwilling to see Loudon privately, Poynton was clearly obliged to respond. He wrote asking the general manager to put the company's complaints in writing. Loudon replied with a long statement repeating much of what Wills had claimed about recent events but in even greater detail. He also ventured that the Lieutenant Governor had greatly misrepresented the nature and extent of the opposition to his administration in his published statements about the meeting in March of the year before, and referring to the Prime Minister's remark that the quarrel in Papua was no business of the Commonwealth, Loudon suggested that 'a public official was not allowed the luxury of personal feelings in his official capacity'. He continued,

You can quite understand that it is a matter of difficulty to carry on business in difficult times with a feeling that any moment the company may be liable to a heavy and serious attack from errors [*sic*] of one of our staff and even in cases where no mistake at all is made. It may be that some of the government officials dislike our company or some of our staff but their personal disagreements have nothing to do with their duties as officers and we are entitled to ask for the same treatment as any other company. We contribute largely to the cost of the government. We have spent an enormous amount in attempting to develop the country and we are entitled to the assistance of the government . . .¹²

In the exchanges which followed, as in all those hitherto, Murray had the advantage of knowing exactly what Loudon had written to Poynton or Hunt, as by customary procedure copies of letters were forwarded to him and conversations reported. Poynton invited him to comment on Loudon's letter and subsequent statement.

With regard to the general manager's first resumé, Murray admitted he could have no regard for Loudon personally but denied that he had ever allowed his personal feelings to influence him against BNGD. He had had no personal differences with Loudon's predecessor, Lewis Cowley, whom he had nominated to the Legislative Council. Of Loudon's reference to the good intentions of the company's directors, Murray commented,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Loudon to Poynton, 25 June 1921.

¹² *Ibid.*, Loudon to Poynton, 8 July 1921.

What is said of the directors may be quite true - I hardly know them. It is true that one of them is an ex-Governor; but I ought to add that another ex-Governor warned me against this Company, manifested great surprise that it was ever encouraged to come to Papua and expressed the most gloomy views of the treatment which natives were likely to receive at its hands.¹³

Here was implied some previous existence of BNGD, as if the company or its principals had an earlier record in another dependency of oppressing native workers. This was clearly unfounded. Perhaps Murray had been warned in general of the threat posed to government and native welfare in any colony by the presence of a dominant commercial interest. Certainly he had previously expressed fear of such a threat himself. In a subsequent letter to Poynton he would draw the Minister's attention to the Putamayo atrocities committed in Colombia and exposed in 1912 by Roger Casement to show what the employees of British companies could perpetrate far from the eyes of their directors.¹⁴ He went on now to suggest that the BNGD directors knew very little about conditions in Papua. Indeed, at the time when Murray entertained him in Port Moresby, the company's secretary, Samuel Thompson, had been 'entirely ignorant of the facts of so outstanding a case as the starving and ill-treatment of "boys" at Itikimumu in 1918'. He continued,

I was struck by one thing in particular in my interview with Mr Thompson, and that was his insistence upon the wealth of his company and its importance in the world of affairs, and his apparent inability to understand the ordinary Australian view that the richest Company could have no more right to disobey the law than the poorest settler in the territory. I think that this sort of idea, that a rich company is in some way above the law, may have a good deal to do with the trouble this Company has given.¹⁵

Murray appended reports on the Itikimumu and Aroa cases, on proceedings taken against BNGD by the Treasury over customs clearances, and on a dispute over a claim by the company for exclusive rights over a water supply point for its coastal steamer, the *Tambar*. Leslie Bell's report of the December and January hearings was re-written for Poynton's eye. Bell thought that the absence of complaints from other employers of vindictive treatment by Native Affairs was in itself evidence of the absurdity of Wills's assertions. But he now allowed that

There is no company in this Territory that has given this Department so much cause for anxiety in connection with the treatment of its native labourers . . . Officers...have made very earnest efforts to bring the Company to a better understanding of its responsibilities . . . by means of moral suasion, but we were

¹³ Ibid., Murray to Poynton, 25 June 1921.

¹⁴ CRS A1 21/20615 'British N. G. Development Company Ltd. Complaints against Admin.' 1921, Murray to Poynton, 17 Aug. 1921.

¹⁵ Ibid., Murray to Poynton, 25 June 1921.

most reluctantly forced to the conclusion long ago that such methods were quite ineffective . . . Surely no reasonable man can honestly believe that we should appeal to the law, with all its attendant anxiety and extra labour that such entails, if we could carry out what we believe to be our duty by any other effective means . . . The Company wish to govern, not to be governed.¹⁶

This suggests that BNGD was to be distinguished from other companies in Papua only by the degree of irresponsibility of its European employees and by their unwillingness to submit to control. But this company was the largest enterprise in the country and by far the largest employer of Papuans. And the detection of breaches of the labour code and the prosecution of offenders was, after all, the *raison d'être* of Native Affairs. The confrontation between a government and such a company was indeed a major crisis for both, and both parties could believe the other prejudiced. It is at least possible that there was a determination on the part of Murray and his officers to bring BNGD in particular 'to a better understanding of its responsibilities' for fear of the threat any concessions to it could pose to the independence of the government. Such an enterprise had to be held at arm's length.

In commenting on Loudon's larger statement of grievances, Murray drew Poynton's attention to the 'atmosphere' written into it that gave the impression that 'the Papuan Government is impossible and that its members spend most of their time in trying to entrap his company into technical breaches of the law'.¹⁷ Murray repeated for emphasis that the origins of all the conflict with BNGD lay in the attitude of the company - and not in any malign intent on the part of his officers:

This notion that the B.N.G.D. Co. Ltd. should be above the law is perhaps fostered by recollections of Chartered Companies in Africa and elsewhere, and is I think really at the bottom of all the difficulties we have had with this Company.¹⁸

Was Murray being fair? If there was 'atmosphere' in Loudon's submissions, there was exaggeration here also. Here was the trained advocate defending his administration and the conduct of his officers with an unanswerable strike at the competence of his principal opponents: they could do wrong unconsciously. And as with his evidence before the Royal Commission in 1906 when he thought he could see a foundation for Captain Barton's failure as an administrator in his hostility to Australian interests - so now he had identified an underlying cause for the government's difficulties with BNGD in the company's pretensions. Certainly the directors of the company were not as 'entirely' ignorant of conditions in Papua or Australia as Murray suggested. The chairman, W. A. Horn, though now living in England, was born in New

¹⁶ Ibid., Bell to Murray, 22 July 1921.

¹⁷ Ibid., Murray to Poynton, 26 July 1921.

¹⁸ Ibid.

South Wales and had spent much of his life in South Australia where he had been a prominent member of Parliament. His son, Major Kelham Horn, also a director, had visited Papua with Evelyn Metcalfe and would visit again. Samuel Thompson's letters as secretary of the company suggest a conscientious and not inhumane man, and betray no hint of a claim for BNGD to 'chartered company' status. Thompson was simultaneously secretary of the Kuala Selangor Rubber Company, also chaired by Horn, and the owners of Robinson River, and he and several directors knew Malaya well. The comparisons they could make between conditions there and in Papua were not uninformed. Perhaps Murray could not foretell the outcome of Poynton's visit if his opponents caught the Minister's ear and succeeded in establishing that their complaints had substance. He had to make sure that the groundwork for any further defence was solidly laid. He did not impute insincerity to BNGD, nor need insincerity be imputed to him. At bottom, Murray had come to believe, the problems between a colonial administration and private settlers were inherent in the colonial situation itself where the interests of the native people and those of the settlers were bound to be in opposition.

If the visiting Minister would not meet Loudon alone, he could scarcely avoid meeting him as a member of a delegation from the Planters' Association and mining interests.¹⁹ The others present were Arthur Jewell as spokesman, R. D. Bertie, Seymour Williams of Bloomfield's Moresby Trading and Agency Company, and P. R. Osborne of the Laloki Copper Mine. Jewell began with a request for consideration of a development loan for the Territory of £500,000, the expenditure from which would be determined by a committee in which the Lieutenant Governor would have only a casting vote. Poynton said he thought that this 'committee would abolish Government control altogether', an unlikely concession. The remaining submissions were not new: the indenture of women, the admission of Asians for specified tasks, the reduction of government staff and salaries, jury rights, electoral representation, the abolition of the Native Affairs Department, the Sapphire Creek road. The encounter was amiable - if the Minister gave little hint of his attitude. Poynton had listened patiently. He responded to Jewell's thanks contrasting the welcome he had received in Papua with that he had received in Darwin. He was struck, he said, by the absence of signs in the places he had seen of the enormous waste of money that had occurred in the Northern Territory.²⁰ This his hearers might well have found ominous.

Poynton also met a deputation of the Citizens' Association comprising Captain Fitch, E. C. Skelly, and J. R. Ross. Skelly, formerly the manager of a Samarai hotel, was now an employee of Fitch's company, and Ross a small

¹⁹ *Papuan Courter*, 1 July 1921.

²⁰ CRS A1 21/15821, 'Citizens of Port Moresby No. 1 Deputation to Minister, 1921', p.7.

planter at Kerema and possibly a trader connected with Fitch. This exchange was less pleasant than the meeting with the planters. Their principal 'demand', this deputation said, was the enfranchisement of the white community. But so heated did Fitch become in pressing his views about this and a wide range of other grievances that the interview could only have confirmed any opinion Poynton may have had about the dangers of allowing such people a greater say in the Territory's affairs. Fitch was reminded that he 'was making some very rash statements', and the deputation informed that there was no possibility that the Commonwealth would entertain a proposal to give settlers 'full control while the country was in state of transition'. Murray, the Minister told them, 'had done remarkably well'.²¹

Poynton's visit marked a turning point. It did much to allow settlers a feeling that they had been given an opportunity at last to state their case before an arbitrator. He had conceded them nothing but his personal goodwill, yet a large crowd gathered at the Port Moresby wharf to cheer, sing 'For he's a jolly good fellow', and wave him goodbye.²² The Minister had demonstrated, without the least ambiguity, the Commonwealth's confidence in the Lieutenant Governor. It could take only a little reflection on the part of the planters and their allies to see that they could expect no change in the structure of the government or in the administration of current policies and that no agitation could succeed. And they would have to live with Judge Murray.

Indeed that the government had won a 'victory' was widely perceived. Having lost control of the *Papuan Courrier* in the previous year G. A. Loudon now had to contend with both editorial criticism and attacks from correspondents in the paper that for the first time placed the leading planters on the defensive. A letter of 1 July called them 'Advocates of Asiatics' and the new editor, C. E. Wilkins, defended the independence of the local press against planter 'innuendoes'.

Before the Minister left the Territory Loudon wrote to say that BNGD's plantation inspector, Archie MacAlpine, would also be travelling south aboard the *Marsina*. He suggested that perhaps Poynton could meet informally with MacAlpine to discuss matters.²³ The resulting unscheduled interview at sea Alexander Poynton might have wished to avoid, but it was timely and proved him in the end a most astute conciliator. Affecting some perplexity at the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²² *Papuan Courrier*, 15 July 1921. It is possible those giving the Minister a rowing farewell were chiefly from 'the Government crowd' though given the general success of his visit this is not certain.

²³ CRS A1 21/20615, Loudon to Poynton, 8 July 1921.

conflicting claims of the government and the opposition, he urged the plantation inspector,

that in the interest of all concerned I thought it would be much better to bury the past and work amicably together in the future. Mr MacAlpine assured me that this was the sincere wish of his Company and that everything possible would be done by Mr Loudon and himself to create a better feeling in all matters between the Company and the government.²⁴

On 4 August the Minister wrote a quasi-personal letter to Loudon reporting that he and MacAlpine had been 'unanimous' about the need for the parties in Papua to work together. He assured the general manager

that as far as you yourself are concerned, I have always formed the highest opinion of your integrity and ability and never for one moment did I think that you were personally antagonistic to the Government of Papua, but presume, like myself, you have people under you who are not at all times very discreet in the handling of important matters.²⁵

This was a clever approach and it disarmed Loudon at a stroke. He was offered the opportunity to deflect onto unnamed subordinates any blame that might be his for the agitation and difficulties between his company and the government. He was permitted to believe that Murray himself might have been among Poynton's 'own' people who could be indiscreet. He responded in September with fulsome thanks. He felt

that the result of your visit to Papua is fully appreciated by all residents, especially myself and Directors of B.N.G.D. Co. Ltd. inasmuch as more harmonious relations have now been established.

Loudon could not resist the implied offer of an intimacy in the Minister's letter, and added - it was entirely in character - an invitation that Poynton 'write to me direct' if he considered 'at any time . . . improvements can be made . . . and I will endeavour to fall in with your suggestions'.²⁶ Though he would remain general manager of BNGD for another five years and go on to be a large private planter, and would be the last of the old 'opposition' ever to be reconciled to Murray personally, the 'uncrowned king of Papua' had come finally to accept the constraints. He remained outspoken and a hard man in business but no longer the central figure in a cabal. In his later years he chose to remember Murray only in a favourable light and to forget the rancour that had once stood between them.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., Poynton to Murray, 5 Aug. 1921.

²⁵ Ibid., Poynton to Loudon, 4 Aug. 1921.

²⁶ Ibid., Loudon to Poynton, 19 Sept. 1921.

²⁷ In 1959 Loudon wrote some notes ('Agriculture - Papua, 1913-1959' [7 pp.]) giving a brief history of the Papuan plantation industries. Murray is mentioned only as the planters' ally. See also below pp. 296-7.

Long and carefully prepared submissions presented by a delegation of the Samarai Chamber of Commerce were also considered by Poynton on his return to Australia. They contained many proposals for additional expenditure by the Commonwealth which they suggested should 'look on Papua as a business enterprise' and 'bear the burden of its development till it reaches a self-supporting stage' - the whole predicated on the assumption that a much larger planter settlement in the country was necessary.²⁸ The Chamber explicitly dissociated itself from those who had condemned the administration but many of its 'representations' were the same as those of the Port Moresby deputation of the planters.

Copies of the submissions were passed to the Lieutenant Governor for comment. He preferred a development loan from the Commonwealth to an increased subsidy. He defended the 'iniquitous' copra tax as essential to the revenue. He could 'not imagine what advantage there would be' in reversing the roles of the Government Secretary and the Native Affairs Department. He did not object to electoral representation as long as the Papuans could be represented and the government retained a majority - the difficulties were practical as Papuans were not yet ready to participate in their government.²⁹ The demand for juries must be opposed where 'racial prejudice prevents the return of an impartial verdict'. And in the matter of an employer's responsibility for illegalities committed by his employees as employees, he advised that

It is believed that the employer is liable in every part of the world. The only person to whom the Government can look is the employer, and it is for the employer to see that the provisions of the Ordinance are complied with both by himself and by his servants . . . A company can only act through its agents, and if only the agent is to be liable the company must always go free.³⁰

The publication of his *Review* in the previous year now gave Murray a convenient reference to which he could relate his response to grievances and queries. On one point the views of the Samarai delegation had his complete support - if the coastal provisions of the Commonwealth's *Navigation Act* were applied to Papua, as seemed likely, the effect would be disastrous. He noted that

Questions of female labour, admission of Asiatics, and all the hundred and one points which are raised by way of criticising the administration are not worth a moment of consideration in comparison with the question of overseas trade with the

²⁸ CRS A1 21/15921 'Planters of Papua: Deputations to Minister' 1921, Deputation from Samarai Chamber of Commerce, 28 June 1921.

²⁹ CRS A518 C918/2 contains comments by Atlee Hunt critical of the Lieutenant Governor's defence of the nominee system.

³⁰ CRS A1 21/14921. Murray's notes on the record of the discussion between Poynton and the planting and mining deputation.

rest of the world. If our trade is confined to Sydney owned boats trading to Sydney the prospects of agricultural development are hopeless.³¹

And indeed it would be over this fundamental issue that planters, all other settlers, and the administration were to unite in a struggle that would bind them together as a community as never before.

The volume of the Territory's trade had increased 300% in the five years to 1920 and with the falling off in recruitment at the end of this period it seemed that a serious labour shortage would develop. But in 1921 the markets in both copra and rubber collapsed in an international slump. Planters previously hampered by the dearth of shipping from realising on the post-war boom were now forced to rapidly reduce their work force to maintenance levels. Production ceased on most plantations.

The application of the *Navigation Act* to both Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea coincided with Poynton's visit and appeared the crowning blow after a decade of toil. In the interests of both the Australian Seamen's Union and Australian interstate shipping companies the Act effectively denied the two island territories direct access to third countries by requiring overseas ships calling in turn at more than one port in Australia and its territories to conform to specified standards of accommodation for their crews - standards unlikely to be met in vessels employing Asian seamen. Since the volume of their exports was too small to attract direct shipping to Europe or America, the entire trade of Papua and New Guinea was now forced to pass through Australian ports and to proceed there aboard Australian flag shipping whatever the destination of the cargoes. Almost as soon as he had returned from his tour Poynton wrote personally to the Minister for Trade and Customs, Walter Massy-Greene, urging the exemption of the territories from the Act. He had, he said, 'received numerous deputations' while in the territories and

upon one subject I found a complete consensus of opinion, namely, the effect of the application to the territories of the . . . Act, the view being quite general that unless some relief therefrom can be afforded the progress and development of the territories would be seriously retarded and the interests of planters and other settlers seriously prejudiced.

He warned that

Any factor in the trade between Papua and Australia which operates to the detriment of Papuan interests must, moreover, inevitably react with equal force upon Australian interests.³²

³¹ Ibid., item 16.

³² Ibid., Poynton to Massy-Greene, 3 Aug. 1921. The *Navigation Act* was applied to the Territories from 1 July.

And so Poynton is likely also to have argued in the Cabinet Room, but evidently without success. In his 1920-21 *Annual Report*, Murray noted ruefully,

Agricultural development has, temporarily at least, come to an end. The low price of rubber and copra is responsible for this but even should prices rise it is improbable that there will be any further development so long as the law confines our trade relations with Australia.³³

The prospects were 'gloomy' and 'the price we may pay for Australia's policy may be the economic ruin of Papua'. This was a Lieutenant Governor, conspicuously 'going into bat' on their behalf, of whom planters could approve. He received their letters of support including one from G. A. Loudon.³⁴

The imposition of the *Navigation Act* served to shift the locus of 'blame' from Murray's administration to the Commonwealth and to the chief beneficiaries of the Act's provisions, the Sydney based island traders and ship-owners, Burns, Philp and Company. In his letter to Massy-Greene, Poynton himself attacked the 'one line' that 'at present enjoys practically a monopoly of the Australian trade, and the service which it renders', which was 'far from satisfactory'.³⁵ That the presence of 'foreign' shipping, given the state of the markets, would have availed them little at the time seems not to have influenced the settler reaction. A new villain had been found.

In October 1921 the Planters Association published its response to Murray's *Review*, entitled *Conditions in Papua*, setting out the 'true position of affairs . . . with particular reference to the Planting Industry, and with a view to securing more sympathetic treatment for the pioneers of Papua, and its industries'.³⁶ It was written anonymously by R. D. Bertie. It is essentially an appeal to Australians to 'pay the premium on the insurance policy' taken out when Papua was first placed under British protection for reasons of Australian security. Murray's *Review* is repeatedly and deftly quoted in criticism of his own and Commonwealth policies while anything like a personal attack on the Lieutenant Governor is now avoided. Indeed it was the Commonwealth's 'starvation policy', the failure to provide a sufficient subsidy through the development period that 'has condemned [Murray] to personal hardships and penurious parsimony in his official administration' and forced the Papuan Government to survive by taxing the capital of as yet unprofitable industries. For though

³³ PAR 1920-21, 1.

³⁴ NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 1210/7, Loudon to Murray, 10 Mar. 1922.

³⁵ CRS A1 21/15921, Poynton to Massy-Greene, 3 Aug. 1921.

³⁶ Planters' Association of Papua, *Conditions in Papua* (Sydney 1921). The pamphlet contains 26 pages. See note 39 below.

It is an excellent ideal, to make the country self-supporting . . . it must be realised that this can, in future, only be done out of profits made from the development of the country. The sooner this profitable stage is reached by the industries, the sooner the Territory will support itself.

Yet there seemed to be a

fundamental sophistry, which infects like a canker the whole system of Papuan Administration by the Commonwealth . . . [in] the apparent assumption that the possible accumulation of wealth by private individuals or corporations resulting from the work of development of the country is evil, and must be prevented at all costs.³⁷

What Bertie, together with Loudon, Sefton and Jewell - the executive of the Association - now proposed were: Firstly, that the annual subsidy to the revenue should be doubled to allow for the influence of inflation since 1914 and so maintained until industries could in fact contribute a larger share to the expenses of government out of profits. The 'savings' the Commonwealth had effectively made since 1914 by not maintaining the real value of the subsidy, or £180,000, should be set aside in a fund to assist industrial development. Secondly, the export duty on copra should be removed and the tax on imported tobacco reduced. Thirdly, either a bonus should be allowed Papuan rubber when the price fell below the costs of production, or a preferential duty applied in favour of Papuan rubber entering Australia. Fourthly, the restrictions recently imposed by the application of the *Navigaton* Act should be removed. Finally, there should be non-official representation on the Executive Council and elected representation on the Legislative Council.

The fulfilment of these requests was 'vital to the success of Papua'. In the only allusion to Judge Murray that might have been provocative he was also absolved. Settlers it seems had misunderstood him. Bertie

hoped that no one will take the complacent attitude so often adopted to camouflage the real conditions, that these conditions are only the aftermath of the war, and that, therefore, no one is to blame . . . The general stagnation of trade only makes our need the greater, and we have taken this means to publish the facts . . . also to prove that the general opinion of those engaged . . . in developing the country, of the attitude of the Administration towards them, is unfounded.³⁸

This was an adroitly prepared document. If Murray's position was morally unassailable, the Commonwealth's was not. But did anyone read it?³⁹ The

³⁷ Ibid., 15, 12, 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 21.

³⁹ There is no copy on CRS A1 21/15921 or on the file 'Planters' Association of Papua' A1 20/9009. There is a copy with the Staniforth Smith Papers (NLA Deposit 1709), item 1472.

facts were that the Papuan settlers were far too few to be credible and that only in united action with a sympathetic administration could their distress - in conjunction with the threat of a collapse of the local revenue - move an Australian ministry.

9. Labour force and white staff, Giligili, Milne Bay, 3,500 acres under cultivation. A striking photograph taken to convey an image of efficient and effective 'white' management of 'native' labour in the development of a large agricultural enterprise.

[*Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, 1914-17, Vol. 2]

10. Sisal hemp plantation at Fairfax Harbour, around 1911. Here perhaps the object is to expose the vigour and quality of the labour force shown against rows of well-tended sisal plants.

[J. H. P. Murray, *Papua or British New Guinea*, 1912]

11. A Papuan rubber tapper (last-last or Goslago?), Itikinumu. Many labourers were very young, and homesick if undertaking their first period of indenture.

[The late Mrs Winifred Loudon]

12. Inside the rubber factory at Itikinumu. An image of the exotic produced no doubt to reassure the overseas investor or politician that Papuans could be trained to undertake quite technical tasks.

[Territory of Papua *Annual Report* 1933-34]

13. Sun drying sisal hemp, British New Guinea Development Company, Bomana. The scale of the sisal industry impressed visitors in the war years 1914-18 though by 1940 few traces were left.
[Territory of Papua Annual Report 1918-19]

14. Sisal hemp decorticating plant, Bomana. Another photograph with which to impress overseas people with both the scale and exotic setting of an enterprise in Papua.
[Territory of Papua Annual Report 1918-19]

15. Giligili Plantation, Milne Bay. Plantations could seem attractive places that demonstrated a considerable human achievement. They required constant maintenance.

[Sir J. H. P. Murray, *Papua of Today*, 1925]

16. Guinea Airways Ford Tri-motor loading coffee at Ellogo, 1938. G. A. Loudon was probably the first planter in Papua or New Guinea to build an airstrip and fly out his produce to port. The plane pictured later crashed. [The late Mrs Winifred Loudon, Sydney]

CHAPTER 15

Burying the past

THE SITUATION FOR all planters had indeed become desperate. In the twelve months commencing in October 1921 the public companies, without exception, either underwent reconstruction with their capital written down, or offered their plantations for sale. Only the absence of purchasers of any kind served to keep most of them going in the unwilling hands of their long-suffering shareholders. Trader-planters subsisted, even continuing to export, their losses concealed by poor or negligible accounting and covered by the profit on trade with even poorer Papuans. Angabunga River Plantations Ltd was wound up in October 1921, its properties passing to a new venture of Walter Gors, the onetime Burns Philp manager and planter who now returned to Papua to grow sisal and cotton. In November the collapse of Angabunga was followed by reconstruction of Papuan Products, the New Zealand based company that developed the lease alongside Mamai at Port Glasgow. Mullens Harbour Plantations found it difficult to find subscribers for an issue of debentures in May. Sogeri Para Rubber Ltd, the only company to have once paid a dividend and survived, put Koitaki up for sale in August. It could not be sold. The company went into liquidation and was re-formed as Koitaki Limited in 1923. Domara River Plantations Ltd was saved from collapse by obtaining £9,588 from an issue of £12,000 in five year debentures carrying the punishing interest rate of 15% a year. By 1924 the company was straining under the incubus of the debt.¹

With the largest planter, BNGD, the debentures that had kept the enterprise afloat since 1919 and now due for redemption could only exacerbate the difficulties. The choice for the directors was between reconstruction in the shareholders' interest or having the debenture holders appoint a receiver. Though the company's plantations had been 'planted according to first class practice' and were in excellent order, enquiries had shown that they would together fetch less than enough to pay the debenture debt, or £120,000 - perhaps a third of the cost of their development. There was no alternative for either share or debenture holder but to keep BNGD going. A reconstruction through the setting up of a 'new' company of the same

¹ *Papuan Courier*, 5 May 1922 (Mullins Hbr.); 4 Aug. 1922 (Koitaki); 9 May 1924 (Domara).

name was approved by the Chancery Division of the High Court in London in June 1922. The assets of the 'old' company were purchased with three 10s. shares for each of the old £1 shares with 7s. 6d. regarded as paid. The call of 2s. 6d. now available provided the enterprise with the capital to continue. The transfer of titles to the new company required a legislative enactment in Papua and a facilitating ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council in May 1923. Staniforth Smith, Administrator in Murray's absence, wrote to the Minister pointing to the figures showing the company's financial plight. He commented that 'they presented a very good picture of the tribulations and difficulties that have been the lot of all plantation owners in the Territory'.²

Of the Clarke and Whiting connection, the Fairfax Harbour and North Fairfax Harbour sisal plantation enterprises, floated by Arthur Bloomfield as public companies in 1909 with Clarke and Whiting backing, were now offered to the government for £75,000 as soldier settlement blocks.³ When the offer was declined the properties were abandoned. The price Bloomfield had asked for them probably represented the loss sustained by the shareholders in their development.

Arthur Bloomfield himself suffered major losses. His 'agency house' venture, the Moresby Trading and Agency Company, went into liquidation, at least one of the staff suspected of criminal negligence or embezzlement. The agency's business passed to G. A. Loudon and Company, a new subsidiary of BNGD. Bloomfield's Galley Reach Plantation was incorporated into Kanosia in a settlement with Clarke and Whiting marked by some bitterness and reproach. Two of his companies were given special assistance.⁴ Late in 1921 with 65,000 pounds of unsold rubber on his hands, Bloomfield requested a Commonwealth guarantee for a bank loan in return for a lien on the debentures of Kemp Welch River Rubber Estates and New Guinea Rubber

² NAPNG & CRS G69, Item 23/5, Staniforth Smith to Senator George Pearce, 14 May 1923.

³ CRS A1 21/16061, Fairfax Harbour Plantation Ltd. Papua Settlement of Soldiers', 1921. The Commonwealth *Repatriation Act* did not apply to Papua but special arrangements and loans of up to £625 were provided to returned soldiers who had been Papuan 'residents'. Among the beneficiaries were G. Harden, Leo Gors, John MacDonald, Frank Mahony, Reginald Chancellor and M. M. Fitzgerald. The Papuan Government was responsible for the collection of repayments on the loans including interest, £2,500 having been advanced. None of this was recovered and the loss was borne by the local revenue. (CRS A1 20/9467, and G69, Item 2/8/50)

⁴ CRS A1 25/16087, Loans to Kemp Welch & N. G. Rubber Estates Ltd. Papua. 1921-1925. A. S. Bloomfield had gone to Canada in July 1920 in an attempt to establish a direct trade. The *Toronto Globe* of 4 Aug. announced that there appeared to be a 'Vast field for Dominion enterprise opening up in British New Guinea', while the Gutta Percha and Rubber Company of Canada privately advised their visitor that 'he could not have come at a worse time'. (CRS A1 21/5488)

Estates. Judge Murray discreetly supported this application and the guarantee was obtained and with extensions continued until 1925. Arthur Bloomfield had by then withdrawn from all his Papuan interests. In 1926 he ventured again into tropical agriculture with the purchase of a plantation, Malhua, in Fiji.

In Melbourne in March 1922, and with support from R. S. Whiting and Bloomfield and an 'Association of Planters' lobby, Judge Murray tried to persuade the federal government to undertake to buy the whole of Papua's copra production at cost until prices rose above £18 a ton. He had earlier proposed that the Commonwealth compensate the Territory for the likely effects of the *Navigation Act* by imposing a preferential tariff on copra from elsewhere in the Empire of £1 a ton and on 'foreign' copra of £2 a ton.⁵ But locked into an intricate set of tariff provisions and having many interests to balance, Australian federal ministries and their advisers were unprepared, it seems, to contemplate changes unless the political price to be paid for inaction became too high. It was expected that partisan producers would cry for assistance as they began to be pressed, but experience suggested that such suppliants could always endure more than they admitted. Later in the year the Assistant Director of Navigation was sent to Port Moresby and Rabaul to investigate the effects of the Act on the two island territories. He attempted to weigh the interests of Australian manufactures, shipping and trade in the Pacific generally against those of the settlers to whom he spoke, whom, apart from those 'directly or indirectly dependent on Burns Philp', he found everywhere 'in favour of the total exemption of their trade from the restrictions of the Act'. He recommended that vessels on Burns Philp's Singapore run be permitted to call at territory ports and upgraded to take white crews.⁶ The Commonwealth continued to wait.

The Papuan Government was forced to reduce the copra export duty to 15s. a ton. Burns Philp in turn was induced to lower freight rates for Papuan produce shipped to Sydney from 45s. to 35s. a ton with through bills of lading to London at £4 10s. a ton on consignments above twenty-five tons. The proceeds of copra f.o.b. at Port Moresby rose from £14 a ton on a c.i.f. London price of £27 in 1922 to £16 a ton on a London price in 1923 of £25. Staniforth Smith estimated production costs at the time at £12 a ton on a fully bearing plantation yielding eight hundredweight an acre though few plantations could

⁵ *Papuan Courter*, 10 Feb. 1922; the earlier proposal is in CRS A518 A.M. 812/1/1, Part 2, Murray to Minister, 11 Feb. 1920. See below p. 264 for reference to the Melbourne 'Association of Planters'.

⁶ CRS A518 Item A. M.812/1/1, Tariff Board Memorandum, 12 Aug. 1924.

match this.⁷ It seemed, nonetheless, that planters might just survive without assistance after all.

But the sense of grievance over the *Navigation Act* would not abate. In 1923 in a move to open up a direct link with Europe and so escape the Act's restrictions, BNGD chartered a steamer to deliver petroleum supplies to Port Moresby and ship copra to London. The vessel, the *Pruth*, was wrecked at the very entrance to Basilisk Passage within sight of the town on Sunday 30 December.

Assisted by journalists in the Australian papers who found Burns Philp an easy target, opposition to the Act finally led to the appointment of a Royal Commission in August 1924.⁸ In evidence the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce tellingly charged that 'Rice, copra sacks, and other things which we must import from Asia are taken past our very doors to Sydney and transhipped back to Papua, involving extra handling and double freight' while Papua had 'to compete in the markets of the world with other countries employing coloured labour and whose produce is delivered to the markets direct by ships carrying coloured crews'.⁹ The Majority Report of the Commission accepted that damage had been done to the trade of the territories and recommended that the carrying of passengers and cargoes between Australia and territory ports no longer be deemed 'coastal' trade. The Commissioners pointed to the anomaly of having treated Papua as part of Australia under the *Navigation Act* while continuing to regard it as a foreign country under the *Tariff Act*. One Commissioner, Senator G. E. Yates, in a Minority Report, took the view that Papua had never been prosperous, that its industries would continue to be uncompetitive, that Australian interests required the maintenance of the *Navigation Act* and that the consequences for the territories should indeed be borne by the Commonwealth.¹⁰ In August 1925, the Majority Report having been accepted, the restrictions on Papua and New Guinea imposed by the Act were removed.

In the meantime both planter representatives and the Lieutenant Governor sought to persuade the Commonwealth to concede tariff protection to Papuan produce. It was an issue raised with Poynton and one he had agreed to consider further. And for the copra producers, whatever the outcome of the struggle over the *Navigation Act*, there remained the burden of the Papuan export levy. Sir Robert McCheyne Anderson, an Australian elected to the

⁷ NLA Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers, item 565, 'Valuation of Coconut Plantations' - an exhaustive analysis apparently prepared for the Expropriation Board in the Mandated Territory.

⁸ CPP 1925, pp. 1323-43, *Second Report of the Royal Commission on the Navigation Act*.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11 (p. 1335).

¹⁰ Ibid., Yates's Minority Report is on p. 15 (p. 1339).

board of BNGD in 1922 as its 'local' representative, wrote in July 1923 to Senator Pearce, Poynton's successor as Minister for Home and Territories, urging abolition of the remaining duty of 15s. a ton, and proposing a list of preferences. He was invited to make his submissions to a hearing of the Tariff Board in September attended by Judge Murray and a delegation of the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce led by Arthur Jewell.¹¹

The Tariff Board agreed that the copra levy was an excessive imposition upon an unprofitable industry and were prepared to recommend its replacement with a bounty of 15s. a ton to be paid by the Commonwealth to the Papuan government. Murray objected that an export tax ultimately promised the only means whereby the administration could hope to become self-supporting whenever prosperous times finally came. An increase by way of a bounty in the Commonwealth's subsidy was 'a step in the wrong direction'. A precedent would be set and a principle conceded. Export duties were levied in most Pacific territories including the Mandated Territory, and Papua could not be expected to abandon a just claim on this form of revenue.¹² To head off a collision he acted quickly to persuade planters to accept a revised arrangement whereby duty would be levied at the rate of 10% of the amount that the price quoted in London exceeded £25. He was able to present this to the Board as a *fait accompli*.

In commending the Lieutenant Governor's scheme to the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce, the Government Secretary, Herbert Champion, pointed out that the greater part of the export duty was in fact being met by English and Australian shareholders in the larger companies and that this, at least, was to be preferred by residents to any increase in import duties which he posed as the alternative revenue measure.¹³ This was an argument used by Murray himself on several occasions though it would have found little support among small planters who had no shareholders onto whom to pass their losses. Larger planters could only be dismayed. Indeed, when a copy of Champion's letter was forwarded to Sir Robert Anderson he commented to the Minister that 'for cynical frankness it leaves nothing to be desired. In plain English the principle is laid down that the Government has to be maintained by outlanders who had foolishly found capital and consistently lost it'.¹⁴ It was an attitude, Anderson thought, that would 'kill the goose that lays the golden egg'. Believing that the Chamber of Commerce had been led too easily

¹¹ CRS A518 Item A.M. 812/1/1, Part 1, Acting Chairman Tariff Board to Senator Pearce, 4 Sept. 1923.

¹² Ibid., Murray to Minister, 17 July 1924, and Memorandum, 24 Feb. 1925.

¹³ Ibid., Government Secretary (Papua) to Chamber of Commerce Port Moresby, 29 Jan. 1924.

¹⁴ CRS A518 Item A. M. 812/1/1, Part 1, Sir Robert Anderson to Senator Pearce, 5 Dec. 1924.

to accede to the government's scheme he suggested that the duty should not be levied unless the f.o.b. price at Port Moresby was above £18 a ton, the cost of production on at least some plantations. In any case, he pointed out, the c.i.f. London prices quoted were usually for Straits Settlements copra that fetched an average of £1 a ton more than South Seas copra. Certainly for further investment in copra plantations the goose was already quite dead in Papua as elsewhere as the energies of company directors and planters for much of the following decade and more were heavily committed to protecting the existing investment from attrition.

In April 1925 the Commonwealth Analyst and Advisor to the Minister for Customs, Percy Wilkinson, visited both Papua and New Guinea to prepare a report for the Tariff Board and Cabinet on how encouragement might be given to expand the planting of economic crops for Australian consumption. On his return to Melbourne he met the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee then considering the question of Papuan development. And in Sydney he held discussions with Sir Robert Anderson, G. A. Loudon, J. R. Clay - a shipping agent at Samarai, and the Rev. C. F. Rich of the LMS, to get their views.¹⁵

Both the Chambers of Commerce at Port Moresby and at Samarai had sought a bounty of 40s. a ton on Papuan copra while the government recommended an Australian duty on 'Foreign' copra. When the provisions of the Papua and New Guinea *Bounties and Preference Acts* were finally announced in April 1926 both government and planters were disappointed as no assistance was offered either copra or rubber producers. 1925-26 was colonial Papua's one year of prosperity due principally to the trebling of the price of rubber and a fourfold increase in the volume of copper exported from the Laloki mine. If copra exports increased only modestly in volume and value there seemed no pressing need to provide either for protection or encouragement.

In 1925 Judge Murray was knighted in the New Year Honours list. The stormiest years were well past and prosperity seemed, for a brief moment, to hand. As the rubber prices rose the value of exports exceeded imports for the first time since 1906 when both had been by comparison negligible. Koitaki paid its second dividend in eighteen years and BNGD its first in sixteen years of operations in Papua - a modest 5%. By 1927 the brief euphoria had subsided and the surplus of imports over exports resumed. Here was the true indicator of the Territory's chronic poverty. Only the continued injection into the plantation and mining companies of shareholders' funds, much of it proffered most unwillingly after 1914, together with the annual

¹⁵ CRS A1 26/86, 'P. Wilkinson (Cwth Analyst) Visit to Papua and New Guinea'. 1925-26.

Commonwealth subsidy to the revenue, allowed the Papuan colonial economy to pay for the disparity between its earnings and its expenditure.

The *Customs Tariff (Papua and New Guinea Preference) Act of 1926* waived tariffs on coffee, whole coconuts, prepared coconuts, kapok seeds, ginger and tropical fruits entering Australia from the two territories. It was a measure taken at a moment when Australia itself and the world economy appeared to have 'turned the corner' after the post-war depression and when some gesture of generosity towards the dependencies could be afforded. Briefly buoyant, copra and rubber - as noted above - received no benefit.¹⁶ Though Papuan products were still subject to the primage duty of 2.5%, the umbrella provided by the preference over both 'Foreign' and 'Empire' imports was enough in the following years to allow the development of a desiccated coconut industry, with factories at Ahloma in Milne Bay and at Hisiu, and to renew interest in growing coffee.¹⁷

A *Papua and New Guinea Bounties Act* passed in the same session of the Federal Parliament made up to £25,000 available for claim annually in the ten years until 31 December 1936 to encourage the production within the territories of commodities currently imported into the Commonwealth from elsewhere. The schedule included sisal hemp and kapok fibre, bamboo and rattans, cocoa, vanilla, and various spices, and all in a 'raw' state that would reserve for Australian workers the further manufacture of the materials. The Act came too late for sisal hemp and the industry spluttered to a halt despite the bounty now offered of £6 a ton. A revival in 1930 was shortlived.¹⁸ Of the remainder of the products listed, only a little cocoa was exported and this came from a few trees planted years before. The other items seemed more appropriate to smallholder development and it was a measure of the prevailing pessimism that £8,783 was all that was paid out in bounties from the possible £250,000 in the ten years spanned by the Act. Nearly all of the claims were accounted for in subsidies to cocoa production in the Mandated Territory.¹⁹

Arthur Jewell was appointed a Member of the Legislative Council in 1924. In view of his long association with the opposition to Murray's administration, the honour attached to the appointment - and Murray's offer implicit in it to forget the past - placed Jewell in the Lieutenant Governor's debt. Their relations remained formal, an arrangement that suited both men, though the new MLC came to be on first-name terms with Leonard Murray. While elected

¹⁶ CRS A518, Item A M 812/1/1, Part 2; and A1 26/86.

¹⁷ See below p. 208 (desiccated coconut) and p. 240 (coffee).

¹⁸ See below p. 233.

¹⁹ CRS A518 Item A M 812/1/1, Part 2, Memorandum: Halligan to Minister, 3 May 1937. A Memorandum of 12 April 1932 records that £20 had been paid out in 1927-1929 as a bounty on cocoa in Papua, and £40 on sisal hemp.

representation was never achieved, Jewell's appointment in many ways effectively enfranchised the leading planters, and thereafter, while they might remain privately critical of government policies and publicly oppose particular decisions, these settlers could not again believe that their interests went entirely unconsidered, at least by the Papuan Government.

Jewell was a good choice. His responsibilities as general manager of Pacific and Papua Produce, with its plantations at Lolorua in the Central Division and the Conflict Islands in the Eastern Division - together with Millicent Jewell's interest in Sagarai plantation which she bought in 1931 from the liquidators of Mullens Harbour Plantations - took the MLC frequently to Samarai. He possessed a courtly manner that impressed others in negotiations, and proved an alert and skilful defender with Sir Hubert Murray of the common Papuan interest in the seventeen years from 1924 until the cessation of civil government in 1942.²⁰

The value of the Territory's exports rose from £179,452 in 1922-23 with a trading deficit of £135,966²¹, to £685,896 in the *annus mirabilis* of 1925-26 with a surplus of £215,122 when 8,619 tons of copra realised £204,125, and 642 tons of rubber £194,849.²² A further £201,732 was obtained for 11,466 tons of copper ore. In the following year increased production of copra and rubber brought lower returns and with the sudden collapse of the copper industry, the Papuan economy was again trading at a loss. By 1928-29 exports were valued at less than half of those of the peak year. From 1930-31 onwards until 1937-38 the trade of the Territory showed a small surplus. But the Commonwealth subsidy was reduced after 1930, and with no further investment, the money economy had to live within its means. Commercial agriculture was far from flourishing. If rubber exports rose slightly the returns were less than a third of those of 1926 and copra production steadily declined both in volume and value. In 1938-39 gold production was valued at £150,000, more than twice the returns from copra, and exceeding those from rubber by over £30,000. Renewed interest in investment in rubber planting from 1936, a revival in oil exploration and the rapid increase in military expenditure just prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 allowed the country once more to afford a large deficit. The defence of the investments in rubber and coconut plantations that overwhelmingly preoccupied planters in the years after 1926, together with an account of the failed attempts to

²⁰ In 1925 Jewell became also 'unofficial member' of the Executive Council elected by the Legislative Council under an amendment of the Papua Act. His company, Pacific and Papua Produce Ltd, became Anglo-Papuan Plantations Ltd in 1935. Jewell remained one of three directors of the 'new' company.

²¹ PAR 1922-23, 9.

²² PAR 1925-26, 74

establish other commercial agricultural industries over the whole period 1900-1942, form the subject of the next Part.

The BNGD Company shed the Samarai branch of its trading operations in 1926. The purchasers were Burns, Philp and Company. While G. A. Loudon withdrew as general manager in that year, G. A. Loudon and Co. the BNGD retail store and plantation agency subsidiary, continued to do business under this name for another two years until its functions were resumed by the original trading arm of BNGD and residual wholesale and import agency, the BNG Trading Company.²³ The parent company appointed George William Guttridge, an Englishman with Indian experience, to succeed Loudon - though as attorney rather than general manager. Guttridge played golf, was a fine chess player and 'a great entertainer' in Port, and Murray appointed him to the Legislative Council in 1931. He is believed never to have visited any of his company's estates²⁴ and were it not for the good fortune that Tom Nevitt had succeeded Archie MacAlpine in 1927 as BNGD's plantation inspector the company might have collapsed.²⁵ Nevitt, a Queenslander with a laconic wit and a character much liked in the settler community, had come to Papua as an assistant on Clarke and Whiting's Rorona estate in 1913. When Guttridge returned to England in 1933 Nevitt became general manager of BNGD, a position held until his retirement in 1951. He became an MLC in 1935. The old antipathy between the 'bung' company and the government was well buried, the rules in Papua were established and infrequently challenged, and the relationship between the officials, the planters, and very probably too most Papuan coastal communities, had become almost domestic.

Though now subdued, settlers privately could still persist in believing that even were trading conditions for the Territory's products to improve markedly the Papuan planters must continue to be competitively disadvantaged as a consequence of Murray's 'native policy'. Certainly they had cause to be grateful to the Lieutenant Governor for all he had done for them since 1922 and they were quite unwilling any longer to openly criticise his administration. But they were also well aware that the minimum wage for native labour in Papua remained double that prevailing in the Mandated Territory to the north. Here, surely, we may think, they might have found good grounds for protest in the worst of times. Yet there was little direct demand in the depression years for the lowering of wages. Rather it is clear that planters consistently preferred to argue for Australian tariff concessions to remedy their losses or to compensate for greater costs - however these latter might be attributed -

²³ The BNG Trading Company too was sold to Burns Philp in 1933, BNGD's interests thereafter being solely in plantation enterprise. See below p. 211.

²⁴ Interview: B. E. Fairfax-Ross, 11 June 1973.

²⁵ Archie MacAlpine died in 1927, Tom Nevitt in 1964.

whether to the higher wages paid to native workers or to the higher price of supervision, transport and supplies in Papua. Perhaps by the early twenties settlers knew that Murray would never agree to a reduction in wage rates just as he could not be moved in other matters and that Australian ministries would support his government. It was in desperation and almost apologetically that the chairman of BNGD, General F. C. Stanley, wrote to the Lieutenant Governor in October 1933 to appeal for further assistance to copra growers with the plea that labour costs were after all the most serious impediment to profitability in Papua.

We do not wish to suggest that the natives employed on coconut plantations in Papua should be accorded less favourable treatment than has been customary, but the fact remains that the terms of employment required by your Government result in the operating costs being on a higher scale than in other tropical countries producing similar products, and it is consequently impossible to reduce costs in Papua as much as elsewhere.²⁶

And Samuel Thompson, the BNGD secretary in London since 1910, clearly expressed a settled view long taken by officers of his company - and we might presume shared by many others - when he wrote to Tom Nevitt in 1938 that

Labour in Papua is better treated than in other tropical countries and therefore more expensive, and they should reimburse Papuan planters for the extra cost by means of a preferential tariff . . .²⁷

It seems that employers accepted that a minimum cash wage of 10s. a month had indeed become 'customary' and that it could not be tampered with without an effect on the labour supply that was unpredictable. Certainly Papuan labourers who made comparisons between their own apparent poverty and the wealth of the white men among them could only remain perfectly unaware of any relative advantage they were supposed to have over plantation workers in other parts of the world.

²⁶ ANUABL, BNGD Letterbooks, Stanley to Murray, 18 Oct. 1933.

²⁷ Ibid., Thompson to Nevitt, 18 Nov. 1938.

PART V

The fortunes of the industries

It is some years now since the Australian Government asked for increased rubber production in Papua and promised help in some form or other but nothing whatever has been done. It is very disappointing, particularly in view of the fact that we and others did a good deal of planting on the faith of such promises . . . Australian promises go for nothing.

Samuel Thompson (Secretary of the British New Guinea Development Company, London), to Tom Nevitt (General Manager of BNGD in Port Moresby), 18 Nov. 1938.

That there was over-expansion of investment in raw materials production during, and immediately after, the war is clear. Raw-material productive capacity proved to be far in excess of the demand from European and American industry in the 1920s. The terms of trade for primary producers worsened. By 1921, their terms were only 70 per cent of 1913 and, although they recovered between 1922 and 1929 to 84 per cent of 1913, they fell again after 1930 to a level below even that of 1921.

Michael Barratt-Brown, *After Imperialism*, 1970.

CHAPTER 16

Defending the stake: copra and rubber 1921-1942

IN 1921 RUBBER tapping in Papua became uneconomic, and copra prices also began to fall rapidly as in an international recession the extent of over-capacity in tropical plantation production throughout the world became apparent. The pattern of pre-war trade in the tropical commodities had resumed with some increase in volume as the economies of the European belligerents re-adjusted to the peace. Britain and France had been greatly weakened by the war but retained their advantage as possessors of immense overseas investments including those in tropical export produce. Germany too was soon importing rubber at the pre-war level, and the growth of the motor car industry in all the major industrial states promised an expanding market at least for rubber. But the extent of the planting explosion before 1914, predicated as it had been upon very optimistic expectations of future levels of consumption, was bound even without the interruption of the war to lead to the lowering of prices. The pressure to secure tropical commodities at the lowest possible cost in combination with their domination over populations in the colonies to whom they were politically unaccountable had allowed the metropolitan powers to impose terms of trade on their dependencies that - while seeming to represent an improvement in the conditions of life of the subject peoples - had encouraged immense expansion in plantation industries based upon very cheap labour. In the South Seas an abundance of land and subsistence food might secure a degree of protection for the Island peoples but in many other countries dependence upon plantation industries would provide a formidable barrier to further betterment in the lives of colonised communities. With the margins of profit reduced to the minimum, both investors in 'over-extended' industries and low paid workers who laboured on tropical estates had now to contend with the cycle of inflationary boom followed by deflationary bust seemingly inherent in the operation of market economies. Only expanding consumption in the metropolitan countries ultimately promised profitability for plantation enterprise - and, perhaps, the filtering down to plantation workers in the colonies of some small measure of increased purchasing power. A world economy in recession represented disaster, and the investors and distant planters in coconut plantations, in particular, could feel trapped. They had been led on by the guarantees of

William Lever and others in the almost universal optimism of the pre-war generation, and since by the hope that prosperity would follow the peace. The hopes of 1918 now dashed, the optimism of 1914 seemed quite naïve and certainly irreclaimable in 1921.

Copra

An average coconut palm bears around forty nuts a year and about 5,000 nuts are needed to produce a ton of copra, the kernels losing about 45% of their weight in drying. On coasts with volcanic soils in New Guinea palms may produce up to eighty nuts and it might take only around 4,000 to make a ton, while on some atolls 7,000 nuts might be required. Thus an acre of about fifty-six mature palms will produce on average about four hundredweight of copra a year or about a ton every five acres but 100 acres might produce as much as fifty tons in favoured areas or as little as twelve tons on poor soils. Fifty thousand acres, the area of Papua's plantations in the 1930s, produced scarcely 10,000 tons. Some of the larger, better situated and better managed properties - like the government's Baibara plantation on Orangerie Bay - came close to producing two tons of copra from five acres. Smaller plantations must have done much less well considering that village groves and plantations set up under the government's Native Plantations scheme accounted for some part of the copra exported.

Throughout the period to 1942 prices quoted for copra in Papua and New Guinea were the c.i.f. landed prices obtaining in London. Freight from plantation to port - in the case of Papua freight to Port Moresby or Samarai - and freight to Sydney or Europe together with handling charges and an allowance for further shrinkage of copra aboard ship (with resulting weight loss) meant that the return to the grower was between half and three fifths of the quoted price. The cost of production was variously estimated as between £10 and £18 a ton with freight to London seldom less than £5 a ton.

Palms begin to bear commercial quantities of nuts after eight years and those planted in Papua between 1907 and 1914 began to come into bearing during the war years. The extent of the commercial coconut plantations increased from 1,000 acres in the former year to 34,000 acres in 1915-16. Tonnage and value of copra exported rose from 1,100 tons valued at £19,000 in 1915-16 to over 2,000 tons valued at £40,000 in 1916-17, outstripping gold for the first time as Papua's chief export. Tonnage doubled again and values tripled by 1919-20 with copra valued at £124,000 accounting for half the value of all exports in that year. These results were achieved in the face of the diversion and loss of ships in the war and their dearth in the years immediately following.

Between 1921 and 1925, when the burden of the *Navigation Act* was lifted from Papua and New Guinea, copra producers in the territories could still believe that their difficulties were almost wholly due to its effect. And the

coincidence of finding the market briefly favourable in 1925 'could seem to confirm their view. But to confirm other predictions - those made by the representatives of Burns Philp before the recent Royal Commission - the exemption of the territories from the Act brought no rush of new shipping to Papua.¹ In the late twenties direct freighting of copra to San Francisco commenced through the agency of Houlder Brothers, a London based company with offices in Sydney and Port Moresby which had traded in Papuan timber since 1914. It now became convenient for American ships discharging cargo at Australian ports to call occasionally at Port Moresby and Samarai and fill otherwise empty holds with copra on the return voyage. In the thirties the vessels of the Dutch KPM Line on the Sydney to Batavia run resumed calling but mainly to set down or take on passengers, and Burns Philp's hold on the overseas trade of Papua remained largely unchallenged. And if the recovery of 1925 had provided an opportunity to pay modest dividends, it did not lead to any further investment in coconut cultivation. The life of the white coconut grower became one of constant struggle to make ends meet, one providing the barest of 'civilised' livings and carried on for much of the period until 1942 only in the hope that 'we might turn the corner'.

Of the world production of copra in 1926 of 897,000 tons, about 250,000 tons was 'South Seas' copra, including 24,000 tons from Fiji, 50,000 tons from the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, and 12,000 tons (or 1.3%) from Papua. There was some reluctance on the part of crushers in Europe to pay as much for South Seas copra as for Ceylon (43,500 tons), Java (206,000 tons) or Straits Settlements (146,000 tons) copra, the reason being the very great variability in the quality of the South Seas production in the absence of a standard system of grading.²

The Samoan Government in 1927 was the first to introduce an ordinance to control the quality of copra produced in the villages where the worst copra presented for sale had tainted the reputation of the best produced on the plantations. Fijian planters sought a similar ordinance the following year when after continental crushers had amalgamated to form a Margarine Union it appeared that South Seas copra might face complete exclusion from the European market.

¹ PAR 1926-27, 3-4. The Parliamentary Joint Committee of Public Accounts visited Papua in Oct. 1926. It was proving difficult to obtain tenders for the subsidised Papuan Mail Contract - and therefore the 'trunk' service to Papuan ports - from any shipping line other than Burns Philp. Burns Philp itself could affect some reluctance. See K. Buckley and K. Klugman, *The Australian Presence in the Pacific: Burns Philp, 1914-1946* (Sydney 1983), 199-202.

² CRS A518, D812/1/1, 'Territories Commerce - General Copra Industry, 1919-1932, Assistance by Empire Marketing Board', Memorandum to Prime Minister, 18 Apr. 1929.

After an Imperial Conference held in London in 1926 an Empire Marketing Board had been formed to collect and disseminate information and to facilitate, if possible, the rationalisation and integration of commodity production within the British Empire. The Board agreed to contribute to the costs of establishing in conjunction with the Fijian Government a coconut research station in Fiji. Papua and New Guinea planters made representations to the Board for similar assistance in the Australian territories, an approach the United Kingdom Government was, understandably, unwilling to entertain.³ The Australian Government in turn was also concerned that there should be no direct contact between the planters in Papua and New Guinea and London that by-passed the co-ordinating body for research in Australia, the C.S.I.R. Subsequent requests made by the planters through the C.S.I.R. to secure the services of scientific advisers were gracefully declined by the Board.⁴

With mounting apprehension as prices began to slide again some producers in Papua looked to alternative uses for coconuts. As noted previously, the *Commonwealth Customs Tariff (Papua and New Guinea Preference) Act of 1926* had the effect of establishing one new industry. Among tropical products from the territories to be admitted into Australia duty free the Act listed 'prepared coconuts'. In 1927, W. H. Wright, the manager of Levers' only Papuan plantation, Giligili, began producing desiccated coconut. In 1929 a group of Samarai merchants and planters led by the Burns Philp manager, George Aumuller, and the Bunting brothers invested in a desiccating factory at Ahioma, midway along the northern shore of Milne Bay, with a view to buying in nuts from the numerous Papuan groves around the bay as well as from the commercial plantations. 'Giligili' Wright undertook the management, and a desiccator was installed designed and built by the Samarai engineer, Norman Izod, who had earlier patented a widely admired copra drier. In the same year a second desiccating factory was established by a group of Central Division planters under the name Coconut Products Limited (though no connection with W. R. Carpenter Ltd's Rabaul subsidiary of the same name) on Hisiu beach. This was also equipped with an Izod Desiccator. Together with the production of several factories established around the same time in New Guinea desiccated coconut exported from the territories was given protected entry into Australia initially through an

³ Ibid., Memorandum, Halligan to Prime Minister, 3 May 1929.

⁴ Ibid., Empire Marketing Board to Prime Minister (of Australia), 21 Jan. 1932. The C.S.I.R. (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) became the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (C.S.I.R.O.) in 1949.

embargo on all 'foreign' imports and subsequently through the tariff.⁵ By 1934, when the Papuan exports had reached 1,200 tons valued at £50,000 or an amount equivalent to the value of the copra exported in that year, the market became saturated and production had to be restricted. In 1938 the two territories were exporting to Australia nearly seven million pounds weight of desiccated coconut or a pound for every man, woman and child in the Commonwealth.

The c.i.f. London price for copra fell to £15 a ton in 1929-30 and to as low as £11 the following year. Only the remission to the producers of the greater part of the benefit of the exchange gain in converting the Pound Sterling to the Australian Pound made by the shippers to the producers in the interest of maintaining a service through what was hoped would be a temporary slump eased the situation in any way.⁶ The Commonwealth had come belatedly to the rescue of the rubber industry with the imposition of a duty on rubber imported into Australia except that from Papua, but whereas rubber trees could rest if necessary without deterioration and with only little maintenance, coconuts continued to fall from the palms in season and out, and copra production fell only gradually. In the year of peak production, 1928-29, 12,500 tons brought in over £214,000. In 1933-34, 8,000 tons were worth only £43,000. The larger companies made copra at a loss carried by the meagre return on their rubber. Smaller planters subsisted on credit and the declining trade in matches and *ramis* with the even more impecunious Papuans. In 1934, with small plantations closing down and the larger estates obviously about to follow, the Papuan Government, to avert the calamity that only hope of relief had delayed for so long, voted £8,000 out of its insurance fund to be used as a subsidy. Assistance was provided for each ton exported at a rate that varied according to the distance of the plantation from the port of shipment. The recent stabilisation of rubber prices and a renewed interest in gold on Misima were all that staved off disaster for the revenue as copra reached a low £8 a ton. The Treasurer's report noted that

Coconut planters have so long contended with adversity that one must fear, if prices do not reach a profitable level and remain there, the industry will just fade out with the participants giving up the unequal struggle. It is this industry we have always looked to absorb the bulk of our native labour.⁷

Copra producers everywhere sought relief from colonial governments and drew attention to the anomaly of planters floundering while the Unilever 'Combine' formed by the merger of the Margarine Union with Lever Brothers

⁵ PAR 1931-32, 3, 31. For desiccated coconut exports see below, p. 313. Vavasseurs and Company Ltd of London acquired over half the shares in the Ahloma venture in 1935.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ PAR 1934-35, 6.

in 1929 continued throughout the depression to pay ample dividends. In the largest 'South Seas' producer, the Mandated Territory, the failure of the industry threatened the livelihood of the greater part of the European community in one way or another. Plantation salaries and wages for European employees were reduced and an ordinance passed granting a moratorium on mortgage payments due to the Custodian of Expropriated [German] Property. The *Rabaul Times* thundered that

These huge mergers of the super-capitalistic combines are bleeding the world's producers to death and any government in any country is not only entitled but should consider it its immediate bounden duty to step in and protect those who are unable to protect themselves against the exploitation of huge concerns whose huge capital and immense profits make them an economic power in the land.⁸

Indeed the activities of the 'combines' gave 'the greatest fillip to present-day Communism'. The New Guinea Planters and Traders Association urged an approach to the United Kingdom Government to enquire into Unilever's affairs. A similar proposal was made by the Advisory Council of British Solomon Islands Protectorate meeting in October 1933.⁹ This one international company now bought more than 70% of the world's copra and was undoubtedly able to manipulate the market in edible oils to ensure that the lowest possible prices were paid - even if its own plantations produced at a loss. Responding to inquiries Unilever's agents blamed the situation for the coconut planters on the very low prices prevailing for butter.

The Empire Marketing Board, its members perhaps having realised the hopelessness of reconciling the interests of producers and manufacturers, had ceased to exist in September 1933. There now remained no institutional mechanism either within the British Empire, or outside it, similar to the Rubber Growers Associations of Malaya and Ceylon, by which copra producers could work together towards an international agreement to maintain prices by restricting output. In Papua the export duty was reduced to a nominal 2s.6d a ton. In Fiji a *Report on the Copra Industry* suggested measures by which a bounty on copra might be funded, all wharfage charges and the export tax remitted, and Fiji copra compulsory graded and separately marketed. The Legislative Council meeting in Suva in March 1934 distinguished between the plight of the white planters and the relatively less serious position faced by the Fijian growers who could withdraw from the market and enjoy the continuing security offered by communal society and

⁸ *Rabaul Times*, 2 Feb. 1934.

⁹ CRS A518 C812/1/1, 'Territories Commerce. General Copra Industry. Activities of Unilever Company', 1934-1937.

the subsistence economy.¹⁰ Conditions in Papua were comparable. Pacific Islanders generally enjoyed few advantages in marketing copra as smallholders except the capacity to survive a market collapse.

Planters throughout the southwestern Pacific railed at what they believed were excessive freight charges and the low f.o.b. prices offered by Burns Philp to whom many had become heavily in debt. In the Mandated Territory both 'Beeps' and W. R. Carpenter Ltd had obtained 'charging agreements' from planters as security for credit which, as the depression in the industry became prolonged, made foreclosures difficult to avoid. In Papua in 1933, BNGD, having sold its Samarai trading business, G. A. Loudon & Co, to Burns Philp in 1926, now also relinquished its British New Guinea Trading Company subsidiary in Port Moresby for £29,896 Stg. Burns Philp retained the trading company's name for its wholesale business and provided office space at their main building for BNGD - an arrangement that often led to confusion as to the relationship between the plantation company and the merchants.

In Papua there were few 'charging agreements'. Burns Philp had avoided taking a direct interest in plantations in the Territory since the failure of the Hall Sound Company in 1900. But by 1935 with properties becoming available at prices well below the cost of their development, the 'Octopus of the Pacific', having continued to prosper mightily, could now both afford and risk ownership. As a centre for its plantation operations, in February 1936 the company bought Robinson River, the large and very productive coconut plantation of 3,400 acres near Abau developed and managed for the Horn family by BNGD. The price was £68,000 Stg, calculated as no more than the cost of development - or £20 an acre - but a high figure in view of the current state of the market.¹¹ In the same year the new Burns Philp subsidiary Robinson River Plantations Ltd bought Hagita, the old Milne Bay Rubber Company's coconut plantation adjacent to Giligili at the head of Milne Bay, and Dedele - the oldest plantation in Papua and once associated with Burns Philp as the private venture of the company's first manager at Port Moresby, Walter Gors. In 1939 Thomas McCrann's Baia plantation and the neighbouring Domara River Plantations rubber estate at Kauru were added to the Robinson River holdings.

The collapse of copra had brought down all the old single estate companies that had depended primarily on coconuts. New owners, chief among them Burns Philp and Steamships Trading Company, would proceed with production when prices eventually rose again after the war of 1941-45 unencumbered by any heavy development debt. Captain Fitch's company, now

¹⁰ Ibid., The file contains the record of the meeting of the Fijian Legislative Council, 23 Mar. 1934. The comment is made in the Governor's speech.

¹¹ Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence in the Pacific*, 271.

Burns Philps' principal trading rival in Papua, began its acquisitions with Mamai, the plantation in the Elai Valley of the New Zealand owned Papuan Rubber and Copra Company, in a liquidation sale in 1934. The property had absorbed over £75,000 in shareholders' funds and had paid no dividend. Steamships acquired it for £875.¹² Steamships went on to buy the two coconut plantations on the Vailala River. Maira, developed by Lewis Lett and since 1928 the property of J. F. Puxley, was purchased in 1935; and Vaiviri, Donald MacDonald's place downstream, was bought from his widow in 1937. Captain Fitch also bought the New Guinea Rubber Estates property on the Kemp Welch in 1935.

Other estates to change hands were Sagarai, obtained by Millicent Jewell in 1931 from Mullens Harbour Plantations, and Veimaui, bought in 1936 by its manager Trevor Ward from the heirs of R. S. Whiting. Ward continued to manage for Clarke and Whiting at Rorona until 1941; Mrs Vera Ward managed Veimaui in conjunction with Veiya, a small adjacent property the Wards had owned since about 1912.

The successors of Clarke and Whiting offered Rorona for sale in 1940 but it could not be sold. Kanosia and Rorona remained their property until after the war when Steamships undertook the management. Only the recovery in rubber prices in 1934 saved BNGD.¹³ A second reconstruction of its assets in 1935 enabled the 'bung' company to pay its second dividend in twenty-five years. Its capital was now written down 60% from £478,531 to £191,412, perhaps half the development costs of its rubber and coconut plantations alone. With a loan of £75,000 Stg from Burns Philp to pay off its maturing debentures, new shares were issued in 1937 with two valued at 2s. being offered for each of the old 10s. (1923) shares.¹⁴

¹² Neal Nicklason, 'History of Steamships Trading Company Limited' in Second Waigani Seminar, *The History of Melanesia* (Canberra and Port Moresby 1969), 242.

¹³ Earlier, in 1930, the company seemed close to collapse when the Papuan Government, concerned that BNGD might not be able to honour its existing commitments to its labour, refused to accept the company's guarantees. The refusal in itself left the largest planter and employer open to the suggestion that the company might go into receivership. The application of a duty of fourpence a pound on 'foreign' rubber entering Australia in that year may have come just in time to save BNGD then.

¹⁴ ANUABL Deposits 95, M37. BNGD Notice to Shareholders, 8 Nov. 1935. Directors' Report, 5 June 1937. BNGD distributed no dividend before 1926 (5%) and then not another until 1936 (3%). Subsequently, with the company's capital heavily reduced and international rubber prices maintained at profitable levels, dividends were declared in 1937 (3% interim and 5% final), 1938 (2% and 3%), 1939 (2% and 5%), 1940 (2.5% and 5%), 1941 (7.5%). (BNGD Annual Reports 1911-1941 (ANUABL deposit 95)). BNGD over the years had written-off large losses sustained in the failure of the tobacco, sisal hemp and cotton industries and in the abandonment of areas planted with these cultures.

Yet, while company owned properties changed hands, most independent planters managed to survive with the assistance of the Papuan government's small copra bounty payable since 1934. The market rallied in 1936-37 when the c.i.f. price quoted in London rose again above £17 a ton. Papuan village producers, long inactive, also began again to contribute significantly to exports. But the recovery was brief, with prices falling steeply to £9 in 1939-40. With 6,000 tons unsold on hand in August 1940, Loudon, Jewell, Nevitt and Fitch requested the Administrator to radio their proposals to Canberra for temporary assistance to 'save the total loss of the assets' of the industry. In January Leonard Murray attended a conference in Australia to consider the problems facing all the 'South Seas' producers.¹⁵ The conference recommended the establishment of a combined Copra Marketing Board with a local board in each territory, but in June under the National Security Regulations the Commonwealth undertook to buy existing copra stocks in Papua and New Guinea for a maximum of £4.10s a ton and cover the freight from plantation to port.¹⁶ It was bare relief at the last possible moment as many plantations had by then paid off their labour and ceased production. Some were re-opened late in 1943 as the Japanese forces withdrew from Papua. Most did not resume production until 1945.

Rubber

It was not until 1915-16 that the first plantings of the rubber boom years began to yield their latex. In 1914-15 exports were valued at only £1,500. In the following year they were valued at £14,800 and in 1916-17 eighty-five tons were sold for £26,000. Thereafter, while tonnages increased, the price declined and by 1920-21 220 tons realized scarcely more than had the eighty-five tons of 1916-17. When the price fell to 7d a pound in 1922 tapping ceased on most estates, exports falling to fifty-seven tons in 1922-23 but rising to 304 tons in 1923-24 when the price again exceeded a shilling a pound.

In the meantime the planted area under rubber in Malaya had increased to over 2.25 million acres. It had become obvious that Papuan rubber, like the other plantation products of the Territory, could not be produced at as low a cost as in Southeast Asia. If prices rose above a shilling a pound then a modest profit could be shown but the margin was narrower than for any of the 'Eastern' producers. Planters blamed the poor roads, the absence of railways, the fees and duties imposed by the Papuan government, or the Commonwealth's parsimony, for the uncompetitiveness of their industry. They also attributed it to the scarcity, inefficiency and higher costs of Papuan labour. There were grounds for other explanations. As mentioned in Chapters

¹⁵ *Papuan Courler*, 2 May 1941; and CRS G69 Item 26/20.

¹⁶ *Papuan Courler*, 20 June 1941.

11 and 12, in 1918 the manager of Glenealy estate in Perak (FMS), George Wiseman, was invited by several of the Papuan rubber producers to visit their properties and suggest improvements. Wiseman noted that the labour force on Papuan estates was actually smaller by a third than that required on an equivalent acreage on Malayan plantations. He thought this state of affairs might indeed be due to higher labour costs in Papua. Or so he told the Planters' Association. For he confided to Judge Murray, with whom he happened to travel to Australia as a fellow passenger at the end of his tour, that he believed the European managers and overseers employed in Papua inferior to the managerial class in Malaya and that this was the chief impediment to efficiency and profitability.¹⁷

In 1922, a Ceylon planter, C. F. Hutchinson, also visited Papua furnishing the Lieutenant Governor with a confidential report in which he too questioned the capacities of the 'digger' type of Australian employed on the estates, their number and their cost.¹⁸ He suggested that many could be replaced by employing assistants drawn from the Ceylon burghers or the Singhalese who could quite competently do much of the work currently carried out by white men in Papua but at greatly less expense. These overseers, clerks and artisans of the 'intermediate race' would then work under a greatly reduced staff of professional managers assisted by a department of qualified agricultural officers. He went on to recommend, as the planters had also frequently sought, the settlement of the families of labourers on the plantations and the employment of women - a situation that, if allowed, would make the labour force more dependent and more permanent. It was a suggestion deeply opposed, as we have seen, to Murray's policy of maintaining a balance between the need to provide just sufficient labour to meet the requirements of employers and the need to preserve the basis of Papuan society in the village by ensuring that time-expired labourers returned to their homes. Hutchinson came much closer to laying bare the causes of Papuan disadvantage. But there were others as well.

From the beginning the very wide distribution of the estates and the consequent failure to consolidate holdings - together with the continuing small volume of the Papuan rubber export - had contributed to the higher costs of transport both within and from the country. Before 1914 the Dutch KPM boats had called regularly at Samarai and Port Moresby on the Sydney-Batavia-Singapore run and approval had been given to build a light railway from Port Moresby through the then flourishing sisal hemp, tobacco and cotton plantations of the lower Laloki valley to Sapphire Creek at the foot of

¹⁷ CRS A1 19/9923, 'G. Wiseman Report on Plantations, Papua', 1918-19. The file also contains Murray's comments on Wiseman's reports submitted to him by Atlee Hunt.

¹⁸ CRS A518 Item H112/1 'Papua Agriculture and Labour Reports', 1922.

the Astrolabe Range where the ore of the Laloki copper mine and the rubber of the Sogeri plateau could be gathered in. The steel rails purchased in England by the successful tenderer, Elders, were already aboard ship when war was declared. They were diverted to Brisbane for more pressing use. After the war, with the continued shortage of shipping of any kind and the confinement of direct trade to Australian ships and ports imposed under the *Navigation Act* in 1921, there were only the Burns Philp vessels, no more tobacco, sisal or cotton plantations along the Laloki - they had proved unprofitable - and the copper mine had closed down.¹⁹ Until 1942 the rubber of the Sogeri district had to be carried down a zigzag track from Hombrom Bluff on the back of mules to be met by trucks at Sapphire Creek.

The post-war slump of 1921-22 was not confined to Papua. In the immediate aftermath of the war prices for rubber had risen. American motor vehicle production had reached 2.25 million in 1920 and speculative boom conditions had again developed. Rubber acreage in Malaya increased by 125,000 acres in 1919 alone. Efforts to control inflation through credit restriction that resulted from a conference of the allies in Brussels led to a rapid collapse into depression. Car production fell by half a million in 1921 and a stockpile amounting to 110,000 tons of unsold rubber quickly accumulated. A committee under the chairmanship of Sir James Stevenson was set up to recommend some form of restriction of production that would force prices to rise. The Stevenson Committee proposed that an export tax be imposed in all the producing colonies and that output be limited to a percentage of productive capacity, to be decided annually, on the basis of 500 pounds an acre for plantation rubber and 400 pounds an acre for smallholder rubber. The scheme was duly applied throughout the British rubber producing areas, 72% of the whole, and voluntarily accepted by British interests that controlled a third of production in the Netherlands Indies - the Dutch producers refusing to be party to the restrictions taking the view that competition should be allowed to run its course to eliminate the inefficient producer. The Americans took a similar view and saw the Stevenson scheme as a British 'imperial venture' which, at the expense principally of the United States, was designed to deprive automobile producers and consumers of cheaper rubber.²⁰

¹⁹ The mine was closed in 1919, re-opened in 1921, closed in 1922, re-opened in 1924, and finally closed down in 1926. To later requests for a motor road beyond Sapphire Creek Murray could respond that the whole product of the Sogeri district amounted to 'no more than two lorryloads a day'. In CRS A518, Item R918/3 'Planters' Association of Papua, 1936-1950', *Bulletin* No.5, 8 Jan. 1937. A light rail line was built from the mine to the coast at Bootless Bay.

²⁰ John Drabble, *Rubber in Malaya 1876-1922* (Kuala Lumpur 1973), 198.

By April 1926 the Colonial Office permitted 100% production but warned that the percentage would be reduced again if the price of rubber on the London exchange fell below 1s. 9d. a pound. In that year, planter Papua's one year of prosperity before 1942, the price reached 4s.7d. a pound. The 642 tons exported in 1925-26 realized over £194,000, only a little short of the £204,097 earned on the 8,419 tons of copra produced.²¹

As noted in Chapter 15, the visit to both Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea in 1926 by the Commonwealth Analyst, Percy Wilkinson, was followed by the passage through the Federal Parliament of a *Papua and New Guinea Bounties Act* whereby £250,000 was set aside over ten years to encourage in the territories production of tropical commodities that Australia currently imported from the Netherlands Indies and elsewhere. Rubber, briefly buoyant, was not included in the schedule attached to the Act.

Arthur Jewell MLC, representing the planters and temperamentally a cautious man, immediately proposed that rubber be added to the list, and that a bounty become payable if the price fell below a shilling a pound. Wilkinson thought it unlikely that the price would fall below 1s. 9d. a pound and that, in any case, the industry would do well to establish its own stabilisation fund out of any return above this amount.²² By 1928, under pressure from rubber manufacturers in the United Kingdom, the British Government announced its intention not to impose further restrictions on production as from November of that year. Prices fell suddenly to 8d. a pound and Sir Hubert Murray pressed to have Jewell's proposal reconsidered.²³ An immediate threat, it seemed, was posed to the continued existence of the rubber plantations, the livelihood of their thirty-six European managers and assistants and to the employment of 2,000 Papuan labourers. The effect on the Papuan revenue in reduced import duties, fees and receipts was likely to be very severe and the ramifications of collapse among the commercial community incalculable. The Stevenson scheme had had the effect of shifting American support to the Dutch producers and smallholder production in the Indies had rapidly expanded. It was now expected that Malayan planters would export at the maximum rate to reduce costs and no one could tell the depths to which the market might fall.

The Commonwealth Analyst now concurred that the Papuan planters had a fair claim to support but Australia was becoming rapidly absorbed in its own economic crisis.²⁴ Rubber production in Papua dropped from 811 tons in

²¹ PAR 1925-26, 74.

²² CRS A518, Item P812/1/5, 'Commerce Papua - Rubber Industry', Part 1, Percy Wilkinson to Secretary, Home and Territories, 14 July 1926 and 5 Oct. 1926.

²³ Ibid., Murray to Minister, 20 Apr. 1928.

²⁴ Ibid., Memoranda of 12 and 23 May 1928.

1928 to 470 tons in 1929 as tapping was reduced. Over the next twelve months the price did not rise above 10d. a pound landed in London which yielded the Papuan grower less than the cost of production. Hard times had shown that rubber might just be produced at cost at this figure f.o.b. at Port Moresby.

In February 1930 Arthur Jewell went to Canberra in an attempt in person to persuade the government to include rubber within the scope of the *Bounties Act* out of the fund of which almost nothing at all had so far been paid to Papua. In July the price fell to 6d. a pound and Jewell wrote to the Minister for Industry, J. A. Beasley, suggesting that if the bounty proposal was unacceptable then the government might consider placing an import duty of a penny a pound on all rubber entering Australia other than that from its territories. This would represent almost £10,000 for every 1,000 tons imported. He pointed out that despite the decline in raw rubber prices manufacturers of rubber goods had not passed any saving on to Australian consumers.

Here was an idea far better calculated to gain a receptive hearing from a Federal Government itself desperate for revenue than could an appeal for a bounty. The Comptroller General conceded in a memorandum that the increased burden on the Commonwealth that would result if the Papuan local revenue failed might not be inconsiderable.²⁵ When rubber fell to 4d. a pound in November the House of Representatives passed a Tariff Resolution imposing an import duty of 4d. a pound on crude rubber other than that produced in territories of the Commonwealth. Considering how desperate the situation had become and the sheer weight of correspondence that had been required to wring this preference from Canberra, the fulsomeness of Jewell's gratitude was excessive: 'We were indeed fortunate in having a Mother Country in Australia to whom we could appeal for help', he telegraphed.²⁶ The Comptroller General was rather irritated by this reaction. He wrote to the Prime Minister, James Scullin, acknowledging that the tariff had given incidental assistance to a Papuan industry, but he thought it should be made quite clear that it had been primarily imposed as a revenue measure. Scullin's secretary noted that true as this may have been, such a view might best be withheld from the Lieutenant Governor.²⁷ Meanwhile the Legislative Council in Port Moresby carried a further vote of thanks.

²⁵ Ibid., Memoranda, Comptroller General to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 3 Oct. and 6 Nov. 1930.

²⁶ Ibid., Jewell to McLaren, 20 Nov. 1930.

²⁷ Ibid., Memoranda, Comptroller General to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 16 July 1931 and reply, 3 Aug. 1931.

Elsewhere prices dropped still further and below the 4d. a pound now regarded as the cost of production in Malaya. In Papua it was soon realized that even with the 4d. preference the Territory's rubber still laboured under the disadvantage of a higher primage duty - a flat rate duty of 2.5% *ad valorem* imposed on all goods imported into Australia including those from Papua and New Guinea. The duty was levied on Malayan rubber before the tariff - on rubber entering the country at 3d. a pound in 1931 - whilst Papuan rubber had primage levied on rubber valued at 7d. a pound making the Malayan product still cheaper, it seemed, for Australian manufacturers to buy tariff and all. Within a year the Tariff Board was of the opinion that the duty on an essential material like rubber was neither 'scientific nor rational'.²⁸ Arthur Jewell, vigilant as ever, pointed out to Murray in a letter forwarded to the Prime Minister that the London price had fallen to 2½d. a pound and that the alternative to continuing the preference was the immediate collapse of the Papuan industry. Australian manufacturers and consumers, he argued, were paying less than the cost of production even with the 4d. duty.²⁹ The Lieutenant Governor had eventually heard of the view of the Comptroller General that the tariff was no more than a revenue measure, and dismayed, he sought assurances that were not forthcoming, that the preference would be adopted as a permanent feature of Australian territorial policy.³⁰

With the fall of the Scullin ministry in November 1931 manufacturers renewed their pressure for abolition of the tariff and it seemed that the planters and the Papuan Government had to go through the whole gamut of explanatory correspondence again to acquaint the new Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, of Papua's predicament. Internationally, attempts made again in 1932 to regulate production failed as 'native producers' in the Netherlands Indies could not be effectively controlled. On Mincing Lane, the London hub of the rubber trade, brokers were accepting 1.875d. a pound.³¹

The Commonwealth tariff system traded off one interest group and industry against another where governments had to bear the electoral consequences of altering the balances. There was no constituency in Papua; there was only the cost that would accrue to the Commonwealth of failure to keep the territorial economy afloat. With the Papuan rubber industry regarded by the manufacturers as more of a nuisance than an asset, the balance was heavily weighted in their favour. It appeared that the new government would succumb

²⁸ *Papuan Courter*, 22 Jan. 1931; The Tariff Board Minute has not been sighted but a Minute Paper of 23 Jan. 1933 in CRS A518, Item P812/1/5 summarising events for the Prime Minister confirms this.

²⁹ CRS A518, Item P812/1/5, Jewell to Leonard Murray, 1 Oct. 1931.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Murray to Prime Minister (J. A. Lyons), 5 Nov. 1931.

³¹ *Papuan Courter*, 24 Mar. 1932.

to pressure as trade unionists added their voice to those of the manufacturers. The Darling Harbour Branch of the Australian Labour Party, in protesting against the withdrawal of a subsidy to the shale oil industry that promised a domestic synthetic rubber industry, demanded the ending of the natural rubber 'subsidy' to 'New Guinea farmers'.³²

Only the rubber preference had saved Papuan commerce, and indeed the Papuan Government, from the worst effects of the great depression as the annual subsidy to the revenue made by the Commonwealth was reduced from £50,000 in 1928-29 to £34,000 in 1932-33. While the Papuan industry had been able to survive with the preference, the manufacturers had also derived the benefit of a savings in exchange, since in purchasing Papuan rubber they were not required to remit funds to London. Nonetheless, as the entire Papuan rubber production represented only about 8% of Australian rubber consumption, their desire to have the duty lifted was an overriding consideration. To press its case the leading importer, the Dunlop Perdreau Rubber Company, declined to buy any Papuan rubber as from 31 March 1932, ostensibly on account of the disadvantage in primage duty.³³ The Executive Council in Port Moresby now asked for exemption from the primage for Papuan produce - though the Treasurer, E. C. Harris, was able to tender figures that demonstrated that when the exchange factor was considered Papuan rubber was indeed still cheaper than 'Eastern' rubber.³⁴ Murray wrote

I do not think that one can contest the argument of the Papuan rubber growers that the collapse of their industry would ruin many persons in the territory and would cause a loss to Australia far greater than anything that cheaper sales of rubber in Australia could possibly replace. The primage amounts to something like a halfpenny a pound and this on 800 tons . . . doubtless amounts to a very large sum but I suggest that it would be worthwhile to give up this sum if thereby the objections of the merchants could be removed.³⁵

On agreement that the excess primage be debited to the sellers' account the manufacturers agreed to extend their purchases of Papuan rubber for another year until 31 March 1933. In January 1933 Jewell and Harris went 'south' to be joined by Major Walker of Clarke and Whiting, and F. C. Tracy, BNGD's Sydney agent, to attend a conference with the Chairman of Dunlop, W. A. Watt, and the Minister for Customs, Colonel T. W. White.³⁶ At the conference

³² CRS A518, Item P812/1/5, Darling Harbour Branch of the ALP to the Prime Minister, 4 May 1932.

³³ *Ibid.*, Jewell to Minister, 30 Nov. 1932, and a radio-telegram from Murray to the Prime Minister, 13 Dec. 1932.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Memorandum E. C. Harris to Leonard Murray, 14 Dec. 1932.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Murray to Prime Minister, 16 Dec. 1932.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Harris and Jewell to McLaren, 13 Feb. 1933.

Watt complained about the expense of Customs supervision on the factory floor where a drawback of duty could be claimed on Eastern rubber that was to be re-exported but not upon Papuan rubber. It was difficult to maintain a distinction between batches of rubber at the manufacturing stage merely on account of their place of origin. This the growers could acknowledge. But the main problem, as Watt saw it, was, and would continue to be, the cost of rubber production in Papua. If the Papuan industry was not competitive, did it deserve to survive? He privately told Tracy that Dunlop would be prepared to buy all the Papuan production at an agreed price - he suggested 10d. a pound - if the tariff were lifted from Eastern rubber. It was an offer that might have been very acceptable years earlier though it would, no doubt, have been tied to an agreement restricting extensions to rubber acreage in Papua. But the Federal Government's declared interest in the revenue remained and a private agreement was not now possible.

The outcome of the meeting was a decision by the Commonwealth to impose a tariff of 4d. a pound and therefore equal primage on all rubber entering Australia but remitting the proceeds of the duty on the Papuan rubber component to the Papuan Government for disbursement to planters in the form of a Papuan rubber export bounty.³⁷ Jewell and Harris returned to Port triumphant; the manufacturers remained outraged. A year earlier W. A. Watt had drawn his shareholders' attention to the iniquity of tariff and primage duties that amounted to upwards of 200% of the landed cost of an essential material and which cost their company alone £180,000 in the year 1931-32.³⁸ He felt no need also to acknowledge what everyone knew - that the Australian manufacturers were themselves very heavily protected from imports of cheap manufactured rubber articles.

The triumph of Papua soured a little when it was found that Papuan rubber, like Eastern rubber, might now remain in bond for long periods and that bounty payments could only be made on receipt by the Papuan Government of the re-imburement of duty after clearance.

Then in October 1933 it was announced in the Federal Budget speech, without warning, that the tariff on crude rubber was to be reduced to 2d. a pound. The Prime Minister hoped that the reduction would be passed on to the public in cheaper motor car tyres. Apparently the Federal Treasurer had had his attention drawn to the Annual Report of BNGD that indicated the average cost of production had dropped from 5½d. to 4½d. a pound. A closer examination would have revealed these to be pared down figures, produced for the jaded British shareholders, that included nothing beyond plantation

³⁷ Ibid., Jewell to Minister, 27 Feb. 1933.

³⁸ Ibid., Dunlop Perdriau Rubber Company, Annual General Meeting, 30 Sept. 1932. Chairman's address.

cost - not local or overseas freight, the interest due on loans or the amortisation of debt, or the 25% exchange payable on remission of proceeds to London.³⁹

By the beginning of 1934 it seemed likely that the manufacturers would soon succeed in forcing the abolition of the tariff and that the question of assistance to the growers in Papua would be 'thrown into bold relief as [further support] would have to be by subsidy from the Australian Treasury'. Sir Hubert Murray was invited in April to furnish confidential proposals for such a contingency.⁴⁰

The Commonwealth also intended to set up a commission of enquiry into the industrial conditions prevailing in Papua. Murray thought this unnecessary.⁴¹ Within Papua there was peace between government and commercial agriculture. The old complaints against the provisions of the *Native Labour Ordinance* and their administration had died away over the years. There was agreement that limitations of geography, timing and scale had all disadvantaged Papuan industry and that the conditions offered Papuan workers could not be modified. Murray now recommended that a permanent bounty of 2d. a pound be applied to all Papuan and New Guinea rubber - a proposal he submitted in conjunction with General Griffiths, Administrator of the Mandated Territory. In return Australia was to be offered exemption from duties on rubber manufactures imported into the territories - a quite nominal gesture in view of the insignificance of such trade.⁴² The tariff stayed in place.

In March 1934 the manager of Ogamobu Plantation for BNGD, William Jefferson, returned from Malaya after careful assessment of rubber production costs there. He was able to confirm that in production per acre, in the number of trees tapped per day by the average labourer, and in labour unit costs, the Papuan estates compared quite favourably with those he had visited.⁴³ The advantages possessed by 'Eastern' estates, he found, were firstly in transport

³⁹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 1933, (Representatives), 4 Oct. 1933, p. 3235, for Lyons's announcement; CRS A518 Item P812/1/5, Part 2, has the protest by F. C. Tracy to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 11 Nov. 1933.

⁴⁰ CRS A518, Item P812/1/5, Part 2, Prime Minister to Murray (Confidential) 6 Apr. 1934.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Prime Minister to Murray, No. 25/3/489. 20 Apr. 1934.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Murray to Prime Minister, No. 25/3/490. 20 Apr. 1934. The Mandated Territory produced no rubber.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Part 2, Murray to Prime Minister, 6 June 1934. Jefferson's report was prepared for the planters but Murray was given permission to use it as he saw fit. He defended the need to protect the Papuan as an independent peasant proprietor but in every other respect agreed with Jefferson's analysis. 'W. H. Jefferson: Some Notes on a Visit to Malaya - February/March 1934' was appended. Later in the year Jefferson returned to Malaya to take up a position there.

where a large industry had provided the revenue out of which excellent roads and railways had been built and where the volume of production had made for cheap shipping. Secondly, though the salaries of white staff were much higher than in Papua, the number of white managers in proportion to the acreage was comparatively very small. Tanah Merah, near Port Dickson, for example, a single estate of 11,172 acres and an area greater in extent than all the Papuan rubber estates together, was under the control of one manager and two assistants. Thirdly, Indians and Chinese were available to carry out many of the technical and clerical functions performed by whites in Papua. Finally the growth of great agency houses that managed large numbers of properties in Malaya on behalf of British companies allowed for a high degree of rationalisation in staffing, transport, storage and marketing. It appeared that only the amalgamation of estates in Papua - impractical on the grounds that proprietorship was shared between England and Australia, and the plantations too small and too widely distributed - might have promised reduced costs. A. S. Bloomfield set up the Moresby Trading and Agency Company in 1916 to act as managing agents for the Clarke and Whiting interests, the Kemp Welch estates and his own Galley Reach property. The company was a casualty of the post-war collapse and an absconding accountant. G. A. Loudon and Company and the BNG Trading Co., subsidiaries of BNGD, succeeded as agents for Clarke and Whiting in 1922 and managed the BNGD estates until 1933. But neither of these companies could achieve great economies of scale when the scale of the whole was so small.

The year 1934 marked a turning point in the fortunes of Papuan rubber. It was to be a last minute reprieve for the colonial economy, for the year also brought the collapse of the copra industry that was not to recover before the Pacific war. There had been renewed efforts to regulate international rubber production, and in addition this time, to limit the expansion of planted areas. An International Rubber Agreement between Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, the Government of India, and Siam was signed on 7 May. Australia was not party to the agreement and Papua too insignificant a producer to be considered. Nonetheless, the maintenance of this agreement was to provide the security of price so long hoped for that allowed, as another war drew near, a second expansion of the Papuan rubber industry on the scale of 1908-12. In February 1936 the London price rose above 6d. a pound for the first time in five years.

It did not take long for the International Rubber Regulation Committee set up to administer the Agreement to have its oversight in respect of the

Australian dependency drawn to its attention by Dutch interests.⁴⁴ The Committee approached the Australian High Commissioner in London to complain that under the umbrella of restriction the Papuan growers were free to extend their plantings, and to urge the abandonment of any bounty that might encourage expansion. With Papua still supplying under 10% of Australian rubber requirements the Commonwealth began for the first time to look on the Territory - at least with regard to its rubber industry - as an integral part of Australia. Murray and Jewell were invited to respond to the Committee's objections.⁴⁵ Papuan production was less than an eighth of 1% of world output, a minuscule amount by comparison with the output of the chief producing countries, but with the collapse of copra, the decline in gold exports, and the failure of most other cultures, it was doubtful if a rubber industry was as important to the economy of any other country as it was to that of the Territory. 'It is hardly realized', Murray wrote, 'that Papua has been within a very short distance of bankruptcy'.⁴⁶

Such was the recovery that Koitaki was to pay a dividend of 7.5% in 1935, the first since 1926, and in July 1936 BNGD paid out its second dividend in twenty-five years of operations in Papua, a tentative 3%. Since the International Rubber Agreement was to last initially only until 1938, the Planters' Association, newly refurbished, continued to press for a guaranteed bounty of 2d. a pound that would be fixed for upwards of thirty years. The urgency for such a provision had diminished rapidly, and the Commonwealth toyed with a proposal for a stabilisation fund to be raised out of the tariff reimbursement. Rebate of the duty in the form of a bounty ceased finally on 1 October 1936 with the total assistance given to the rubber planters of Papua since 1930 amounting to £145,743. The only advantage now retained by Papuan rubber was exemption from the primage. This had been conceded. Australian consumption in 1936-37 was 19,000 tons. The area under cultivation in Papua was 11,836 acres and production amounted to 1,112 tons. By comparison, Sarawak exported 44,000 tons from 228,000 acres; British North Borneo, 21,000 tons from 126,000 acres; Malaya, 600,000 tons from 3.25 million acres; and the Netherlands Indies 500,000 tons also from 3.25 million acres.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., High Commission (London) to Prime Minister, 15 July 1936. The IRA Committee's letter is appended.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Murray to Minister, 5 Oct. 1936. Memoranda by Murray and Jewell are appended.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Murray to Prime Minister, 8 Jan. 1935.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Memorandum: Prime Minister's Department, 2 Aug. 1938. These estimates compiled in 1938 compare with Colin Barlow's figures for Peninsula Malaya for 1937 in *The Natural Rubber Industry* (Kuala Lumpur 1978), 444. Barlow gives the planted area in Malaya in that year as 1.3 million hectares (1.27 million hectares of mature trees) and production

In 1937 two clerical officers, J. Fletcher from the Commonwealth Department of Trade and Customs, and O. Wolfensburger from the Tariff Board, were sent to Papua to assess the current costs of rubber production. They closely examined the estate accounts of BNGD, Clarke and Whiting and Koitaki concluding that the average plantation cost without provision for either depreciation or amortisation was 5.23d. a pound, and that with provision for these - according to a formula of the International Rubber Regulation Committee of what was a 'fair and equitable price level reasonably remunerative to efficient producers' - the cost was 6.7d. a pound f.o.b. Port Moresby.⁴⁸ These were calculated at current cost but still did not include the interest on mortgage or debenture loans under which most of the companies laboured and which if added would have taken the figure close to the 8d. a pound that planters now claimed as the minimum price they needed to obtain to cover their real costs - a figure double that for Malayan rubber c.i.f. London.

From 1936 onwards, nonetheless, the idea that Papuan rubber production should be expanded as a contingency against war became part of every recommendation for protection and occurs in much other correspondence besides. Colonel White, as Minister for Customs, spoke to the National Club in Canberra declaring that 'if we do not develop these territories fully we may lose them. They will be taken from our weak fingers by energetic hands'. This was rhetoric reminiscent of that which had accompanied each previous new start in New Guinea, but now the urgency seemed more pressing than ever before. All his adult life, and like many other Australians, Sir Hubert Murray had seen Japan as the real threat to Australia's survival as a European society in the Pacific, and in a personal letter to Sir George Pearce, Minister for Territories, he gave his private view of the vital importance the Papuan industry might acquire in the event of a Japanese blockade of the East.⁴⁹ He was now asked what the limits of suitable and available rubber lands were.

It had become clear in 1937 that the International Rubber Agreement would continue beyond 1938 and in Port Moresby applications for more than 40,000 acres of new lands for rubber cultivation were received. The expansion between 1936 and 1942 was considerable, the areas under rubber cultivation almost doubling though the benefit was not to accrue until after 1945.

as 506,000 tonnes - figures that roughly correspond to the estimates given in imperial measures here. However, the average production per hectare of Malayan estate rubber in 1937 appears to have been 418 kg per hectare while in Papua it was 236 kg, the Papuan level being well below even the 368 kg per hectare produced on Malayan smallholdings.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Minute Paper (Trade and Customs Department), 28 June 1937, prepared by O. Wolfensburger. The Appendices are detailed and clearly show that the higher costs of Papuan production were due to higher transport and supervision costs.

⁴⁹ CRS A518, Item P812/1/5, Part 2, Murray to Sir George Pearce, 6 Oct. 1936.

In 1934 Tom Nevitt had taken out a lease at Sogeri of the area between the junction of the Kokoda track and Koitaki on behalf of a syndicate of 'old' BNGD managers comprising himself, Bill Voysey of Gadaisu, Jim Matley of Waigani, Doug Ross of Obu, Gordon Marshall of Ogamobu, Tom Miller of Paili, Fred Godson of Itikinumu, Arthur Pollard of Aroa, and Cecil Day of Otomata.⁵⁰ The plantation was a little confusingly named 'Sogeri'. Since BNGD had never been in a position to provide any retirement scheme for these men they had agreed to develop this property jointly and as an enterprise quite distinct from the larger company to provide for their security. Samuel Thompson, now a BNGD director and secretary of the company since 1910, with his two daughters also held an interest in the venture. Coming into full production later at the time of the Korean War, Sogeri amply repaid their foresight.⁵¹

Also in the Sogeri district, Percy McDonald, once a miner on Misima, and a building contractor in Port in the thirties, had examined land a few miles along the Kokoda track from the Hombrom Bluff turnoff with a view to planting rubber. By 1937 his plantation, Ilolo, was being cleared and a nursery prepared.

'Gal' Loudon, once 'the uncrowned king of Papua', had taken large risks and paid dearly for them in the years after 1926. In 1922, as previously noted, he had established G. A. Loudon & Company as a subsidiary of BNGD to operate as an agency for the parent company and other plantation interests, and to take over the BNGD retail trading business. He remained general manager of both companies until 1926 when he thought the moment propitious for becoming a full-time planter in his own interest. He was later sued by G. A. Loudon & Co. for retaining the agency for Clarke and Whiting contrary to an undertaking made at the time of his resignation.⁵² An action was also taken against him to recover money he had borrowed from BNGD as a loan to buy his and T. D. Ryan's one third shares in Ogamobu plantation in 1924. His personal affairs were at their nadir and he survived on his interests in several Papuan companies, the plantations at Mogubo and Ou Ou Creek, Mrs Loudon's tradestore and credit from Burns Philp.⁵³ In 1929 Mogubo was sold to the Bunting brothers and Ogamobu to BNGD. By that year Loudon had begun the development of a coffee and rubber estate at Eilogo, on the southern boundaries of Itikinumu. The rubber did not come into full

⁵⁰ Interview: B. E. Fairfax Ross, 11 June 1972.

⁵¹ Ibid. Rubber reached £1 a pound during the Korean War.

⁵² *Papuan Courter*, 2, 8 July 1927.

⁵³ His dependence on the shipping merchant was such for a time that the company could restrict him to one bottle of whisky a week. (Interview: B. Fairfax-Ross interview, 11 June 1972.)

production until after 1945 when Loudon established another rubber estate, Mororo, and a cattle property, Catalina, adjacent to Eilogo.⁵⁴

Captain A. S. Fitch, the Steamships Trading Company chairman, and Brian Molloy, a new solicitor in Port, prospected for suitable rubber growing country in the Kasiabadina district between the Vanapa River and Galley Reach in 1935. In February and April 1937 two companies, Mariboi Rubber Estates, with a nominal capital of £50,000, and Rubberlands Limited, with capital of £20,000, were incorporated to develop leases in the area. Steamships were the managing agents for the companies and the nursery stock was raised from the seeds of improved budgrafted rubber obtained from Koitaki. These inland estates were unpopular with Papuan and New Guinea Highland workers in the years ahead though proving to be highly profitable investments. To the west of Galley Reach along the Aroa River, between Lolorua and Aroa plantation, another lease for planting rubber was taken out by Mrs Vera Ward and Mrs Winifred Loudon. On this estate, Aroana, an attempt was made unsuccessfully to interplant with cocoa.⁵⁵ Vegetables for the Port Moresby market were also grown for a time as catch crops.

In 1936, Herbert Kienzle took out a lease to grow rubber at Amada near Kokoda. In April 1938, Kienzle's father, A. T. Kingsley, manager of the Commonwealth Hemp Company at Tavai in 1930 and since a miner in New Guinea, registered Mamba Rubber Estates, a private company to develop the property.⁵⁶ On the same day together with E. J. Frame, manager of Burns Philp in Port, Kingsley registered a syndicate to take over alluvial gold concessions downstream on the Yodda previously held by the mining engineer Ward Williams. The supplies for the development of both enterprises were flown into Kokoda after the New Guinea goldfields pattern. In July, intending another Northern Division development, Sangara Rubber Plantations Limited, was registered by R. D. Bertie, the Port lawyer, and may have represented an attempt by the syndicators of the failed Sangara Sugar Estates to develop their lease with rubber instead. Rubber trees became a common sight in the villages of this division as Orokaiva labourers returning along the Kokoda

⁵⁴ Other plantations in which G. A. Loudon held an interest for a time included Baia, Domara, Hisiu and Dedele. The historians of Burns Philp record that in September 1927 a loan of £5,000 was made to Loudon and two others to 'buy' a plantation. It is possible that this loan was obtained by Loudon to repay the money borrowed from BNGD in 1924 to buy Ogamobu. See Buckley and Klugman, *The Australian Presence in the Pacific*, 200, note 12. See below, pp. 240-1, for a brief account of coffee at Eilogo.

⁵⁵ G. A. Loudon, 'Notes', p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Papuan Courier*, 6 Apr. 1938. Herbert Kienzle arrived in Papua in 1927 as assistant manager at Kanosia. He was employed by Ward Williams for a time, and joined by his brother Wallace and his father at Kokoda in 1936.

track over the Owen Stanley Ranges at the expiry of their contracts planted 11,000 trees of their own.⁵⁷

Finally, with rubber prices rising rapidly in 1940, Captain Fitch invested further in another new company, Kerema Rubber Plantations, which under Steamships management developed Epo Estate at Kerema in the Gulf Division. One of two other directors was R. W. Robson, editor of the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, of Sydney. The shares in this venture were not all sold until after 1945, and like all the plantations where development had begun in the late pre-war boom, tapping did not commence until the late forties.

⁵⁷ Clendyn Searle counted them in 1938 and made a submission to H. W. Champion for tapping rights proposing to pay royalties to the local owners. The scheme was not allowed. Searle, with experience in Fiji and Malaya, had come to Papua to manage the AWA radio communication facility. He began a plantation at Kokoda, Saga, later incorporated into Mamba Estates. He planted cocoa at Awala near Sangara after 1945. (Interview, Clendyn Searle, 21 May 1975). Much earlier in 1920-21 J. G. Fowler, then ARM at Kokoda, had counted 7,169 rubber trees planted by villagers in his district (*PAR* 1920-21, 50).

CHAPTER 17

Trial and travail with other cultures 1900-1942

WHILE COPRA AND rubber became the major industries of colonial Papua, efforts were made to establish plantations of most of the other principal tropical commodities. These included tobacco, sisal hemp, cotton, tea, sugar, coffee and cocoa. Each for a time received enthusiastic attention and could seem to promise an answer to the Territory's chronic poverty. All had failed by 1942. An account of the trial of these other cultures and the travails that planters encountered as climate, soils, diseases, distance, labour and markets were tested now follows. If in general these abandoned industries demonstrated that in no branch of tropical agriculture could Papua find a margin of competitive advantage, the history of each is distinct - failure or collapse due to a different combination of factors. The planters of Papua blamed their predicament on those closest - the antagonism of the Papuan Government until 1922 and the Commonwealth's unwillingness to provide the degree of protection and support necessary for profitability. They wanted preferential treatment like that enjoyed by other 'Australian' producers in Australian markets. This, federal ministries were loathe to provide for the Papuan industries, unless, as was the case in 1930, a government in Canberra was faced with immanent collapse of the Territory's revenue and forced to accord a preference to Papuan rubber.

Successive governments in Melbourne and Canberra never resolved, indeed never after 1906 and before 1942 did they again consider, the fundamental issue of Papua's future - whether, like the Northern Territory of Australia, it was an integral part of the Commonwealth though currently a dependency of the Federal Government, whether it was an external dependency destined for eventual incorporation into the Commonwealth, or whether it would remain indefinitely no more than a convenient strategic barrier, self-sustaining if possible, but otherwise maintained at the very lowest cost. From the outset the revenues of Papua, unlike those of the Northern Territory, were to be raised substantially from the country's own resources. Indeed Papua could seem a 'foreign' country when it drew an income from customs duties on imports into the Territory - including those from Australia itself - and when its products imported into the Commonwealth were subject to Australian tariffs, conceded no more than the imperial preference. There could be little

political or commercial support in Australia for any of the agricultural industries of Papua if they might compete with Australian domestic production or with cheaper tropical commodities obtainable elsewhere. William Little MLC, advocating the development of a Papuan sugar industry in 1917, attributed continuing Australian indifference towards the development of Papua ultimately to the lack of elected representation for its settlers - 'there are no votes in Papua for Australian politicians'.¹

With the *Customs Tariff* and *Bounties Acts* of 1926 it did seem for a time that the Commonwealth might adopt a more generous policy of protection and encouragement of commercial agriculture in Papua and the Mandated Territory. But, as discussed in the last chapter, neither of the established industries, copra or rubber, was included on the schedule of either Act and both measures largely failed to stimulate production of the other commodities listed. The proffer of assistance had come too late. By the late twenties and throughout the next decade the international economy offered few opportunities for the development of new plantation industries in any part of the world.

Tobacco

The British New Guinea Development Company was the only enterprise to plant *nicotiana tabacum* on a large scale and experiment with manufacture of tobacco products for local consumption. Tobacco from the beginning had been a major item in trade with the Papuans and comprised between 5% and 10% of the value of all imports annually. Local production, the management thought, would be highly profitable and provide an income as a 'catch crop' in the years while the perennial tree plantations were immature. Five tons were harvested from the first areas planted at Katea on the Laloki in 1911 and a sample of leaf sent off to London. The company had some cigars made up. S. L. Thompson reported their 'appearance . . . certainly good and the flavour fair'.² The *Papuan Times* in February 1912 noted that a first lot of these BNGD cigars had already been received by the editor. William Bruce, who knew something at least about their smoking quality, thought the 'Colorado Madura' style specimens just 'a little green', but nonetheless ventured in his fulsome manner that 'of the cultivated products of Papua we place tobacco next to copra and rubber in importance and think the day is not far distant when the brands Flor de Kanosia, La Sogeri, or Regalia del Cowley will be

¹ *Papuan Courier*, 3 Aug. 1917. Melbourne was the seat of the Australian Federal Government until 1927 when Canberra became capital of the Commonwealth. The Northern Territory was part of South Australia from 1863 until 1911 when it passed to the Commonwealth.

² ANUABL Deposit 95, BNGD Letterbooks, S. L. Thompson to Lewis Cowley, 19 Jan. 1912.

indented by merchants and smoked by connisseurs [*sic*] in all civilised parts of the world'.³

In 1913 the company sent out two Dutch 'twisters', Arie Otte and Willem Akkerman, to instruct Papuans in the making of tobacco twist and finer cigars. Subsequently, in 1916, a 'technical expert', Thomas Calligan, was hired in the United States to come and oversee the enterprise. Calligan, a heavy drinker, proved 'hopeless'. He was once pulled out of a ditch by someone he described as 'a long string of a miner' and later identified as the Lieutenant Governor.⁴ Bad luck in the choice of staff seemed to plague the 'bung' company for years.

The area under tobacco on Katea reached 232 acres in 1917.⁵ Production had increased to 31,195 pounds in the last quarter of 1916 alone and a large part of the twist tobacco in the stores and issued by employers under the ration provisions of the NLO was by then being produced by BNGD's factory. About a hundred men of Wanigela, Marshall Lagoon, with 'fine neat hands', were employed in making the 'Bung' and 'Lakatoi' brands of twist and the 'Namo', 'I-dau' and the cheaper 'Papuan Beauties' brands of cigarettes, 'grown and manufactured in Papua by Papuans'.⁶ A duty on imports provided protection of 1s.9d. a pound on the twist and some small protection also on cigars and cigarettes. But an enduring problem had been the moulding of the tobacco in store and in the 1917-18 season almost the entire crop was wiped out by disease. There had been increasing difficulty in wartime in obtaining the licorice required for twist manufacture and the industry was abruptly abandoned.⁷ G. A. Loudon much later recalled that BNGD had to write off £150,000 with the failure of the tobacco industry.⁸ This is possibly an exaggeration but certainly the company had invested heavily in its tobacco operations.

In 1931 Tom Sefton planted tobacco experimentally at Koitaki and sent leaf off to London to test the market; 2,085 pounds were exported and sold for £216. Badly cured it had been badly received.⁹ But to encourage further tests

³ *Papuan Times*, 14 Feb. 1912. In the same edition Bruce anonymously drew attention to a deterioration he believed had taken place in the quality of the Armed Constabulary since the abolition of the office of Commandant - his own old position. One of his children had died of dysentery in the week before this was published.

⁴ Interview: Mrs W. Loudon, June 1973.

⁵ ANUABL Deposit 95, M37, BNGD Annual Report, 1917, p. 18.

⁶ G. A. Loudon, 'Agriculture - Papua 1913-1959', Notes prepared for an address or article, 1 Apr. 1959, p. 3 (cited below as Loudon, 'Notes').

⁷ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 1, 30 Dec. 1915, S. L. Thompson (Secretary of the company in London) to G. A. Loudon (general manager in Port Moresby). Thompson suspected the 'Tobacco Trust' of withholding a supply of licorice.

⁸ Loudon, 'Notes', 4.

⁹ PAR 1932-33, 37, 12.

the government made a grant of £100 to the company. A plantation assistant, Sholto Morton, was sent to Mareeba in North Queensland to study tobacco cultivation, and cultivation began in earnest with the Warne and Hickory Pryor varieties.¹⁰ In 1933 L. A. Jenkinson, an expert from the Tobacco Experimental Station at Mareeba, was invited to visit Koitaki and oversee the harvesting and curing. His report gave mixed grounds for optimism - the first tobacco harvested and cured being satisfactory, the second harvest less so on account of the 'excessive rain, and hot and steamy conditions . . . making the curing more difficult'. As well, 'this leaf also shows signs of leaf spots'. Of this crop 458 pounds were exported but the return was only £11. None was exported thereafter.¹¹

Beatrice Grimshaw's brother, Ramsay, planted or acquired a trial plot of tobacco on a block on the Laloki that Beatrice bought in 1933 from Errol Flynn - the future actor and briefly a Papuan planter. The Grimshaws left Papua in the following year, the tobacco being probably that harvested 'at the 15 Mile' in late 1934 by a trader, Percy Hinds, who turned it into 'Koiari Twist'. Compared with the old 'Bung' tobacco which 'would ruin any pipe', the new tobacco was, if anything, 'too light' for 'the native trade' but apparently quite suitable for cigarettes - for which no market existed.¹² The CMO, Dr Walter Strong, had bought the property from the Grimshaws. He continued to experiment with tobacco culture.

Sisal Hemp

Sisal, *agave sisalana*, a spiky yucca native to Mexico and major source of rope fibre, may have been among plants sent to British New Guinea for experimental planting from Rockhampton through the agency of Ferdinand von Müller, the Victorian Government Botanist from whom Sir William MacGregor sought advice. Well suited to stony dry soils it was successfully propagated by A. C. English at Kapakapa near Rigo and subsequently by John Exton at Boera. By 1907 English had planted sisal in his own interest next to the Rigo Government Station, but none of the processed product, sisal hemp, was exported before 1910 when £340 was realised.¹³ The poor soils and lower rainfall of the coastal districts surrounding Port Moresby between Lealea in the west and Hula to the southeast seemed to provide perfect conditions for the cultivation of the sisal plant.

In the plantation boom beginning in 1907 sisal was one of the first cultures to be tried with a view to an early return on investment. With A. S. Bloomfield

¹⁰ Ibid., 13

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Papuan Courter*, 4 Jan. 1935, p. 4. Another of Grimshaw's brothers, Osborne, was an officer of the Papuan service, 1915-34.

¹³ *PAR* 1911-12, 152. For sisal exports see below, p. 312.

as promoter and subsequently secretary of the companies, Sir Rupert Clarke and R. S. Whiting floated Fairfax Harbour Plantations Ltd and North Fairfax Harbour Plantations Ltd in 1909 to produce the fibre between the western end of the harbour and the sea. The contractor for these properties in 1910 was Arthur Jewell who bought suckers from Exton's fifty acre block at Boera. Clarke and Whiting later proceeded to plant more than 1,000 acres of sisal on their Rorona property at Galley Reach alongside the coconuts.

At the '7 Mile' on the Laloki road, Papuan Plantations Limited had planted 250 acres of the suckers on a lease of over 1,100 acres by 1914. Further along the track at Bomana the company had another 210 acres planted on a lease of 5,500 acres next to a much larger plantation of the BNGD Company. By 1914 BNGD were cultivating nearly 1,000 acres of sisal on their lease at Bomana of 10,228 acres. In that year the larger company took over the smaller company's holdings on the strength, the BNGD chairman said, of the government's firm undertaking to build a railway along the Laloki to the Astrolabe copper mining field. Papuan Plantations Limited had paid a dividend it could not afford in 1913, the first paid by any of the plantation companies, and liquidation soon followed. Both companies on the Laloki had installed scutching machinery and light rail tracks, and the immense fields of sisal and the acres of racks hung with drying fibre were a striking feature along the road to Sapphire Creek in 1920.¹⁴ BNGD produced 101 tons of sisal hemp in the year ending 31 January 1917, the Territory producing 343 tons in 1917-18.¹⁵ This was the best year and earnings were £17,682, exceeded only by returns on copra (£68,225), rubber (£37,020), gold (£28,594), and pearls (£19,250). The shortage of shipping during the war enabled Australian buyers to pay only £28 a ton for sisal hemp then fetching £37 in London and £43 in New York.¹⁶ In August 1917 the London price reached £68.

When prices began to fall in 1919, the Territory's output rapidly declined, to 145 tons valued at £4,630 in 1921-22, and to nothing in the following year.¹⁷ Production of sisal hemp ceased. As mentioned in Chapter 15,¹⁸ capital in the Fairfax Harbour companies was exhausted and they were placed in the hands of A. S. Bloomfield, their promoter in 1909 and now their liquidator. There were no buyers - Clarke and Whiting with other shareholders

¹⁴ *Papuan Courter*, 21 Jan. 1921, pp. 6-7. This comment is in a reprint of an article that had appeared in the *World's Work* magazine written by Thomas McMahon, a 'sisal expert' who visited Papua in 1920. In the paper of June 10 McMahon criticised Commonwealth parsimony in Papua.

¹⁵ *PAR 1918-19*, 63, and the BNGD Co. Directors' Report to 31 Jan. 1917 (ANUABL, Deposit 95, M37).

¹⁶ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 2, Secretary to General manager, 16 Jan. 1916.

¹⁷ *PAR 1921-22*, and *PAR 1922-23*.

¹⁸ See above p. 194.

losing the whole of their investment in these plantations. BNGD did not immediately relinquish its leases but the company did not again produce sisal hemp.

Elsewhere sisal had been planted on the Tavai Creek at Gaire in 1909 by the former RM, Henry Griffin, for a company he had floated and which included among its directors Arthur Jewell and Archie MacAlpine. The property, planted with stock from Kapakapa, had 500 acres bearing in 1916. It was offered for sale in 1913 and appears to have passed into the hands of Clarke and Whiting. By 1918 Tavai was being managed by Tom Nevitt, then one of the Clarke and Whiting staff. Also left abandoned as prices fell in 1920-21 it was opened up again in 1922 by Anglo-Papuan Investments Ltd, a new undertaking of Walter Henry Gors, the onetime Burns Philp manager and early planter, who returned to join his brothers and sister in Papua after an absence of twenty years. He acknowledged that he was taking a 'gamble' but that it was 'worth a try'.¹⁹ Alongside the sisal at Tavai cotton was also grown. But by 1926 Walter Gors had failed to make the place pay and this time he left the country not to return. When he came he had felt 'ten years younger', he wrote to the Lieutenant Governor begging permission to withdraw from the Legislative Council to which Murray had re-appointed him in 1922, but so much disappointment had attended the sisal project that he was leaving 'feeling ten years older'.²⁰

In 1930 with the arrival of a representative of a newly formed Commonwealth Hemp Company, A. T. Kingsley, together with 'plant and gear', Tavai was again opened up, 200 acres of the old plantation being in still 'splendid condition'.²¹ But even with the promise of a Commonwealth bounty of £6 a ton the Papuan industry could not compete with countries paying their labour 6d. a day in full. £40 was paid out from the bounty fund in 1931 but none thereafter. Forced to sell at or below cost, the company ceased production and sisal disappeared from the hills near Gaire. Kingsley with his sons, Herbert and Wallace Kienzle, became a rubber planter on the Yodda in the late thirties. In 1936 the Commonwealth Hemp Company became agents for the British Australian Pulp and Paper Company that intended to make paper in Australia from the *kurukuru* grass of Papua.²²

Cotton

Like sisal, 'Sea Island' and upland cotton had been cultivated by A. C. English at Rigo in the years before 1906, though none had been exported. Robert

¹⁹ *Papuan Courter*, 4 Aug. 1922, p. 4. Anglo-Papuan Investments was registered in Papua as the Klana Planting and Trading Co Ltd.

²⁰ CRS A518, P800/1/5, W. H. Gors to Murray, 2 July 1923.

²¹ *Papuan Courter*, 4 Apr. 1930.

²² See below p. 242.

Hunter had also tried cotton at Obu in 1898. John Clunn sent samples from a test crop at Ramaga on Milne Bay to Brisbane for appraisal in 1904. They were reported to be of 'good commercial value'.²³ With the plantation boom commencing in 1907-08 the production of cotton was bound to be attempted and Alec Clunas and Morton Clark were the first to do so, on the Giriwu River near Buna in the Northern Division. Partners in a store supplying the miners on the Yodda and Gira goldfields, they leased 940 acres on which to plant rubber and coconuts in 1908. Cotton was to be a 'catch' crop. By 1912 Clark was dead and the lease terminated.

In 1914-15, to test both the suitability of its lands and the market, the BNGD Company began the cultivation of cotton on 102 acres of Baubauguina estate, with smaller plots on Otomata, Paili, Obu, Aroa, and Gadaisu. The first 266 bales (forty tons) produced realized £2,639 in London. It was apparently of a high quality but unprofitable at the price obtained on account of the cost of Papuan labour.²⁴ Cotton was not again planted on any of the estates in 1917.

In 1919 the president of the Commonwealth Board of Trade wrote to the Lieutenant Governor enquiring about cotton growing in Papua. In reply Murray acknowledged that the main difficulty was a sufficient supply of labour at the picking stage. He asked the general manager of BNGD to supply a report of the company's experience which was forwarded on to the Board. G. A. Loudon began by saying that

The industry was abandoned by the company on account of labour difficulties . . . when our crops were due for harvesting, we only had a certain number of indentured labourers available. Cotton is a rush crop, and harvesting has to be carried out promptly and a large number of casual labourers are required . . . when we called on local natives from surrounding villages to assist in picking (for which we were willing to pay a half-penny per lb.) they refused.²⁵

In addition he noted that Papuan pickers averaged only nineteen pounds of boll cotton a day which compared badly with the 130 pounds a day picked by Egyptian casual labour, with which, after all, they were competing. Only a large area, an abundant labour force and a level of production that would allow the employment of the latest machinery, he thought, would have made the industry payable. In his letter accompanying Loudon's report Murray saw no reason to dispute the general manager's reasoning.

Yet with the collapse in 1921-22 of the market for Papuan rubber, copra, and sisal hemp, there was a renewed interest in cotton production. A Papuan Cotton and Produce Association began planting cotton at Haga on Milne Bay

²³ BNGAR 1904-05, 29.

²⁴ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 2, 13 Jan. 1916, Secretary to general manager.

²⁵ NAPNG Series A128, Item 7, 7 July 1919, Loudon to President of the Board of Trade.

in 1921. Anglo-Papuan Investments Ltd, the company that re-commenced the production of sisal hemp at Tavai in 1922, planted cotton as well, both there and on the old Angabunga Company lands it also leased in the Mekeo district. In November 1923 Walter Gors thought the Gaire pickers, while they 'broke no records' had 'shaped very well' with the best worker gathering ninety-four pounds in a day.²⁶ BNGD too resumed cotton cultivation on a large scale on its properties at Katea, Gadaisu and Baubauguina in 1923 and Clarke and Whiting began interplanting a crop under the coconuts at Rorona. At Huiva in the Gulf Division Robert Shaw-Moody had planted sixty-five acres of cotton by October 1924 and in March 1925 brought a shipment of twenty-seven tons to Port Moresby.²⁷

G. A. Loudon and Company, formed in 1922 to take over the agency and commercial business of BNGD, established one of two cotton ginneries in Port. Shaw-Moody put his first four tons through Loudon's Asa Lee gin in July 1924. The second ginnery was set up by Messrs Clayton and Bell. Kurt Hacke, a mechanical engineer who had worked for Walter Gors at Tavai, became manager of their machinery in 1925. A Papuan Cotton Syndicate became Patakalana Cotton Estates Ltd in September 1923, taking over a timber lease on the Kemp Welch River from Timbers (Papua) Ltd, a company in liquidation. Patakalana continued the sale of timber and began planting cotton. By 1927, like all the producers this company was in trouble. The Territory's production had reached 103 tons valued at £4,866 in 1925-26, by far the best year, but prices rapidly fell thereafter. To these prices alone, and not to a shortage of cotton pickers at harvest time or to the low productivity of Papuan workers, was now attributed the decline in the industry. In 1928-29, one ton was produced.²⁸ By 1932 there was none and the industry vanished a second time.

Liquidation and sale of the assets of a failed enterprise to a new venture that in its turn also collapsed made up a pattern repeated in colonial Papua before 1942 as speculators probed the possibilities. Despite the lessons that some learnt, others still could be readily deluded, it seems. A Wataluma Cotton Syndicate was registered in 1927 with the intention of developing an industry on Goodenough Island. In 1932, in the midst of the depression, the syndicate was still seeking money in the market believing that a cotton industry could yet be established in Papua.

²⁶ *Papuan Courier*, 23 Nov. 1923, p. 5.

²⁷ *Papuan Courier*, 27 Mar. 1925.

²⁸ *PAR* 1928-29, 21. For cotton exports see below, p. 312. The physical suitability of Papua for cotton cultivation was again affirmed in Sept. 1925 when a visiting British cotton expert, G. Evans, and the Commonwealth Cotton Entomologist, E. Ballard, after inspecting several parts of the country, recommended the 'dry' belt around Port Moresby and the D'Entrecasteaux for Sea Island cotton development (*PAR* 1925-26, 9).

Tea

Tea was grown successfully from seed at Warirata in 1896-97 and was among the numerous 'economic' plants that grew in the government's nursery and garden begun in 1907 on Hombrom Bluff, the opposite spur of the Astrolabe Range overlooking the Laloki Gorge. In the 1912-13 *Annual Report*, Charles Speedie, in charge of the station, recorded that he had 14,000 tea seedlings available.²⁹ BNGD had considered tea culture and seeds were supplied to the company together with rubber seeds by the agents Cumberbatch & Co. of Malaya in 1910. An experimental plot of 150 bushes was planted on Itikinumu estate where, like those at the Bluff, they did well in a climate and at an altitude considered ideal. The secretary in London noted that 'there should be a splendid market for tea in Australia if it could be found to thrive'.³⁰ The establishment of a tea industry was one among many recommendations for agricultural development in Papua made in a report prepared in July 1917 for the Department of Trade and Customs by the Commonwealth Analyst, Percy Wilkinson. He noted that Australia imported tea valued at nearly £2 million and that Papua possessed 'large upland jungle districts . . . where the climatic and soil conditions . . . approach closely those of the tea districts of Java and Ceylon'. It seemed folly to continue to import so much with 'our own vast tropical possession lying almost unexploited within a few hours sail of the mainland'.³¹

Yet neither BNGD nor any other company proceeded beyond experiment with tea cultivation. In every country where it was produced tea was picked principally by women living on or near the estates. In no part of Papua was the population surrounding plantations dense enough to provide a very large reservoir of temporary labour and it was likely that if an industry was developed in Papua pressure would have mounted for the government to reverse its policy on the indenture of women in agriculture. This, the administration had already shown it would strongly resist. In 1924 the idea that tea might be cultivated was revived by the Commonwealth Analyst but with the world price already very low it was obvious that no bounty or preference could be usefully given in encouragement. It was not included in the schedule of either the *Bounty* or *Preference* Acts of 1926. In 1935 prompted by a suggestion from Sir Hubert Murray a preference of 2d. a pound

²⁹ *PAR 1912-13*, 31.

³⁰ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 1, 1 May 1914, S. L. Thompson to Lewis Cowley (general manager in 1914).

³¹ CRS A1 20/21573, *Papuan Development - Report by W. P. Wilkinson, 1920*. The passage is in the Appendix drawn from Trade & Customs file 17/5585.

was finally offered, but while tea grew in Papua, tea planting was a risk no one was prepared to take.³²

Sugar

Among all the tropical commodities that had expanded in world trade since the seventeenth century cane sugar was the first to be 'over-produced' and its planters the first to suffer the downward pressure on price and income in a near perfect international market that producers of all the commodities would eventually experience. By the late nineteenth century the industry was also in competition with an immense and subsidised domestic European beet sugar industry. Nonetheless, the sugar colonies of the West Indies and the Mascarenes remained the classic plantation economies where unbridled European power, unanswerable to an enslaved or indentured population of workers that could be moved about almost at will, had first succeeded in creating the conditions whereby a commodity desired in Europe was produced in unprecedented abundance at the very lowest possible cost and at a great distance from the markets. The development of the Australian and Fijian industries, though subject to much greater scrutiny in a more humane generation, began with much the same pattern. But Australian sugar was being produced largely for a growing domestic market that possessed an enfranchised working class wanting employment at 'civilised' rates of pay and restless at competing with cheaper 'coloured' labour. With the federation of the Australian colonies the Queensland industry had to respond to political pressure and replace indentured South Sea Island labour with white labour, the producers compensated for the increased costs with tariff protection.

No one could be in any doubt that sugar could be grown in Papua. It was a natural home of *saccharum officinarum* and strains collected in New Guinea were important in the development of sugar industries elsewhere. The Badilla (or 'Badila') variety that became the most successful of those grown commercially in Queensland had been obtained in New Guinea in 1895.³³ The problem for anyone contemplating establishing sugar plantations in the Territory was that Australia together with Fiji had begun the development of sugar industries in the 1870s that by the time British New Guinea was

³² The preference was announced in the *Papuan Courter*, 6 Dec. 1935. A tea industry would be developed in New Guinea after the Pacific War.

³³ Papua continued to be of interest as a possible source of new sugar varieties. The Chief of the Sugar Research Branch of the United States Department of Agriculture, Dr E. W. Brandes, visited Papua in 1927 looking for disease resistant stock. He was accompanied by the Chief Sugar Expert of the Dutch East Indies, Dr J. Jesweit, and the Chief Entomologist of the Hawaiian Planters' Association, C. Pemberton. The expedition camped at Everill Junction on the Fly and was flown in by sea-plane. Large quantities of plant material were collected (*PAR* 1927-28, 41). See also the *National Geographic Magazine* (Washington), Sept. 1929.

annexed already met the requirements of the Australasian colonies and to spare. No Australian government answerable to its domestic sugar producers and to white industrial unions and at the same time administering Papua could readily permit the development of a Papuan sugar industry that might threaten the Australian. The entrenched and established Queensland sugar interests could only view a Papuan sugar industry as a threat to their current markets and to their future expansion.

In May 1916, on hearing a report that the Australian Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, had said that increased sugar production was desirable in the Empire, Samuel Thompson, secretary of BNGD in London, telegraphed the general manager in Port Moresby asking him to secure leases of up to 10,000 acres adjacent to the company's Paili estate for a sugar venture. It was 'important', he added.³⁴ The company had hoped in any case to obtain more land at Cloudy Bay near Paili in exchange for other areas of its leases that were unproductive - perhaps to consolidate its holdings. The government was unwilling to allow such exchanges. And, almost certainly, Hughes's remark was made in the interest of Australian growers alone and when this had become clear BNGD did not proceed further. In the following year William Little MLC, noting that Australia was actually a net importer of sugar products, proposed in lengthy letters to the *Papuan Times* that a sugar industry be developed after the war by returned soldiers enabling Papua to become for Australia what Hawaii and the Caribbean islands were for the United States.³⁵ In 1921 the Samarai Branch of the Returned Soldiers' League submitted a similar proposal for the development of an industry at Buna to the visiting Minister, Alexander Poynton.³⁶

No attempt was made to test whether a Papuan sugar industry could be developed before 1929 when Sangara Sugar Estates Ltd was promoted by Arthur Bunting, the Samarai merchant and planter, and Tom Nevitt, then BNGD's plantation inspector, to grow cane commercially in the Northern Division between Buna and Kokoda. Several residents of Cairns in North Queensland, including Tom Nevitt's brother Bert, an accountant, were members of the syndicate backing the venture. In August, W. F. S. Howe, manager of the Mulgrave Central Mill at Cairns, was persuaded by the Nevitts to visit Papua to examine and comment on the suitability of the area for sugar development. His report was rumoured in the *Papuan Courier* to be 'glowing', the Buna lands thought to resemble Babinda near Innisfail.³⁷ Badilla

³⁴ BNGD Letterbooks, Vol. 2, 18 May 1916, Secretary to general manager.

³⁵ *Papuan Courier*, 3 and 31 Aug. 1917.

³⁶ CRS A1 21/15922 RS&SILA Samarai Sub-Branch to Minister. The members understood that the Buna Bay district would be opened up to soldier settlers.

³⁷ *Papuan Courier*, 30 Aug. 1929. The visit was first reported on 16 Aug.

cuttings were brought in from Cairns and by July 1930 a nursery and trial plots had been set out and tramlines reported as completed. The Sangara experiment was begun with limited capital, Bunting and Nevitt hoping, no doubt, that a successful demonstration would attract the remaining investment necessary for a much larger scale development. In the 1928-29 *Papuan Annual Report*, Sir Hubert Murray gave the idea of a sugar industry for Papua his support and to allay the apprehension of a threat to their interests among Australian growers he assured them that Papuan sugar would never enter the Commonwealth. Instead it would 'be sold in the markets of the world'.³⁸ This could hardly have comforted Queensland growers with a sugar surplus to sell in international trade. In the end they had no need to fear. For by 1932, Staniforth Smith's successor as Director of Agriculture, A. P. Lyons, had to report that while the Sangara sugar experiment had been technically successful and a flourishing crop grown, the international financial slump made further development unlikely for a time. Seventy-six tons of 'plant Badilla' cane an acre were produced on one plot of twenty-five acres and forty-two tons of 'first ratoon Badilla and "P.O.J." mixed' on another.³⁹ In an experimental nursery the company also planted forty indigenous varieties collected in the Buna and Tufi districts. None at all was exported. The company had offered 450,000 £1 shares for subscription, a huge sum given the state of the share market, but expecting a slow response the promoters assured subscribers that the deposits made to reserve their shares would be held in a trust account until sufficient were sold. The suggestion was that this might take several years. Five other enterprises were mooted or floated in the years 1931-35 to plant sugar in the Northern Division. One, Papuan Rural Products Limited, intending to grow sugar on Collingwood Bay, proposed having a nominal capital of £4 million. All of these ventures failed either to proceed or produce, the loss on the Sangara experiment being £30,000.⁴⁰

Coffee

Coffee from the company's mixed plantation at Warirata had been the first tropical culture tested commercially by Burns Philp in 1897 and the first choice for plantation cultivation on the pioneer Sogeri plateau properties of David Ballantine, also in 1897, and of Garrioch and Greene in 1902. In 1905-06 the value of the beans exported reached £915.⁴¹ Thereafter production rapidly declined with none being exported in 1910-11. Without privileged entry to the Australian market there seemed no likelihood of a revival.

³⁸ *PAR* 1928-29, 4.

³⁹ *PAR* 1931-32, 7.

⁴⁰ Loudon, 'Notes', 6.

⁴¹ *PAR* 1908-09, 152. For coffee exports see below, p. 313.

Staniforth Smith in June 1915 and Judge Murray in December 1917 each wrote to argue that since coffee could not be produced in Queensland with white labour the Commonwealth might exempt any coffee produced in the Territory from the tariff.⁴² No response came before 1926, when to encourage new industries at last, coffee from the Commonwealth's territories was to be permitted entry into Australia free of duty under the new *Customs Tariff (Papua and New Guinea Preference) Act*. Coffee imported from elsewhere remained subject to duty of 3d. a pound. With this assistance significant exports from Papua resumed in 1928-29 when four tons valued at £313 were shipped south. By 1934-35 exports had increased to seventy-nine tons and sold for £7,083. The greater part of the production came from Eilogo estate on the Sogeri plateau.⁴³

By 1929 the former general manager of BNGD, G. A. Loudon, had begun producing coffee at Eilogo when with the depression his fortunes were at their lowest. Planting rubber as a long term investment he interplanted with both *robusta* and Blue Mountain coffee to spread his risks. These flourished and he was gradually able to regain the personal pre-eminence among the planters of Papua that for four or five years he seemed to lose. His 'A-LOGO' coffee at first found a ready Australian market through the agency of F. C. Tracy, a shareholder in Eilogo and Sydney agent for BNGD since 1915. The early shipments were sold to the Mutual Store in Melbourne with Bushells in Sydney later taking the bulk.⁴⁴ But in 1935 coffee from the Netherlands East Indies was being sold in Sydney below the cost of production and Loudon was able to show that the Australian primage (the flat duty of 2.5% on all imports) together with the costs of freight by mule and truck between Eilogo and Port Moresby and by sea between Papua and Sydney amounted to a sum hardly less than 'the Dutchman is prepared to accept C.I.F. Sydney'.⁴⁵ The crisis was barely survived.

Always an entrepreneur and enjoying being ahead of others in everything he did, Loudon had an 'aerodrome' cleared near Eilogo in 1938 and flew out his produce to Port, probably the first planter in either Papua or New Guinea to use aircraft in this way.⁴⁶ Just prior to the outbreak of the war in Europe

⁴² CRS A518 Item A.M.812/1/1. Murray to Minister of Trade and Customs, 21 Dec. 1917.

⁴³ A third of production came from Papuan owned plantations set up under a scheme whereby the government provided the capital out of the Native Taxation Fund to establish small plantations in the Northern Division with a total area in 1935 of 242 acres. The proceeds of sales as elsewhere under the Native Plantations scheme were divided between the Fund and the growers. See note 29, p. 150.

⁴⁴ Loudon, 'Notes', 4.

⁴⁵ NAPNG Series G 69, Item 25/21, G. A. Loudon to H. L. Murray, 17 Apr. 1935.

⁴⁶ Loudon is also believed to have brought the first motor-vehicle to Papua in 1914.

in 1939 overproduction in Brazil and Java had again caused the market to slump with prices falling to 3d. a pound. Loudon appealed for additional Australian protection without result and production at Eilogo was finally shut down, the trees grubbed out. 'At this time the Blue Mountain type was commencing to flower', Loudon later wrote, 'and the destroying was a heartbreaking job'.⁴⁷ Coffee became the major industry of the New Guinea highlands in the decades after 1945 but Papua scarcely shared in this development.

Cocoa

Elias Solomon planted cocoa at Loani on the China Strait in the early twenties on a small scale. In 1928-29 he exported 784 pounds valued at £17 and drew £20 from the bounty fund, but none was exported thereafter.⁴⁸ A further attempt to grow cocoa commercially was made on Aroana, a rubber estate between Lolorua and Aroa opened up towards the end of the 1930s by Mrs Vera Ward and Mrs Loudon, but Aroana proved seasonally too dry for success with this culture.⁴⁹ Apart from Solomon no one exported cocoa from Papua until well after 1945 when production began in the former Northern Division.

Miscellaneous ventures

'Peanut Charlie' Gillingham's attempt in 1899 to establish peanuts on Gebaro Island in the Western Division has been mentioned.⁵⁰ Elias Solomon experimented with vanilla beans at Loani but these failed, it was concluded, because bees were absent. BNGD tried planting castor oil seeds at Katea in 1918 after the failure of tobacco, but the new crop was attacked by caterpillars.⁵¹

The Angabunga River Plantations Company in the Mekeo grew bananas during the war years 1914-1918 in the hope of finding an Australian market. In 1915-16, 1,200 bunches valued at £120 were exported.⁵² The company went into liquidation in 1921, its properties passing to Walter Gors's Anglo-Papuan Investments. The new owners planted cotton. When cotton failed, a new Angabunga Plantations enterprise again tried bananas. An Australian preference was sought and denied, and this company too was wound up in 1938.

⁴⁷ Loudon, 'Notes', 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4; *PAR 1928-29*, 21; CRS A518, Item A M 812/1/1, Part 2, Prime Minister's Minute regarding payments under the Bounties Act, 1926-1931, 12 Apr. 1932. In 1929 Solomon's interest in Loani passed to his creditors, the Bank of New South Wales. The property was bought by the Samarai ship-owner J. R. Clay and then by W. P. Gill - possibly a former BNGD manager. Solomon retired to nearby Kwato.

⁴⁹ Loudon, 'Notes', 4.

⁵⁰ See above p. 38. Judge Murray believed that Gillingham was later 'eaten' in the Solomon Islands (CRS A1 20/21573, Murray to Minister, 29 Sept. 1920).

⁵¹ Loudon, 'Notes', 7.

⁵² CRS A1 20/5481. 'Angabunga Plantations Ltd. Reduction of Lease', F. S. Bryce to Sir Joseph Cook, 21 Nov. 1919; *PAR 1915-16*, 23.

Some industries did not require the development of plantations initially but, if successful, might have done so later. There had been a preliminary investigation in 1922 into setting up an industry to make a fuel alcohol, Natalite, from sago palms in the Delta Division. And then there was interest in *kurukuru* (*lalang* or *kunal*) grass.⁵³ In June 1936 a report in the *Papuan Courter* noted that a consortium of New South Wales graziers led by P. R. Higgins, chairman of Standard Portland Cement, had lodged an application to register a British Australian Pulp and Paper Company Ltd with a nominal capital of £3 million. It was intended to enter into an arrangement with British firms to use the long fibrous grass from Papua and New Guinea to produce pulp at a factory in Papua, and manufacture paper at a mill to be built at Port Stephens, north of Sydney, or in Tasmania. The promoters expected that the new company would produce 60,000 tons of bleached paper annually. Forty-five thousand acres of grassland on Collingwood Bay - possibly the old Mombiri lands - were obtained from the Papuan Government. In August the projected output was reduced to between 15,000 and 20,000 tons and the capital required now estimated at £1 million. An engineer from Bertrams Ltd of Edinburgh was brought out to design the machinery. Not strictly a plantation venture, this was to be the 'first big industrial enterprise in Papua'. Neither of these projects proceeded. Five directors of the Commonwealth Hemp Company, agents for British Australian Pulp and Paper, were arrested in Martin Place, Sydney, in 1940 for attempting to defraud shareholders.⁵⁴

In 1936 there seemed no industry where Papua could find an advantage; the country had proved a profound disappointment. In the *Papuan Courter* an anonymous writer about to leave after twenty-one years poured out the sentiments of many of 'the legion of the damned'.

It was not the hardships or the discomforts or the sense of loneliness that makes me so joyful at the prospect of being able to leave it all behind. All these have been and still could be cheerfully borne, if there were any sense of achievement . . . But there is no such feeling and my spirit is oppressed with a sense of futility; a conviction that all the striving and stress of all these years is just a generation of endeavour wasted.

'Adsum' in his regular column, 'Papuanalysis', wrote a few months later that 'not a word of [that] article was untrue' and asked

How many are there here today, we wonder, - or are buried here - who feel or have felt exactly the same . . . What a waste of youth, energy, faith, hopes and money, have gone into plantations of Coconuts, Hemp, Rubber, Coffee etc. Why is it that hopes have never been realized?⁵⁵

⁵³ *Papuan Courter*, 5 June 1936. Further details were published on 21 Aug. and 25 Sept.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 Sept. 1940.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1935, 19 June 1936.

17. Interior: Beatrice Grimshaw's house at Migagi, Rouna Falls. It is a representative scene. Cane furniture, 'squatter's' chair, bookshelves, and, usually, male 'house boys'.

[Beatrice Grimshaw, *Isles of Adventure*, 1930]

18. Servants: Three of the Bruces' children and nurse-maids. These white children are very well cared for. But so also it seems are the two young Papuan women who tend them. One has a gold bracelet. Possibly taken in Sydney or Brisbane, where sometimes Papuan Residents on brief visits were accompanied by their servants.

[The late Mrs Ellen Bruce, Brisbane]

19. Adapting to the country: New house at Paili, Marshall Lagoon, c. 1910. This splendid manager's house of native materials with its surrounding verandah and detached kitchen is typical of many of the first houses erected on plantations.

(E. Nixonwestwood: *New Guinea-Tonga Album*, National Library of Australia)

20. An opposition voice: The *Papuan Times* press, c. 1912. The paper began publication in 1911 and William Bruce remained the editor until 1917. It was succeeded by the *Papuan Courier* in 1918.

(The late Mrs Ellen Bruce, Brisbane)

21. On the steps at Koltaki, c. 1915. From left, Winifred Penny, Tom Nevitt, woman and boy unknown, Ruth Pratt, Tom Sefton. Probably photographed after a ride through the plantation. Miss Penny the school teacher subsequently married G. A. Loudon of BNGD and Miss Pratt Tom Sefton.
[Mr Colin Sefton, Sydney]

22. Vice-regal party at Koltaki, 1929. Centre left: the Governor General's aide-de-camp; centre: Tom Sefton (with topee); centre right: Sir Hubert Murray (in white), Lady Stonehaven, the Governor General Lord Stonehaven (hidden by coat) and Leonard Murray.
[Mr Colin Sefton]

23. A rougher society: The Sapphire Creek Gynkhana Committee, 18 May 1913. The group includes Tom Nevitt (third from left at rear), James Matley (with pipe), Campbell Cowley (centre rear), A. O. Wallace (with spectacles), Richard Jensen (far right), Tom Sefton (centre), and Guy de Moleyns, (centre right). The others unidentified are Messrs Thomas, Harmont, Rydal, Fry and Simmonds. [Mr Colin Sefton]

24. A settler establishment: At the racecourse, c. 1938. From left, Gerald Smith, E. J. Frame, hidden unknown, R. A. Goodyear, E. T. Ward (?), E. A. James, Arthur Jewell (?), P. J. MacDonald, Tom Sefton, Tom Nevitt, J. B. McKenna, Fred Godson. [Mr Colin Sefton]

PART VI

Planter Papua

People indulge in a lot of shoddy moral indignation about the 'settler mentality'. Let them face in practice the decisions involved, and then talk.

James McAuley, 'My New Guinea', *Quadrant*, Vol. 5, No 3, 1961.

The colonial plantation was always an enclave of racial discrimination; in New Guinea the tensions between the white manager and the coloured labour force, the first with his family in the house, the second housed in the dreary barracks of the labour lines, have been expressed for too long in the (long illegal) use or threat of violence as the basic labour incentive. Generations of this kind of experience have inevitably coloured the views of the white man held by villagers.

Charles Rowley, *The New Guinea Villager*, F. W. Cheshire, 1965.

CHAPTER 18

The planters' world

WHAT EXPECTATIONS did inexperienced settlers coming to Papua hold about the kind of life they would live? If they came, as most did, after 1909, they might have devoured Staniforth Smith's *Handbook of the Territory of Papua* in the first or subsequent editions and found it full of reassuring detail. Some would have read one of Beatrice Grimshaw's articles or *The New New Guinea*. Many middle class settlers must have been familiar with the South Seas stories of Robert Louis Stevenson or Louis Becke. All had some idea of plantation life as it had been recently seen in Queensland or as it could still be found in Fiji. Plantation societies had existed in the Americas for three centuries and in parts of the East for nearly as long - plantations could seem a permanent part of the periphery of the world Europeans had created. To some the actuality they faced in Papua would always fall short of the expectations that these images aroused and planters could think that they had chosen the wrong country or arrived too late. Nonetheless, the nature of the common plantation enterprise - the experience of clearing the land, the management of alien labour, the conscious adjustment to a new climate and country - created a sense of identity and shared destiny among planters which, like the group loyalties among settlers elsewhere, could be given at first an exaggerated significance, but acquire in time great sentimental power.

Beatrice Grimshaw in her autobiographical account of her South Seas wanderings as a journalist and author of popular romances, *Isles of Adventure*, wrote that

If I were asked what I have most enjoyed in my life, I think I should say the clearing of that forest. No one who has not done clearing can imagine the delights of it. You have obtained from the Government so many acres of forest, paying nothing but a few shillings for your ninety-nine year lease; you know that you will have no rent to pay for ten years, and after that only a few pence an acre. The place is yours to dispose of for a century . . .

Your team of 'boys' . . . has been collected and signed on; they are your servants for three years, provided you treat them well, and their wages will be no more than ten shillings a month each man. Just before daylight . . . you will wake . . . and go out on the verandah for roll call. The sun is rising now, and your native labourers dressed in cotton loin cloths, or in the native next-to-nothing of dried leaves, stand in line . . . all but one boy who has been told to go ahead with the cooking. After roll-call comes medical parade; cuts and sores are dressed, medicines, if necessary, are given out. Then you go to breakfast . . . One by one the big trees fall to the

accompaniment of wild screams and singing, and by the middle of the day your boys . . . have transformed a good slice of the landscape.

Power? Authority? You can revel in both to the top of your bent . . . You have been down to the sea, taken your whaleboat across to Samarai. You return, after a day of absence, walk up the long dark forest track and see, ahead of you, a break of light that was not there yesterday. For the first time in centuries, the sun has touched the earth of those dusk acres. For the first time, since those hills beyond were made, man may look upon them from the valley below. And you have done it . . . Power!¹

Beatrice had recollected these emotions in tranquillity years afterwards but similar thoughts occurred to Percy Robinson clearing land at Ogamobu in December 1919. Writing to his wife in the heat of the moment he found that

Achievements on a large scale have their compensations for the hard work and self denial that go into their making - if they are successful. I have just been watching the impenetrable jungle that I used to struggle into, and get lost in, less than four months ago, rising to the high heavens in flame and smoke. It is good to see, and good to contemplate good work well done. And the scale is large enough for anyone. Imagine an area equal to a line from the Hackney Hotel to the Parliament House corner then down King William Street to City Bridge along Queen's Drive to Hackney Bridge and back along Hackney Road to the corner you started from - that is the size of the block you have to imagine thickly strewn with great trees, branches, and dry scrub six feet or more deep & closely packed - some fire eh!²

Robinson's deep satisfaction was almost certainly shared by his 'boys' as they feasted, danced and rested for three days after completion of the work. He wrote

I killed 'Scotty Currie' [a Berkshire pig] for the feast . . . They decorated themselves and their houses with variegated leaves and flowers & created really a most effective scene of festivity. I bought up seven dozen discarded flags . . . and presented them to the boys & you would have laughed to see the use they made of them . . . The whole affair was . . . a good stunt.³

In his letter of 20 March 1920 he described his 'regular routine'. It varied little from Beatrice Grimshaw's.

A bell rings a 5.30 and we have coffee and a pipe while the boys eat breakfast (which consists of sweet potatoes cooked over night and left in the boss boys' charge) then at 6 there is a violent uproar of conch shells and the gangs "fall in". We have 150 now so it is quite a gathering. Then the various tasks are allotted, food for lunch served out, sores and sickness treated and we depart for work. At eight, having seen the various gangs well started on their respective jobs we come in to breakfast and a smoke. Then back on the job till noon when everyone knocks off for

¹ Beatrice Grimshaw, *Isles of Adventure* (London 1930), 210.

² Percy Robinson, Robinson Letters, 12 Dec. 1919. In the possession of the family of the late Mrs Penelope Hope of Canberra. They are cited below as the Robinson Letters. Her parents' letters are extensively used in Mrs Hope's *Long ago is far away* (Canberra 1979).

³ Ibid.

lunch till one P.M. Then back again till 5.30 which makes the even twelve hours round. Then I bath and shave, get into my pyjamas and eat some food and after a pipe on the verandah turn in with a book until the nine o'clock gun by which time I am good and ready for sleep.⁴

If for the planter - his routines dictated by meaningful work - such a life was deeply fulfilling, to some close observers his world could appear drab and conventional despite the exotic setting, the settler trapped by his own narrow perspective as much as by physical isolation. Tough and frequently profane, with the sardonic outlook of Australians and eschewing any pretence to intellectual or cultural interests beyond a taste for farce, drink and sport, the typical settler disclosed little of a sense of wonder or appreciation of any beauty in his surroundings. In 1917, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski wrote 'How shall I describe Samarai . . . The contradiction between the picturesque landscape, the poetic quality of the island set on the ocean, and the wretchedness of life here'. Periodically depressed by Trobriander culture on Kiriwina he sought company in the little town. But the white residents 'filled [him] with dislike . . . I shudder at the thought of how life looks from their point of view'. He found them 'ordinary people who are incapable of finding a glimmer of poetry in certain things that fill me with exaltation' - even as he guiltily flirted with one or two of the prettier women among them. Unpleasant jokes made about his Austrian citizenship by Australian officials he found 'Loathsome, and the effect . . . depressing. These fellows have such fabulous opportunities - the sea, ships, the jungle, power over the natives - and don't do a thing!'⁵

Evelyn Cheesman, an entomologist collecting in Papua and the New Hebrides, recalled much later that in her experience 'it was the planters that lived the most lonely lives'. Unlike even the missionaries who were joined in communities with frequent contact between their members, planters were often isolated and alone, chained to their plantations for many months at a time, their only company their Papuan 'boys', with whom no real dialogue was either wise or easy, or a dog. Or,

There might be a wife, or young children before they were old enough to send to school. Sometimes it was a man without responsibilities, and on the whole these were the happiest . . . it was no life for an ordinary woman unused to privations. (This point of view should be remembered when men are despised for taking a native wife.)⁶

⁴ Ibid., 20 Mar. 1920.

⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, *A diary in the strict sense of the term* (London 1967), 112, 12 Nov. 1917; p. 167, 27 Dec. 1917; p. 21, 5 Oct. 1914.

⁶ Evelyn Cheesman, *Who stand alone* (London 1965), 8.

No ordinary woman herself and possessing the freedom and the means to visit remote places and leave them again as she finished her work after a month or two, Evelyn Cheesman could attest to the 'stark greyness of these lonely lives' that 'can scarcely be imagined except by those who have experienced it' even as she enjoyed the spare amenities of a planter's house after weeks in the bush. The people she remembered most vividly were clearly not the planters of popular imagination among people down 'south' in Australia or at 'home' in England, sipping gin on a verandah in some South Seas tropical idyll, but

Little cells of humanity tucked away in the vast untamed wilds . . . Their own known world out of reach below the horizon, and their present life colourless . . . Hundreds of men and women endured this, in the days before radio and air communications . . . Mail was left at anchorages and small ports, thence to make hazardous journeys to its destination - precious packages in waterproof covering.⁷

Isolated planters expected passing coastal boats and patrols to visit and accept hospitality and the failure of a white skipper to pause, without explanation, was deeply felt. In a letter of 1921 Percy Robinson noted that the Freshwaters at Madiri had been 'a bit cold at first' when he called. They had thought that he had 'gone South for good' but were most upset because Percy's brother-in-law, Arthur Williams, recruiting on the Fly, had sailed past three times, and with his new wife aboard, without stopping by.⁸ Evelyn Cheesman recalled the greeting and 'querulous and impatient' voice of a lone planter's wife trapped by the choices she had made and desperate for white company: 'Yours is the first civilised voice I have heard for thirteen months since the last ship anchored here, except my Hubby's - and he only talks about the copra market!'⁹

Other women could summon up the strength to manage entirely alone. Two Americans, John and Margaret Vandercook, travelling the Pacific on tramps and coastal steamers, called into Papuan ports in 1931. In *Dark Islands*, John Vandercook recounted a visit they made to Ogamobu where they stayed with Bill Jefferson and his wife for several weeks.¹⁰ During their stay the Jeffersons were also visited by a woman, a 'Mrs Evans', who, together with her eleven year old daughter, unexpectedly tied up her schooner at the jetty. 'Mrs Evans', as Vandercook understood it, had decided to 'open up' a rubber plantation on the Fly River and had come to Jefferson for practical advice

⁷ Ibid., 9, 11.

⁸ Robinson Letters, Apr. 1921. Arthur Williams later became an electrician in 'Port'.

⁹ Cheesman, *Who stand alone*, 13.

¹⁰ John W. Vandercook, *Dark Islands* (London 1938), 234-9. William Jefferson was manager of Ogamobu for BNGD after the collapse of a partnership (1924-29) of Percy Robinson, G. A. Loudon and Thomas Ryan. He obtained a position on a Malayan estate in 1934.

about cultivation. The woman described can only have been Mrs Janet Cowling, the widow by this time of John Cowling of Mibu. In 1931 Janet Cowling took out a lease over the old Papuan Industries plantation at Madiri from the Unevangelised Fields Mission, and might indeed have gone to learn a few details about rubber from Jefferson just as Percy Robinson, a decade before, had gone from Ogamobu to Madiri to learn from James Freshwater. A farmer's daughter from Yorkshire, Janet Wallis had gone out to Papua to be housekeeper for a 'rich planter'. John Cowling was apparently well read but hardly wealthy. They were married in Port Moresby in 1920. Visiting Mibu only eight months after her arrival and while Cowling was away recruiting on the Fly, A. P. Lyons, then RM at Daru, 'hadn't the slightest doubt' that Mrs Cowling was 'supervising [her workers] much more thoroughly & capably than her spouse'.¹¹ After Cowling's death in 1929 she remained on their plantation, where, as Vandercook gathered from the Jeffersons, 'barefoot, ponderous, with a heavy rifle always in her hands, she marshalled her Fly River boys . . . digging drainage ditches, setting out new groves' in that unpromising place.

Accepting the minimum of hospitality and sleeping aboard her boat 'Mrs Evans' departed Ogamobu as soon as she could, a striking but quite credible figure and representative of a group of pioneer women of great strength and courage. Elizabeth Mahony, 'Queen of Sudest', was another and so also had been Joan Mickle McCrann of Baia near Domara. Controlling her labourers 'exceedingly well' and adopting 'exactly the same methods she knew a man would have done', Mrs McCrann seldom saw visitors.¹² In 1910 she tended Mrs Lett dying in childbirth on nearby Kauru. She died herself in 1912, 'fevered and alone', aged fifty-four having spent five years developing the property she shared with the publican of the 'lower pub' in Port, Thomas McCrann. Mrs Elizabeth Whitten of Samarai and Mrs Vera Ward of Veimaui were planters in their own right alongside their husbands, and Mrs Millicent Jewell, wife of Arthur Jewell and a 'handsome woman' in the recollection of several old planters, continued to directly manage their Papuan interests after her husband's death in 1943. There were other such women.

The war of 1914-18 took its tithe of young men from among the planters and their families as from among the officials. Harry and Margaret Catt of the government plantation at Baibara lost their only son in August 1916 at Pozières. Staniforth Smith made sure he visited the boy's grave before leaving

¹¹ A. P. Lyons RM, Western Division, Journals (MSS), 9 Oct. 1920. Perhaps Mrs Cowling had been soon driven to assert herself for Lyons also noted that 'John Cowling's good nature & indulgence of the natives is [sic] well recognised by those who know him best'.

¹² *Papuan Courier*, 31 Jan. 1912.

Europe in 1919 after active service.¹³ A son of James Osborne of Hagita, Milne Bay, was killed in July 1918. Harry 'Hardy' Gofton, a plantation assistant in the Eastern Division and briefly the 'Port' butcher in 1914, had been killed in March. His pretty wife left alone in Samarai was one of those who attracted Malinowski's eye in 1917. She visited Harry's grave in 1922, remarried and started a hotel at Bulolo in the Mandated Territory. Charles Evenett, only son of 'Brassy' Evenett of East Cape, had joined the 9th Battalion. Badly wounded he died at Cairns in December 1919 on his way home to Papua. Campbell Cowley of Mogubo also returned from France in 1919 and died within a year possibly as a result of war injuries. Judge Murray counted 120 Papuan white residents who had gone off to war, some forty-five from among the officials; the remainder must have included many assistants from the estates.¹⁴ William Bruce noted in 1915 that the *Papuan Times* had been received and read by at least five 'Papuan' with the AIF at Gallipoli.¹⁵

And settlers shared vengeful feelings towards those 'who started the war'. Two Germans returning to work in Papua on the *Marsina* in January 1920 were not permitted to remain ashore by a hostile group of residents.¹⁶ One, Carl Etting, had managed Dedele for Mrs Elizabeth Whitten for a time until 1915 when he was interned in Australia.

As time went by the white community became increasingly integrated by marriage. Few women remained either single or widows for long and many were recognised as having very strong characters. Archie MacAlpine's brother Alex was an RM and his sisters married C. R. Baldwin, the 'Port' merchant, and J. G. Fowler, a plantation manager who became an ARM. Of the planter triumvirate of G. A. Loudon of BNGD and Eilogo, Tom Sefton of Koitaki, and Arthur Jewell of Lolorua, Loudon married the second school mistress at Port Moresby, Winifred Penny, Sefton married Ruth Pratt, daughter of Surveyor A. E. Pratt, and Jewell married Millicent Francis, a BNGD employee. W. H. Wright of Giligili and Ahioma married Doris, daughter of Surveyor Septimus Tooth of Samarai. Daisy English, wife of A. C. English of Rigo, was a sister of E. C. Skelly, a Samarai publican, and a sister-in-law of Bertram Bramell, Commissioner of Native Affairs. Of the daughters of Mrs Ashton of Huiva in the Gulf Division, and 'Port' baker in 1914, Vera married Ernest Trevor Ward, Whiting's manager at Veimauri, and Violet, a former miner and a planter at Mei in the Gulf Division, Charles Priddle. Widowed in 1925, Vi Priddle in 1941

¹³ NLA Deposit 1709, Staniforth Smith Papers. A letter dated 30 Apr. 1918 from Harry Catt to Staniforth Smith asks for a photograph of the younger Harry's grave.

¹⁴ Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 65, 14 Dec. 1915; letter No 67, 6 Aug. 1916, increased the estimate to 140.

¹⁵ *Papuan Times*, 15 Sept. 1915. One of the five named was W. M. Middleton subsequently a partner for a time of Hobart Spiller of Menapi (Baniara). See above p. 91.

¹⁶ *Papuan Courier*, 9 and 16 Jan. 1920.

married Tom Nevitt, by then BNGD general manager. Vera and Violet's brother married A. H. Bunting's daughter Meg. Kathleen, wife of Arthur Gors, was widowed in 1928 and married the BNGD manager at Aroa, Arthur Pollard, in 1930. In the same year Arthur Drummond, previously a brash young assistant on Ogamobu, married the widow of Robert Shaw-Moody of Huiva and became a planter in his own right. Celia, widow of Donald MacDonald of Vaiviri, might have been briefly engaged to Captain Fitch in 1937. There were many other unions and interconnections among the white 'Papuan'.¹⁷

An increase in the risks to health and especially to the health of children was a heavy price paid by Europeans who committed themselves to isolated lives throughout the tropics. Malaria was endemic in coastal Papua and New Guinea and few settlers escaped entirely from bouts of fever. At least five white children died in a 'dysentery epidemic' that swept Port in 1912, including two of William and Ellen Bruce's babies, a child of Lewis Cowley, the second general manager of BNGD, and a child of Albert and Daisy English of Rigo. Lewis Lett's first wife had died in childbirth in the isolation of an estate, and his only son, a child of his second marriage, young Richard Lett, died in 1931 aged 11 years. Among other settlers the miners in particular, mostly single men or by the nature of their work living apart from wives in Cooktown or Sydney, careless about their food, insect bites and shelter, were particularly vulnerable - as were many of the Papuans who worked for them and shared their camps. Many died intestate in Papua. Assistants on the estates, often like the miners heavy drinkers and single, were likewise plentiful among the casualties of empire.

In 1929 Alice Keelan, wife of an ARM badly shell-shocked in the war and given charge of Gobaregere, the government plantation on the Kemp Welch, published *In the Land of Dohori* a revealing and often bitter account of five years lived in Papua from 1920. While confident about the moral and rational superiority of 'white' civilisation, she reserved her harshest judgements for the many malicious and ungenerous white people she encountered. She was just as confident that Papuans generally were unreliable, lazy, mendacious, superstitious, incompetent and dirty, while she remembered particularly fine qualities in many individuals. She accepted her husband's code that responsible Europeans must maintain their dignity, honour their pledges and deal justly with the native people. That some did not was deplorable and for

¹⁷ Names associated with Papua were given to some white children. Frank 'Snowy' Clarke of Domara and later of Robinson River called his son Domara; Bill Voysey, a BNGD manager, gave the name Doa to a daughter born on the plantation of the name; Harry Gofton's son was named Moresby; and Ted Clay, a recruiter in the western divisions, called his daughter Varoe after his boat, itself named after a place on the Kikori by its one-time owner, Percy Robinson. These instances were well known. There may have been others.

a 'white man to go native', actually live like one, she agreed with Jack Keelan 'seems like a degradation of the whole white race and pierces one's very soul'.¹⁸

The expression of such attitudes may have been common enough among both officials and middle-class settlers throughout the British colonial world but they were attitudes worked through and given assent in the fire of countless circumstances where to act other than according to the simple principle of maintaining white 'prestige' could only be seen as betrayal. Keeping social distance between the races was an imperative that came easily to an already very class conscious and sexually inhibited white community whose own children were protected from adult realities well into adolescence. Camaraderie, loyalty, undemonstrative affection and trust there could be between white 'Papuan' and Papuan 'natives' but seldom - it is tempting to say never - as equals, never without an overriding awareness, on both sides it seems, of an unbridgeable difference in cosmic predicament.

There had been disturbing signs of change as some Papuans in the towns, who had become familiar with Europeans at home and at play and had had opportunities to assess that the *taubadas* and *snabadas* were neither morally impeccable nor omniscient, could feel that they might show some defiance, steal, or make a sexual advance and perhaps escape unpunished. Anxiety among residents of Port Moresby about a decline in respect for Europeans reached a peak in 1926 when a *White Women's Protection Ordinance* was passed and the death penalty made mandatory in cases of rape or attempted rape of a white woman or child.¹⁹ The discriminatory provisions of the measure seemed quite justified and necessary to a community increasingly self-absorbed, suburban, and some will say hypocritical in its prevailing outlook. The loosening of restraints among Europeans in the post-war world had not made them generally less racially prejudiced; indeed changes in sexual mores and dress since 1914 had probably heightened their awareness of being vulnerable in alien eyes.

On outstations and plantations white women and children continued to live as before - apparently exposed to great danger and far from the aid of other Europeans - but very few convictions on charges of being 'within the curtilage of a house without good cause', or of actual or intended assault of a white woman or child, appear to relate to incidents that took place outside Port Moresby or Samarai. An attempted rape occurred at Kerema in the Gulf Division in December 1925.²⁰ It was one of two cases reported by the

¹⁸ Alice Jeannetta Keelan, *In the Land of Dohort* (Sydney 1929), 225.

¹⁹ The events leading to the passage of this ordinance are recounted in Amirah Inglis's *Not a white woman safe* (Canberra 1974).

²⁰ CRS A518, Item D840/1/5, Murray to Minister, 28 Dec. 1925.

Lieutenant Governor to the Minister at the height of the Port Moresby agitation over the safety of white women. Another took place at Bwagaoia on Misima in 1930.²¹ If there were very few assaults of any kind upon isolated white women, incidents of common assault on plantations between men, including violence involving white men, were, as we shall see in the following chapter, hardly infrequent.

The failings and virtues of Papuan employees were as often the subject of conversation among settlers as their own health or the weather. In April 1921, Percy Robinson of Ogamobu described his cook, Hepea, as

a treasure that I have just signed on at 15/- a month & is equal and better than the Pt Moresby house boys at £2. He can make splendid bread and cooks very well . . . He has good manners . . . [and] goes for a swim each afternoon.

A week later Hepea was 'a wonder' who had presented him 'with a pidgeon [sic] pie . . . We thank each other most courteously on all necessary occasions and he always addresses me as "Sir" or "Taubada".'

Hepea's predecessor, Aumockel, had been 'quite tolerable' requiring only a whisper to know what to do. Vagi, one of the crew of Robinson's vessel was 'an expert cook, natural born mechanic, experienced seaman & can sew and mend like a tailor'. Two years later Vagi was found to know how to milk cows and Robinson was unstinting in his praise - 'I have yet to find anything he doesn't know about'.²² Such detail may suggest that relations were at the least amiable much of the time at Ogamobu and that Robinson was indeed a sensitive employer. Was he extraordinary or were 'his' Papuans exceptional? Or was it that, despite a level of conflict and misunderstanding that was inevitable, co-operative relations prevailed much of the time in most work places? Nowhere in his frank and confidential letters did Robinson admit to thrashing Papuans. He frequently deplored as quite unnecessary the use by his brother-in-law and other Europeans of violence as a means of controlling labour even as he was quite prepared to physically threaten several of his white employees himself.

In Alice Keelan's *Land of Dohort*, both Jack Keelan on several occasions, and Alice at least once, hit out in anger at Papuans who were deliberately defying them and she wrote 'there were many times when my hands ached to give Toia [her "house boy" at Gobaregere] the shaking he so richly deserves'.²³ She was not unique. Indeed two white women in 1912, and another in 1919, were convicted and fined for assaulting their domestic

²¹ NAPNG, Series 485, Box 806, Station Records, Banlara and Cape Nelson, Circular No. 263, 12 Dec. 1930.

²² Robinson Letters, 29 Apr. 1921, 8 May 1921, 28 Dec. 1918, 11 Sept. 1920.

²³ Keelan, *In the Land of Dohort*, 133.

servants in Port Moresby.²⁴ Alice could see the dangers in legally permitting employers the right to corporally punish their 'boys' but could believe that some might be so placed as to need to use corporal punishment.

Yet she came increasingly to see how Papuans might view their situation and was often taxed by questions Toia asked. He had heard about the war in Europe and wanted to know why white people were not gaoled, as Papuans were, for fighting. 'For a moment I was non-plussed. The white race had evidently been arraigned before a native parliament at some time or other, and the inconsistencies of the white man's theory and practice severely commented on'.²⁵ Later Toia asked how the white man found New Guinea and how he had thought about making guns, having clearly identified the two essentials, ships and firearms - rather than the moral and intellectual superiority Europeans supposed to be their advantage - that in Papuan eyes had made the white man supreme. Mrs Keelan learned 'that the native evidently thinks his own thoughts, even while he seeks information on them from a white person whom he trusts. And I was forced to admire the wisdom that seeks "the other fellow's" point of view while yielding no enlightenment on his own. Would that we understood the Papuan as thoroughly as he understands us!' She 'was conscious of a feeling of genuine regret when the day of [Toia's] departure arrived. As natives go, he was a wonderful boy, and surprisingly honest and loyal'.²⁶

When, after repeated attacks of shell-shock, Jack Keelan was finally invalided out of the service, he and his wife decided to settle as planters on a small-holding at Sogeri hoping that when the road then under way to the tableland was complete they could live comfortably off their property and his pension. After enduring many hardships and frustrations, and the lofty hostility of Tom Sefton of Koitaki whose identity is only barely disguised in Alice's book, the Keelans gave up their lease when work on the road was abruptly abandoned in 1926. Those bruised by their Papuan experience could imagine that the country was 'cursed' in some way, that they had been enticed into compromising themselves with a painted harlot. No one who had lived in Papua, it seems, could leave unaffected by it. In *In the Land of Dohort* the pain is palpable.

Alice Keelan's book was one of many dealing with Papua or having a Papuan background. Scarcely a year went by after 1910 without the publication of a work of anthropology, missionary annals, travel or fiction about the Territory. These were widely read and with its tree houses and houses built over the sea, its *dubus* and *ravls*, cannibals and sorcery, Papua

²⁴ *Papuan Times*, 28 Feb. and 6 Mar. 1912. *Papuan Courter*, 18 Dec. 1919.

²⁵ Keelan, *In the Land of Dohort*, 72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-5.

became a country imagined familiar by schoolboys, armchair travellers, philatelists and scholars in many places. Bronislaw Malinowski's studies of Trobriand Islands culture based on two years spent in Papua between 1915 and 1918 placed the country at the centre of anthropological attention. His books commencing with *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* began appearing in 1922; his last major Trobriand work, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, was published in 1935.²⁷ Settler Papua too inspired a small industry, in fiction. Living in Papua for much of the period between 1907 and 1934, Beatrice Grimshaw wrote over twenty novels and numerous stories, many with a Papuan setting. Generally peopled by larger than life characters and with implausible plots her novels served to develop and feed a market in South Seas romances for adults. In her first and best 'Papuan' tale, *When the Red Gods Call* (1911), the daughter of the 'Governor' of Papua marries a planter, Hugh Lynch, a man educated at Harrow and Sandhurst, but who she subsequently learns has been previously married to a Papuan girl. The girl is dead, but hurt and indignant, Stephanie Hammond leaves Lynch and goes back to England. Hugh, repenting his earlier youthful folly, has never compromised himself in any other way with the 'native' and years later Stephanie returns to Papua and her husband realising that she is bound to him by the bonds of marriage. Conventional morality is vindicated and a delicate question of racial relationships resolved.²⁸ Papuan settlers, no doubt, were among those who read Beatrice Grimshaw's books but they can hardly have regarded them as lifelike.

Rather better drawn images of their world were realised in several novels written by Gilbert Munro Turnbull, an architectural draftsman employed in the Department of Public Works (1914-1934). In Munro Turnbull's novel, *Paradise Plumes* (1934), Stephen Blake, an incorruptible RM returning to Papua aboard the 'Moratau', falls in love with a young woman on her way to marry a planter, Harry Merton, a man Blake knows to be a scoundrel. Merton has previously lived with a Papuan girl - a fact that in any man of honour would have prevented him contemplating ever marrying a white woman. Again the husband conceals his past, his subsequent crude and bullying behaviour consistent with that of a weak man who has betrayed his caste. The drama is resolved when Merton is killed by Loana, his Papuan mistress, with Blake neatly shielding Lesley Merton from the facts of her husband's shame. To balance the figure of Harry Merton, Munro Turnbull provides old Tod Lorimer, a rough but worthy pioneer and planter, the widower of a Papuan woman, who has honourably accepted the consequences of his union. His daughter

²⁷ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London 1922); idem, *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (London 1935).

²⁸ Beatrice Grimshaw, *When the Red Gods Call* (London 1911).

Moira is placed in an unenviable position. Although educated by the nuns at Yule Island - as indeed were many children of mixed race in Papua - she cannot finally escape her Papuan heritage and her 'lapses' into chewing betel nut 'bewilder' and 'frighten' her father. Turnbull allows Lesley Merton to find Moira's treatment by white men hypocritical but when she taxes Blake about the girl the RM has to shrug his shoulders. Lesley does not understand. *Paradise Plumes* says much about the outlook of a generation for whom an alternative scheme of things was literally unthinkable.²⁹

Planters themselves, while they could be the subject of romantic fiction or writers of occasional letters of complaint, were mostly 'doers' rather than observers. Lewis Lett and his second wife Mollie were both writers and planters for a time but wrote no planter reminiscences. Indeed few settlers left records of any kind at all. The books, therefore, of Beatrice Grimshaw, Alice Keelan, Munro Turnbull and others, and the material in the *Papuan Times* and the *Papuan Courier* provide information that must be relied upon heavily in reconstructing the settler world in Papua. But in the extraordinary letters of Percy Robinson of Ogamobu there is another order of material available - abundance of detail, immediacy, strain, fatigue, elation, humour, emotion. Comprising almost a weekly diary at times, they singularly allow an intimate acquaintance with one planter. It is beyond the limits of this study to exploit all of their richness though their value must be apparent. Robinson was a sensitive, aggressive and highly strung man, his wife and correspondent an interested and informed reader. Irene Robinson had been to Kikori on a visit with Percy in 1916 and part of the value of the letters lies in this - that Robinson could assume her understanding of much that he subsequently wrote about. And for Percy Robinson, Ogamobu was from the outset to be his 'greatest and last adventure', one in which he had invested everything.³⁰

A dissatisfied public servant on his way to look at farming land being offered for settlement on the Daly River in the Northern Territory, Robinson was attracted to Papua at a chance meeting with H. C. Cardew, the ARM from Kikori, when calling at Thursday Island in 1914. He decided to interrupt his voyage to see the Papuan Gulf, and like Theodore Bevan before him, was captivated by the meretricious charms of what he saw, 'the whole trip' being 'like the most brilliant of my anticipations . . . calm smooth water, perfect weather and an intensely fascinating tropical jungle within a stone's throw of the boat practically all the way. It realized my wildest imaginings & seemed almost too good to be true'.³¹ At the Kikori station, he found the view from

²⁹ G. Munro Turnbull, *Paradise Plumes* (Sydney 1934).

³⁰ Robinson Letters, 1 Jan. 1920. See Penelope Hope's *Long ago is far away* (Canberra 1979).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1914.

Cardew's house 'enough to bring tears to your eyes'. If Robinson was interested in taking up land on the Kikori rather than on the Daly, the ARM suggested, *he* would be prepared to be a silent - and preferably unidentified - partner in the enterprise.³²

At Daru Robinson decided to accompany Percy Beach, a recruiter, on a short trip to Parama Island where he 'couldn't think of anything better to do with myself but stand around & look as much like the dominant white race as possible'.³³ But this experience was also inspirational. At home in Broken Hill and Adelaide he laid before several investors proposals to develop a coconut plantation at the Kikori River which he thought could be partly financed out of the proceeds of recruiting labour in the western Divisions. He returned to Papua placing his two brothers-in-law, Arthur and Claud Williams, in charge of a lease he had taken out on the river at Ogamobu above the Kikori government station.

In May 1918, having persuaded several Melbourne investors to join him in a company, Kikori Plantations, to take over the lease, Percy Robinson went to Papua to directly manage Ogamobu. By August he had been again to Port, had argued with Arthur Bloomfield over a recruiting agreement, and had been asked to join the Papua Club by G. A. Loudon. He was elected to the council of the recently revived Planters' Association. While yet again in Port on 11 November Percy noted in his letter that the Club's rooms had become his temporary office. Three days later he was to bring news of the armistice in Europe to Kikori.

At the time of his arrival at Ogamobu most of the lease still remained to be cleared and planted with rubber, coconuts having proved unsatisfactory on the first blocks planted by Arthur Williams in that extremely wet place. In his letters to Irene Robinson, Percy tried to convey the atmosphere and excitement of the estate at the clearing stage:

My first day in charge here was celebrated by quite a chapter of accidents. I hardly arrived on the clearing to inspect the work before one of the scrub cutters presented for my inspection a horribly gashed foot that he had cut with his axe. I fixed him up & sent him off just in time to receive another with a cracked head - don't know how he did it. Then as a final catastrophe, a tree fell on Dimabi and killed him instantly. As you have probably never heard a hundred savages doing their death wail you can have no idea of the uproar. I knocked them off and started for the house with the body & then all the women joined the chorus . . . We buried him this morning and the incident is apparently forgotten already.³⁴

³² Ibid., Easter Sunday 1914. Shortly afterwards Cardew joined the Australian military administration in German New Guinea. He was not an investor in Ogamobu.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 18 Oct. 1918.

He could not resist condemning Arthur Williams's frequently violent treatment of labourers when it seemed that careful thought could almost invariably prevent trouble. He continued,

You remember Dimabi? He was boat boy on the launch. Arthur beat him up & got fined five pounds. So I took him from the launch & put him to work at Ogamobu to keep him out of Arthur's way. This continual trouble with the Authorities has got to be stopped somehow . . . it is only a matter of time before Woodward, the new magistrate, will be a 'cow' also unless I can devise some means to check [Arthur's] unruly conduct. He was full of good resolutions after Woodward arrived but . . . was [soon] again talking about 'black swine' & 'belting their blocks off' & generally performing in his old pleasant manner.³⁵

By December he could write of a clever scheme he had conceived to keep up the morale of the labour force:

After the end of next week we will have a block of 100 acres right in the middle still to do. This may strike you as a queer way to attack the job but it is still part of the 'kidding' process. It is partly this scheme that has kept the labour from losing heart in the face of the magnitude of the task . . . [for] in the isolated patch is now collected all the wallabies, cassowaries etc. that may have been about and so just at the time when the labour is heartily sick of the whole thing they will bog in like seven devils to get at the game . . . Three hundred acres of virgin jungle looked a fearful task. I confess that when I scrambled through to the back line the first day my heart failed me - it seemed such a cheek for us human insects to undertake to remove all that millions of tons off the face of the earth . . . you can imagine what it feels like to struggle into it for a mile & then sit down & realise that you have undertaken to remove it all. The way I started was to work out a week's task on my programme. Then I divided it into strips from west to east of such width that if the boys did their work they came out at the home end on Saturday morning. They were getting nearer home every day & if they failed to reach there on Saturday morning they worked Saturday afternoon. So it became a sort of game & kept their minds off the rest of the job.³⁶

Recruiting labour in the west for plantations in the Central Division was to pay the day to day development costs at Ogamobu and it was essential to have competent and experienced crew on the company's vessel, the *Varoe*. Percy was quite candid in admitting his complete dependence on good men among the Papuans, and he resorted to careful stratagems to retain them. Sometimes these came unstuck.

It was rather amusing to notice the effect of his [Igua's] dismissal on the crew. They are picked boys and know their value too well. Consequently they were inclined to hold out as a great favour the prospect of their signing on again. But since I sacked Igua it has thrown a scare into them and each one has come to me in great anxiety to know if I will sign them on again. Rather a change from their previous attitude. I was awfully relieved when Heagi came to me on the same errand tho' I was afraid

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 4 Oct. 1919.

he might leave me and I do not know how I could manage without him . . . he is quite the best on the coast . . . They are a fine crew . . . I can see that they approve of me too, as a boss although I don't think they respect me very much - it is more a sort of pity for a harmless individual that gives as little trouble as possible.³⁷

In December 1918 he thought Heagi and the crew were 'get[ting] on with me and each other in a most satisfactory way . . . I am most awfully relieved as I simply couldn't carry on if it was really necessary for discipline to behave in the blackguardly manner that Arthur claims is the only way' to deal with Papuans. A month later, however, Heagi walked out after demanding £1 more a month in wages. Refusing at first, Percy was finally forced to go into Hanuabada and beg his skipper to return. By 1920 Percy Robinson's earnings from recruiting with the *Varoe* had reached £6,000 and had substantially paid for the costs of development at Ogamobu in the preceding two years.³⁸

With the agricultural labourers the same care needed to be taken in the selection of boss-boys and in weeding out those elements among the labourers that spread disaffection or shirked on the job. Labour contentment, it seems, was not only a result of careful management and consideration shown by an employer. Labourers could bring with them, or learn from other workers, attitudes that could threaten good relations on the plantation. Percy was pleased if his judgement was confirmed:

Bydalu - the warder in the Kikori Hospital who humbugged along Evoi's wife - well . . . I put him on for a month on trial much against Arthur's advice . . . and he turned out an absolute prize winner . . . So I shot out Evuga & the rest of his crew of loafers and am now well satisfied with the staff at Ogamobu. Nearly all the old guard have been paid off and I have 60 brand new boys (signed on for 3 years) who have no bad traditions to overcome. I finished up the 100 acres on the other side of the Tewo creek.

In November he reported that

there is orderly discipline & plenty of hard work going on. At the same time there is much more contentment. We have twenty-four women on the place and numerous children and babies. They have gardens of their own and are allowed to entertain their relations at weekends. The mile or so of sago swamp has proved a great success . . . and the 'sago boys' go out every day . . . I have cut out rice altogether.

He now found that Woodward, 'the new RM . . . is a real good sort' who 'shows every intention of avoiding friction with us' and Greenland 'who is acting CNA put me wise to a lot I didn't know before' - presumably about compliance with the NLO Regulations.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 2 Nov. 1918.

³⁸ Ibid., 28 Dec. 1918.

³⁹ Ibid., 2 Nov. 1918.

Percy Robinson was welcomed by G. A. Loudon, Arthur Jewell and Tom Sefton into the inner circle of the commercial community. Ogamobu was a business-like operation, Percy tough and determined. His recruiting venture had quickly outstripped its rivals in the 'west'. He appeared a rising man. His membership of the Papua Club and the Planters' Association pleased him and his enthusiastic descriptions of membership mores provide one of only two contemporary glimpses that survive.

The Papua Club

The Papua Club was founded in 1913 by Tom Sefton, G. A. Loudon - then BNGD's new Commercial Manager, Arthur Jewell and others as an exclusive retreat for selected members of the commercial and planting community, the 'silvertails', who could then avoid the 'riff raff' who gathered in the pubs - and at the same time balance the exclusivism of the officials. Sefton had come to Papua as an accountant with the Bank of New South Wales in 1911 but was soon working as the assistant to his uncle, F. A. Lord, manager at Koitaki. He succeeded Lord in 1913. If 'Gal' Loudon was a rough and bold player in various contests with the government, Tom Sefton was careful to mind his own business and mind it well, while Arthur Jewell, once Captain Barton's private secretary and since an opponent of Judge Murray, would become the planters' chief negotiator. Already in 1914, Loudon, Sefton and Jewell were considered leaders of 'Port' society, Sefton and Jewell acquiring houses on Ela Beach in which they stayed on their frequent visits to town. Much later, when a planter at Eilogo, Loudon also maintained a town house. An American doctor sent to Papua in 1920 by the Rockefeller Foundation to treat hookworm, S. M. Lambert, found friendship in the Club and some indifference at Government House. He thought

Loudon, Bertie, Sefton, Jewel [sic], Tom Nesbitt [sic] and a dozen more . . . the ablest colonials in the South Pacific . . . I couldn't have moved a finger without the help of these men and their friends. These were the forward-looking ones who wanted native labour restored to health, to revitalize races for whom, at that time, there seemed no future but extinction.⁴⁰

Lambert betrayed here a perfect summing up of a view of their role *vis-à-vis* the Papuans held by many planters - that it was they and not the officials who did most to 'improve' and even preserve the 'native' as they sent their 'boys' back to their villages free of skin diseases -with a caddy of tobacco, a hurricane lamp, and a bolt of red cloth under their arm. To their critics it could as easily seem that despite the friendly relationships the more lordly among the settlers might undoubtedly have with individual servants and employees, they appeared to regard the Papuans collectively as little more

⁴⁰ S. M. Lambert, *A Doctor in Paradise* (Melbourne 1942), 19.

than particularly troublesome beasts of burden. Within the confines of the Papua Club and among likeminded men with common interests the country's problems could seem capable of simple remedies if only the members could have their way.

Membership became a reward that admitted the more successful men in the white community to an elite group. Staniforth Smith was the first of the officials offered the accolade. Dr Strong, Herbert Champion and Judge Gore would later join him. The Club became a registered company with nominal capital of £5,000 in 1927, but it is doubtful whether there were ever more than forty members at a time before 1942, and it acquired permanent premises of its own only in 1940.

Percy Robinson, the new member in 1918, recorded some of the atmosphere of both the Club and the 'Port' community. The rougher society all settlers shared to some extent before 1914 had given way to one of sharp class distinctions. In Port Percy found that

the men here rather go in for attire - much more so than I expected considering that the society is almost entirely masculine. There seems a very sharp line between the beachcombers and such and the crowd that frequent the Club. I think they are careful about attire to emphasise the difference . . . you see half the men (in town) going about with bare toes sticking out of their shoes & nothing on but ragged pants & a filthy singlet & the other half looking as if they had just come out of Collins St. Melbourne. There is nothing much in between.

Club members were 'a particularly nice crowd of men and I have some very good friends among them'. His wife 'would fall for Loudon [sic] . . .' and 'there is an entire absence of any effort to assert superiority'. Yet conformity to a standard of dress and a code of behaviour was clearly expected with 'Gal' Loudon, Tom Sefton, Arthur Jewell, and Ernest Trevor Ward, R. S. Whiting's rather elegant manager at Veimauri, setting the accept-able pattern. Percy continued in detail,

In dull or cool weather and in the evening they wear trousers of either gabardine or mohair of a karki [sic] color, socks to match and brown shoes, a shirt of a color to go with the rest & tie likewise. Shirts are always plain & never with anything in the shape of stripes or spots or patterns of any sort. If really cold they have a coat to go with the pants. Unlined patch pockets (pleated) & cut in a severe military style . . . in the hot weather, duck pants, white shirt of heavy twill with two breast pockets . . . gauntlet cuffs are anathema. Loudon has his made with wide sleeves only to above the elbow [i.e. short sleeves] but that is his speciality & no one likes to copy him although they approve of the idea. Black silk tie as narrow as possible. Anything in the nature of 'handkerchief' ties would cause the wearer to be tarred and feathered.⁴¹

⁴¹ Robinson Letters, 2 Mar. 1919.

Percy Robinson visited Sefton at Koitaki, enjoyed dining at Loudon's and at Surveyor Pratt's and imbibed the opinions of his fellow Club members about particular officials. Stanley Greenland, the CNA Inspector whose advice he had earlier thought worth taking, now it seemed was 'a dud', a 'narrow official . . . the sort that drives me frantic. I expect I have to "out" him'. A. E. Pratt, Tom Sefton's father-in-law, on the other hand, was a useful friend who would survey Ogamobu and include a block across the Tewu Creek that Percy had illegally cleared before the Land Board had granted him its lease. Smarting from a £10 fine for over-carrying on the *Varoe* 'in spite of my ingenious efforts to dodge it', he now thought,

Govt officials here are simply poisonous - they are all alike, it is the system & not so much the individuals. No one seems to be able to escape for the simple reason that the Governor does not care a hang about the spirit of the law - if they can 'catch' you on any technical breach they rub it in.⁴²

But it was not only in his relations with the government that he had to watch his step. Most of the leading planters had taken large risks with their fortunes and lived on the edge where ruin was an ever-present possibility. There was frequent litigation to recover debts even from friends. Some of the fragility of his own situation Robinson revealed as he realised that

Just at present I am strong here & am treated by everyone with distinguished consideration as a successful man and one of the 'Heads' but it would take about three months of hard luck & a few whispers of financial embarrassment to throw me down among the suppliants . . . No, it is not a condition for a weak or nervous man.⁴³

By 1924 he knew G. A. Loudon to be 'as clever as Satan' even as he entered into partnership with the general manager of BNGD to buy out the 'southern' shareholders in Ogamobu. The partnership would indeed prove a fatal mistake for Robinson. In the collapse of 1929 while Loudon managed to survive the loss of many of his business interests including his share in Ogamobu, for Percy Robinson the Papuan adventure had come to an end.

The Planters' Association

Unlike the Club which was to have a continuous life, the Planters' Association of Papua was a body that was formed and re-formed several times after periods of inactivity. As with the Citizens' Association in 1915 and 1919-21 joint action by planters as a group was only possible in such a small and dispersed community for short periods. The first Association began in 1911 with an executive comprising Lewis Cowley, general manager of BNGD 1911-14, Arthur Bloomfield, Raymond Dubois and Archibald MacAlpine.

⁴² Ibid., 9 Mar. 1919.

⁴³ Ibid., 22 May 1919.

Representing the larger plantation companies rather than the individual planter, this was the group worried at the time that the limits of available Papuan labour had already been reached, and pressing for three year contracts and the admission of Asians.

Following several years without meeting the Association was re-formed late in 1917 when new grievances had brought interests together. With the purposes of commercial agriculture and Murray's government now seeming to be in irreconcilable disagreement, the difficulties planters were experiencing appeared remediable only if the Judge was replaced as Lieutenant Governor. Names put forward in 1921 in case Murray should retire at sixty were those of Staniforth Smith and Major General Charles Rosenthal, a prominent Australian conservative.⁴⁴ With a membership by that time of thirty seven, the Association represented itself as a responsible 'opposition' which in the absence of electoral representation had taken upon itself to speak on behalf of the whole 'unofficial' community. Several well prepared *Bulletins* were printed and circulated. But most smaller planters chose not to join. Essentially the Planters' Association had been revived to give the leading members of the planting establishment, Loudon, Sefton and Jewell, with the lawyer R. D. Bertie's help, a base respectably large enough to allow them to apply pressure on the local and Commonwealth governments. As recorded in Chapter 14, when the Minister for External Territories, Alexander Poynton, visited Papua in June 1921 the Association led by Jewell, Seymour Williams - A. S. Bloomfield's agent at the time - and Bertie and G. A. Loudon confronted him with a formidable list of proposals for Commonwealth expenditure and changes in policy.⁴⁵

In the economic crises that followed in 1921-22 and again in the late twenties, Judge Murray's efforts to have Papua exempted from the provisions of the *Navigation Act* and other measures taken on behalf of the distressed planters changed their view of his administration. With the Lieutenant Governor actively engaged in defending the Territory's industries and interests, a Planters' Association operating as an opposition to the government had little to do. After years of suspended activity when the Chambers of Commerce in Port Moresby and Samarai provided representation for the interests of the combined commercial and planting communities, a new Planters' Association of Papua was established in 1935 on a broader basis of membership than the previous bodies and when economic issues alone now

⁴⁴ *Papuan Courter*, 18 Feb. 1921. Rosenthal is believed by some to have been a model for 'Kangaroo' in D. H. Lawrence's novel of the name.

⁴⁵ See above p. 185. Three *Bulletins* published by the Association are in CRS A1 20/9009. Membership rules were changed in 1920 to admit plantation assistants as 'Associate Members' (*Papuan Courter*, 19 Nov. 1920).

assured it of support. The president was G. A. Loudon. Tom Sefton was vice-president and the secretary-treasurer was Richard 'Dickie' Walshe of Domara. The Council of the Planters' Association of Papua included Loudon, Sefton, Walshe, Tom Nevitt MLC, and Captain Fitch.⁴⁶

Another group had been formed in Melbourne in 1914 to lobby the Commonwealth Government on behalf of Australian investors in Papuan plantations. This was an 'Association of Planters' led by A. S. Bloomfield which included among its members F. W. Kitchen the soap manufacturer and a principal of the Commonwealth Copra Company (Giligili), and H. Y. Russell of Sydney, director and secretary of the Sogeri Para Rubber Company (Koitaki). In 1919 this body found itself in conflict with the Planters' Association in Port Moresby over recommendations each were making about Sunday tapping on rubber estates. Judge Murray consulted with the Melbourne group in 1922 to obtain support in opposing the *Navigation Act*.⁴⁷

The planters of the Sogeri, Galley Reach and Hisiu districts of the Central Division, founders and core of both the Papua Club and the Planters' Association, lived within a few hours of Port Moresby and, as we have seen, could maintain to a degree much greater than was possible for more distant settlers a frequent intercourse both with each other and with other members of the unofficial community in 'Port'. The chief among them in partnerships with merchants, agents and publicans of the town put money into risky ventures, into mining and timber milling and into buying smaller plantations that came up for sale. And few as their numbers would remain they could come together for those distinguishing pastimes - horse-racing and gymkhanas, cricket and golf, fancy-dress dances and amateur theatricals - that middle-class Anglo-Saxons seemed to take wherever they settled. There was perhaps a conscious reproduction of African and Indian colonial behaviour in some of these pursuits but more certainly there was emulation of the style of life of the landed classes in Australia or England. Horsemanship at least remained a necessary accomplishment for managers and assistants on large estates, and horse or mule and saddle continued to be the means of access to the Sogeri plateau. William Bruce of Doa, Manu Manu and the *Papuan Times*, and skilled in many sports, was the first to keep racehorses in town but most of the nearby planters kept one or two, and from around 1910 race meetings were held intermittently throughout the remaining period under

⁴⁶ Membership in 1936, it seems, comprised almost every planter. A list of the members circulated on a ballot paper for three delegates from each of five 'districts' contains seventy eight names out of (perhaps) a hundred remaining planters. CRS A518, item R918/3, 'Planters' Association of Papua', 1936-50.

⁴⁷ CRS A1 19/10372 contains correspondence between the Melbourne group and the Minister. CRS G69 contains disagreement over Sunday tapping.

review. In the twenties there also grew an enthusiasm in Port for sailing canoe races where town businessmen, senior public servants and planters from the surrounding districts put up prizes, laid odds and sponsored Papuan crews of *vanagls* or *lagatols* in contests on Fairfax Harbour or around the coast to the canoe anchorage at Koki and return. The whole white community joined with Papuans at vantage points along the hills and on Paga Point to view these spectacles.

In the Eastern and South Eastern Divisions of Papua, where there were fewer large planters or company estates, where the tropical environment was more distinctive, standards of dress and behaviour might have been more relaxed than in Port Moresby. Several 'east-enders' were members of the Planters' Association and visiting members of the Papua Club. But Samarai had only a few government officers and little of the hostility between 'commercial' and 'officials' that characterised the capital during the war years. While there were cliques - Alice Keelan found there were three in the town in 1920 between which newcomers had to choose - the Samarai Chamber of Commerce provided a sufficient local forum for all those with an interest to advance or defend and well represented the collective voice of the white residents.⁴⁸ Their number in Samarai could rise to two hundred at Christmas and New Year - with two hotels providing an egalitarian place to meet, stay and entertain that drew traders, miners, pearlers and planters from a vast area. The grander planters of the Central Division might have found the place cloying and confined.

ALTHOUGH their new country became relatively safe and predictable, settlers in the years before 1914 had expected more - indeed that Papua would one day resemble Java, Malaya or Ceylon. No such expectation could be sustained by 1930. Henry Dexter, a marine engineer who had worked his passage out to Port Moresby on the BNGD supply ship *Bentlnck* in 1910, and then served as an assistant on Otomata and Kemp Welch River plantations, left the Territory in 1918 to take up a position on a rubber estate in Negri Sembilan in the FMS. He returned to Papua after eight years and remained a trader at Milne Bay until 1937. Dexter was well placed to make comparisons between two quite different planter communities.

At Otomata he had worked under Bill Jefferson who knew Malaya and had tried to prepare Dexter for what he would see, but 'Only those who have spent years in a primitive country like Papua can fully realise the contrast'. In 1918

⁴⁸ Keelan, *In the land of Dohort*, 49.

everyone in Malaya seemed prosperous. While difficult times were to come, there were

comfortable hotels, cars, trains in which one could travel in comfort, instead of the long journeys - per boot - that had been the usual method of travel in Papua . . . every district had its little club, with its billiard table, tennis courts, reading room, etc. . . How different the lot of the Papua planter! Not his the blocks of ice, the daily paper, mails and cold storage goods delivered each morning; nor when his day's work was done could he get into his car, and spend his evening with others of his kind.⁴⁹

The Papuan rubber planter might personally recruit his own labour, personally supervise his rubber nursery or bud-graft his rubber stumps, build his house, and personally oversee the clearing of the land, all tasks let out to Chinese contractors in Malaya. There, cleaning and weeding and rubber tapping itself were contracted out, a tapper being replaced by the contractor if trees were wounded on two successive occasions. 'It was greatly to the credit of the Papuan planters', Dexter thought, 'that tapping is as good as it is'.⁵⁰

A recent historian has described 'the world of Papua's expatriate settlers' before 1942 as 'a dusty, lower middle-class, Australian version of the British Raj'.⁵¹ Settlers would not have presumed even so much. In the thirties British India seemed very far away and vastly more glamorous than prosaic Papua. Samarai might resemble other South Seas port towns but Port Moresby from the beginning had the unmistakable stamp of a northern Australian frontier settlement - timber framed and iron roofed houses with verandahs, raised above the ground on 'stumps', with corrugated iron tanks to collect the run-off of rain water from the roofs. The town, except in the brief wet season from December to March, invariably disappointed visitors who had expected something more tropical. As a place to live Lewis Lett thought Port Moresby by 1939 had become a town as 'dully and regrettably respectable as any other. For with the coming of women and the flood of commercialism . . . the pioneer element has disappeared'. Sir Hubert Murray could write in the 1938-39 *Annual Report* of 'our life's dull-round proceeding as usual' as the news of a fresh European war arrived and he 'found it difficult even to feign an interest in the local activities which had hitherto absorbed so much of my life'.⁵² If for government officials the heroic age of pacification had been succeeded by an age of bureaucratic routine, so for planters the exciting

⁴⁹ Henry Dexter, 'Reminiscences of a Gin-soaked Trader'. Unpublished manuscript (ANU Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, PMB 624), p. 110-12. Dexter was an acting ARM at Abau in 1915.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵¹ Edward P. Wolfers, *Race relations and colonial rule in Papua New Guinea* (Sydney 1975), 45.

⁵² *PAR* 1938-39, 1.

stages of development, the clearing of the bush and the laying down of the plantations, had been followed by years of waiting and of bondage to the needs of trees, labourers, and markets.

Yet both officials and planters, once so opposed, now shared a very strong sense of ownership of the country. Frequently, if mainly perhaps to distinguish themselves from the white community in New Guinea, they had lightheartedly called themselves 'Papuan'. Less frequently and more formally they had described themselves as 'Anglo-Papuans' - pioneers of a distinct community they expected to continue and carry on their work. In their view they had laid the foundations of the country just as it had been white people like themselves who had named and brought 'Papua' into being. The other Papuans were Papuan 'natives' the best of whom might be more able than whites of an 'inferior class' perhaps but who generally were still destined for a very long apprenticeship in civilisation. In the thirties with most of the world still apparently safe within the ambit of unchallengeable European power it was quite easy for 'ordinary' white people to hold such a view. M. K. Gandhi seemed to the average white man a joke, the Indian nationalists pushy and ungrateful, and only the Japanese, the Germans, and the Bolsheviks real enemies of the modern world order.⁵³

⁵³ Atlee Hunt had written privately to Murray in Oct. 1916 at the time when as a result of C. F. Andrews's report on the indenture of Indians overseas the Government of India ended the system. Hunt had been told that Andrews was 'quite a crank on the subject of Indian labour' who had 'seriously lowered his own status with the whites by an extraordinary action he committed in Natal' where he had 'literally kissed' the feet of an Indian leader named 'Gandi' [*sic*]. This is in CRS A1 20/11706.

CHAPTER 19

Transgression and retribution

Vulnerability and responsibility

The individual settler was vulnerable and his safety finally depended on the perception among the Papuans that, if the provocation was sufficient, the reach of the *gavamani* was very considerable, and that punishment was both certain and irresistible. The capacity of the new authorities in the forceful suppression of warfare and unflagging pursuit of 'wrong-doers' had been demonstrated quite overwhelmingly and within living memory by MacGregor, LeHunte, and Christopher Robinson. But there was a gap between open opposition to the government, its laws and its officers, and the small thefts and evasions that could occur on plantations,

the loafing, the scheming, the waste and destructiveness of the native on his job - things which only prohibitive expenditure on white supervisors could hope to cope with and then not too successfully - the thousand and one insolences and irritabilities . . . that confront the grower at every turn against which he has no practical remedy at all save a very risky and illegal one.¹

Minor acts of 'disobedience' and 'disrespect' directed towards the isolated and fallible employer - his power obviously limited - were hardly uncommon as Papuans were prompted to assert their dignity as men. Such an isolated European might be outnumbered a hundred to one, and the constant concern to maintain their individual authority and a general 'respect for the white man' was kept alive in the minds of most settlers as much by these smaller acts of defiance met with frequently, as by the much less frequent reports of actual attacks. They were signs, settlers could think, of a savagery still barely repressed in a people so recently subjugated. It might now seem more remarkable that Papuans threatened the settler so seldom and accepted the solitary white man at his own valuation as much as they did.

Yet, for the European both his fears and his overcoming of them might have provided zest in a life in other respects dull.² He was also strongly prompted not to lose his standing with other whites by failing to 'control' his

¹ *Papuan Courrier*, 14 Aug. 1936. Letter written by Richard Walshe.

² Percy Robinson certainly regarded arrows shot at the *Varoe* as she passed a village in the Kikori delta in 1919 as an experience to write home about while at the same time something to be dismissed as just another minor hazard of settler life in such a place. (Robinson Letters, July 1921)

labour. The trick, many found, was to forestall a display of truculent behaviour from assertive labourers with a show of bravado, personal power and self-confidence that left Papuans impressed. The penal sanctions of the labour code were a blunt weapon and for an employer to be forced to rely on them too heavily could be considered by his peers an admission of defeat.

A planter's capacity to command respect depended partly on mystery - the novel and unpredictable quality that much of the behaviour of Europeans possessed at least for 'raw recruits' from the bush, and which kept them intimidated, intrigued and frequently, it can be assumed, just amused. Europeans themselves were very aware of their effect generally, often planning to surprise, impress, and even occasionally delight their employees with exotic wonders - and being disappointed if Papuans failed to respond as expected. As early as 1917 on a visit to Gadaisu G. A. Loudon was giving a 'cinematograph' show for the labour force.³ J. F. Horn, the visiting director of Robinson River, was present at Giligili in Milne Bay in January 1933 to observe a fireworks display provided by the manager, Don Irvine, to entertain the 'boys'.⁴ Percy Robinson could kill a pig or issue flags at Ogamobu as a reward to the men completing the task of clearing the bush. Others might kill a bullock or take workers hunting or fishing. But planter authority also depended on demonstrable skills - the daily life of the plantation presenting many opportunities for displays of specialised knowledge in the construction and repair of buildings, boats, wharves and machinery. Plantation development overall and the processes of production to the export stage had requirements set by the remote world outside the purposes of which Papuans could only guess and which gave the planter the initiative as employer, instructor and technical specialist.

Labourers were also dependent on the degree of responsibility and care taken by the employer - the more so the more isolated the plantation. Planters were expected by their workers - as well as required as employers under the NLO - to attend and treat personally any seriously ill and injured labourers, a task carried out immediately after roll call each morning on most plantations. There was a cost in negligence as cases referred to the GMOs for treatment - except where a venereal disease was the cause - were a charge against the employer. Though ultimately constrained by the law and prudence to provide adequately for his employees, every planter could seem to hold arbitrary power as the supplier of food, tobacco, shelter, wages and the

³ *Papuan Courter*, 14 Dec. 1917.

⁴ J. F. Horn, [Diary of] A visit to Robinson River Plantation (Manuscript in the possession of the Horn family, Sydney). The *Papuan Courter* of 22 Nov. 1939 reported the large Christmas feast provided by Bob Bunting the younger for his Teste (Wari) Island plantation workers. Such events had been indeed routine on plantations for many years.

passage home. When, after 1920, RMs were empowered to advance up to a sixth of the wages deposited with them and due to Papuan labourers, the money could only be spent in the plantation trade store the planter controlled.⁵ Generally he needed to show some interest in workers' problems, acting as a local 'court', punishing mis-demeanours with tobacco fines and a 'dressing down', and settling by force of personality or as some will judge, by intimidation, disputes arising between the workers. Generally also the employer had too much to lose if plantation routines were disrupted, and strong reasons to maintain a satisfactory working atmosphere. But fights on plantations were not unusual, sometimes involving a confrontation between worker and European manager or assistant, more often between workers, especially where 'batches' of labourers from different divisions were employed for different types of work - where Goaribaris or Orokaivas might be employed for heavy work and Aromas, Rigos or Iasi-Iasis for cleaning and tapping - but they could also occur between labourers from rival 'tribes' from the same division, and sometimes on larger estates between work gangs pitted against each other by their overseers. If the necessary discipline of plantation life could be irksome, the work boring, the absence of women frustrating, intrigue was diverting and probably inevitable. There was undoubtedly also fear of other Papuans. Gosiago labourers clearing land in 1911 on Giligili and fearful when they heard the sound of axes felling trees on the neighbouring property, Hagita, rushed to James Osborne with the 'breathless information' that 'the Orokivas [*sic*] are coming'.⁶

Control and breakdown

The universal practice of singling out experienced labourers as 'boss-boys' to act as intermediaries between the planter and the labouring gangs not only provided a convenient structure of command like that in an army company or a public school but placed social distance between the management and workers that was essential in the confined society they shared. On larger estates, a manager might never in practice directly communicate with an ordinary labourer at all. On the medium sized plantations the boss-boy system was indispensable if a planter was ever to be able to leave his property for brief periods, essential in the training and supervision of new recruits, essential if he fell ill. In the eastern Divisions boss-boys overseeing casual local labour were entirely responsible for smaller properties for months at a

⁵ As mentioned above on p. 49, the prices charged for common trade store goods by plantation stores were regularly monitored by both Native Affairs inspectors and visiting RMs. As was also noted on p. 49, advances of up to a third of wages due were permitted after 1935.

⁶ NAPNG Series G91, Patrol Reports, Eastern Division. C. B. Higginson, 4 Sept. 1911.

time. The understanding that every planter attempted to develop with these employees could be very close and a 'good' boss-boy was much sought after.

But the mood on a plantation could change and if an employer's grip was lost in a lapse of judgement, or a particular group of labourers could not be bluffed, impressed or intimidated and openly refused to work, the enterprise was faced with a major crisis. For an indentured labourer to refuse a lawful order or desert his work - or to incite others under contract to do so - were offences under the NLO and the planter was entitled to seek assistance from the nearest RM to punish offenders. As well as the time lost in work and attendance at a local court hearing the planter could face the risk that the accused might bring a counter claim of unjust treatment or abuse against *him*, which, if proved, could result in fines and costs being imposed that were severe. If labourers were gaoled their services were lost. Often the employer would prefer to have the contracts of 'loafers', 'troublemakers' and 'deserters' cancelled, accepting the losses involved in wages for which he was still liable and the costs of having new labourers recruited. He could hope for more tractable replacements or an opportunity to mend his own approach. Other planters seemed to enjoy teaching a 'surly' or 'lazy batch' of workers a lesson, believing that to begin with an unsparing regime or to bring back deserters to a harsh routine 'taught the boys who was boss'. These were no more than essential techniques in good management. Subsequently the hard master could allow himself to be generous knowing that he could 'crack the whip' whenever he chose. He might even acquire a reputation as a 'good' *taubada*.

If in many lesser circumstances it was just not worth the employers' while to bring actions against their employees and a dressing down or the withholding of tobacco rations were the most common punishments, physical assault remained temptingly available as an immediate remedy in dealing with disobedience. The white men came from societies in which the corporal punishment of children and young males was still socially and legally sanctioned, and plantations invariably invited comparison with boarding schools and the conditions of life on board ship or in the army. And Papuans of any age, physically smaller generally than Europeans and culturally backward or immature in the view of most white people, could indeed be regarded just as they were routinely described, as 'boys'. While beatings and bashings were behaviour more likely to be resorted to by the less competent or secure among the Europeans, violence was a recourse that all employers believed it necessary to hold in reserve, one that they believed Papuans understood, and one the threat of which was far more significant in the plantation setting than the records of assault cases brought against employers can possibly show. White men acknowledged that in these 'quinine latitudes', their tempers - like their lives - might be shortened. They commonly spoke of

being 'nervy' or 'liverish'.⁷ A planter suffering from frequent bouts of malaria or the consequences of heavy drinking might have been as frequently short-tempered in his management of Papuan labour. It would often be left to a boss-boy to interpret the *taubada's* mood to other workers. The employee might even feel an indulgent or protective concern for such a white man. Certainly many settlers had good reason over the years to be grateful for the loyalty of Papuan servants, boss-boys and crews in such circumstances.

Papuans were also testing the constraints. They saw that the Europeans were divided by role, personality and attitude, that aid could be sought from government officers against employers, and that the new law in Papua provided a broadly predictable - if precisely unpredictable and inexplicable - degree of protection. In October 1919 Percy Robinson of Ogamobu noted that

If [the labourers] take it into their heads to sulk, you can't do a thing. I know that was Arthur's trouble - he treated the labour like dogs and they simply wouldn't work for him. You may 'belt their blocks off' and punish them but if they don't want to work you can't make them. They have nothing to learn from the I.W.W., I can assure you. Simpson treats them like children. He pulls their legs and kids them on. He rarely punishes a boy . . . We had a government inspection on Saturday and there was not a complaint. Incidentally we exercise a little diplomacy with the Govt officials to the same end. Of course, quarrelling with the officials and brutally ill-treating the natives at the same time may be personally gratifying but it is poor policy from shareholders' point of view.⁸

The argument that shareholders ultimately paid for the abuse of labourers was one pressed by the government on many occasions.

Robinson's letters contain quite detailed accounts of several white plantation assistants at Ogamobu and their dealings with Papuan workers. William Arthur Simpson, employed there between 1919 and 1921, was typical. The high opinion held of him in the passage above where he is compared with Arthur Williams, Percy's brother-in-law, did not last. The assistant worked well in sober periods but began to be 'rude and offensive' about the house having forgotten how 'half starved' he had been when Percy took him on. Simpson had earlier been 'shaken to the soul with fear as he had had a close look at his next step - the beachcomber - and this job came just in time to save him . . . His memory lasted about three months'.⁹ Simpson's drinking and indulgence with Papuan women in the end proved too much for Percy's puritan taste. One morning he thrashed the assistant so severely the man was

⁷ In the *Papuan Times* of 4 Oct. 1911 under the headline 'Are we Mad?' a writer suggested that residents suffered from 'furore tropicalis' and that 'It cannot be denied that the white inhabitants of Papua are hot of temper and rancourous of disposition taken all round'.

⁸ Robinson Letters, 4 Oct. 1919.

⁹ Ibid., Christmas Day 1919.

taken to hospital. Drinking whisky with Baidam, the boss-boy, in the manager's absence, Simpson had touched 'the lowest level for a white man in this country - to sit drinking with a native. Besides carrying a penalty of six months imprisonment! By this time Percy Robinson was 'fed up absolutely with cheap white labour . . . I don't think any men of that class are worth employing at any price'. Simpson had been a pharmacist in Marrickville, New South Wales, before going to Papua - perhaps with a drinking problem - in 1918. In the thirties 'Simmo' managed Whittens' Bubuleta plantation on Milne Bay and he died at Samarai in 1939, aged sixty four.¹⁰

Three separate instances of conflict on plantations might be considered. The first comes from the reminiscences of Henry Dexter, acting for a time as a manager for BNGD at Otomata. Writing much later, Dexter recorded with revealing candour a potentially explosive confrontation with labourers in 1913. He had been able to arrange the transfer to Otomata of 150 Goaribari labourers he had previously recruited for Baubauguina expecting that they would work well for him. On one occasion these 'old friends' refused an order. Dexter knew that the RM was absent from the government station at Abau, and that to communicate with the general manager in Port would be an admission of weakness. 'Rightly or wrongly', he issued a gun to his servant, loaded his Winchester, and confronted the 'strikers'. They had acted as beaters for Dexter on Saturday afternoons and well knew the power of the rifle. The strike collapsed. Dexter's conduct was completely illegal and the consequences could have been far more serious. It is quite possible that such a scene was more representative than we have evidence for - even if, as a recollection of himself as a newcomer perhaps out of his depth, Dexter's account is unique.¹¹

Yet another picture appears in a 1929 case which just might suggest that physical punishment was more routine on at least some plantations than there is other evidence for. In October three labourers from the Gulf Division employed on Kanosia estate were committed for trial on a charge of causing grievous bodily harm to a boss-boy, Mohi-miri, who had reported their refusal to work to the manager, J. B. 'Joe' McKenna. In their defence, they testified that they had taken revenge on Mohi-miri because McKenna had caned them. Caning was punishment quite inadmissible under the law in Papua, but it is at least possible that the manager had taken such a 'very risky and illegal' step, might have done so on other occasions, and was not alone among planters who did so. While the workers in this case were convicted of an admitted assault, no charge was laid against the manager.¹²

¹⁰ *Papuan Courter*, 17 Mar. 1939.

¹¹ Dexter, 'Reminiscences', 49-50.

¹² *Papuan Courter*, 18 Oct. 1929.

The third perspective comes from a Papuan source. Ausa Songoro of Mabadauan in the Western Division worked for Tom Sefton of Koitaki as a boss-boy before 1942 and as a recruiter after 1945. He remembered Sefton as a 'strong' or hard man, and violent to a degree. Labourers were indeed frightened of his anger. Ausa could remember being called on one occasion to hold Sefton's mount while a Kiwai worker was horse-whipped to tears. Thirty years later the former boss-boy could still feel the indignation he had then felt at the humiliation of a countryman. This incident was clearly the most memorable of many. Yet though he had worked at Koitaki for more than a decade Ausa could not recall a single instance where a labourer brought an action against Sefton for assault. Papuans, it is possible, were prepared to accept their employer's right to use force to punish them if they had 'done wrong'. 'Mister' Sefton valued good workers and rewarded them. He was harsh with those who were lazy or rough with the rubber trees. He ensured that Koitaki labourers were well fed and when they were sick he visited them each afternoon. He kept two 'shooting boys' constantly out in the bush after game to provide variety and interest in the plantation diet. These things also seemed important to Ausa.¹³

Like most others in the development years Tom Sefton had been fined for breaches of the NLO and in 1917 was warned of the consequences of illegally confining a labourer.¹⁴ All this would be forgotten, his firm handling of his labour probably regarded as falling within permissible bounds by the 1920s and 1930s as Koitaki became the showplace plantation to which vice-regal and other official visitors were invariably taken to be entertained by the manager. Indeed Sefton came to epitomise the more successful Papuan planter. In 1935 he had a cricket ground with a concrete pitch made at Koitaki where 'all hands, European and Papuan, practice together . . . on Saturday and Sunday and play matches against neighbouring plantations'. J. T. O'Malley, CNA by this time, hoped other planters would follow Sefton's lead.¹⁵

Both the law and government policy without ambiguity prohibited all assaults whether by European or Papuan, employer, labourer or villager. If such assaults could no more be prevented in Papua than in most societies - and perhaps less than in some, Murray and his officers appear to have policed the law with an efficiency and degree of equity where two 'races' interacted that might have been exceptional. And if Papuans were more likely to be

¹³ Interview: Ausa Songoro, Hohola, May 1975.

¹⁴ CRSAl 18/4271. In 1928 he was arraigned on 18 counts of 'removing natives further than 15 miles' without an RM's leave, fined a nominal 2s.6d in each case and 3s.6d costs. There had been a 'misunderstanding' (*Papuan Courier*, 17 Feb. 1928).

¹⁵ *PAR* 1936-37, 12.

convicted on the testimony of Europeans than the contrary, and routinely given prison sentences that may seem more severe, certainly gross or persistent offenders among white men could expect prosecution. In 1924 Charles Jackson, once a Patrol Officer and then the BNGD company labour inspector and secretary of the Planters' Association during the period of greatest hostility towards Murray's government, published his *Native Labour Law and Practice in Papua*.¹⁶ By the time of publication an admirer of the Lieutenant Governor he advised that

the newcomer is astonished to find that many natives are only too ready to take the fullest advantage of their privilege to 'make court' on every opportunity offering, and that convictions and fines against the employer are inevitable if the assault, whatever its nature, is proved . . . It is frequently very galling to find one's only legitimate remedy is the 'ponderous machinery of the law' (often enough a difficult, tedious and expensive remedy) for all the many petty delinquencies of native employees, when a 'cuffing' or even a 'sound thrashing' at times seems so much more suited to the . . . offence.¹⁷

If a Papuan knew that 'a sympathetic . . . or apparently sympathetic . . . official' would preside 'to hear patiently and solemnly anything and everything he has to say', then employers had to be careful. In practice, Jackson advised, it was 'Time alone' that 'serves to establish the mean of a reasonable "give and take" tolerance and mutual understanding between employers of labour and officials'.¹⁸ This might suggest that settlers might not find all officials unsympathetic. And *prima facie*, we might suspect that this was so. But there is much evidence that Murray and his senior officers kept a close watch over the decisions of the RMs' courts and that local court records, like all patrol reports, were closely scrutinised in Port Moresby. If imprisonment of Europeans was certainly rare, fines were frequent. Settlers could believe themselves excessively supervised, constrained and punished even as the government moderated penalties to meet the circumstances of offenders whether they were white or black. Offences under the NLO heard before the local RM carried the penalty of imprisonment only for Papuans. The Criminal Code on the other hand applied equally. Criminal cases, however, had to be referred to the Central Court. It seems that unless a settler's offence was sufficiently serious to clearly warrant his committal to appear before the higher court on a criminal charge, RMs routinely used their discretion to sting rather than risk confining the European. To send a planter to gaol might so disrupt the work of his plantation as to make such a punishment counter-

¹⁶ Charles F. Jackson, *Native Labour law and practice in Papua* (Sydney 1924).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

productive. A sharp fine had frequently to suffice to curb the white man where a Papuan could only be gaoled.

Inspection and prosecution

In Chapter 9 it was noted that the position of Commissioner for Native Affairs and Control (CNA) was created in 1908 and held conjointly until 1910 with that of Government Secretary by Alexander Campbell. As Government Secretary Campbell was head of the administration through the Resident Magistrates of the eight (in some years nine) Divisions into which Papua was divided. As CNA his responsibilities were to supervise the indentured labour system.

The roles were essentially incompatible, and from 1910 they were separated. Bertram Bramell became CNA. He had been an officer in the British New Guinea and Papuan services since 1897. Thereafter with a small staff of Native Affairs Inspectors the full time of the Commissioner could be given to policing the Native Labour Ordinance independently of the regular magistracy responsible to the Government Secretary. Bramell was regarded by planters as far too credulous in admitting 'native' evidence and 'a bit of a crank'. He bore the brunt of their antagonism during the most trying period of conflict between the administration and the settlers. In 1920 in an account that demonstrates what was probably a typical planter response to a surprise visit by the Commissioner - though in this instance he did not appear - Percy Robinson wrote that he had been 'scared out of seven years' growth' when he saw the Government Yacht *Eleva* heading unexpected towards his wharf for

I was sure it was that white whiskered old Devil Brammell [*sic*] . . . coming to inspect the labor and plantation. His rare visits are invariably followed by complete disorganisation of your labor and the Lord knows what expense for all sorts of faddish alternatives of the houses, latrines etc. So I was much relieved to see only the Governor . . . Our labor is contented, well fed, well housed and the general conditions . . . are absolutely O.K. but it only needs old Brammell to put in an appearance and the labor will be upset and full of complaints and our working programme jiggered up for the next six months.¹⁹

Percy Robinson, like most planters, had little to hide most of the time. Ultimately this was because he and they knew that Papuans could not be compelled to 'make paper' and enter a contract of indentured service if they believed they would be cheated or mistreated. While villagers were undoubtedly tempted by the display of goods recruiters customarily spread before them as an inducement to allow the young men to leave home, Papuans were finally under no compulsion to take up a particular offer of work. They could pick and choose. The reputation acquired by a plantation,

¹⁹ Robinson Letters, 29 Feb. 1920.

its location and points of interest, together with stories told by returned labourers about their treatment by plantation staff became significant factors in whether a recruiter's 'presents' were accepted - and ultimately in whether an enterprise could secure labour of a desired kind. It was also inevitable that there would be some planters, more commonly those employed as managers and overseers, hard pressed, irresponsible, or just temperamentally unsuitable and not awake to the dangers of alienating workers, who believed that they could 'get away' with abusing or neglecting them for a period without serious consequences. Upon such men fear of the inspectors must have acted as a restraint.

But for the more scrupulous planters too inspections remained an irritant. All planters 'knew' or supposed that in every other plantation colony the employers were subject to far less supervision. It was to take many years before even good men would cease to be indignant at the disruption of their routines by the visits of 'impractical' CNA officers prying into their businesses and questioning the labour force. While acquittals were frequent in cases brought by the Native Affairs Department officers against planters, usually for want of conclusive evidence - a fact which seemed to confirm the prevailing view among the latter that many charges were ill-founded or frivolous - there was some effort indeed needed to evade the law in Papua for any length of time.

In 1918 Arthur Bloomfield had shown Atlee Hunt the reports on the Kanosia and Galley Reach estates prepared by George Wiseman, the visiting Malayan planter. Well primed with the planters' view of things Wiseman had suggested that in Papua 'the Labour Ordinance is interpreted too literally by Government labour officers'.²⁰ Hunt forwarded copies on to Murray for comment. To show that forbearance rather than an over-eagerness to prosecute was by far the more frequent response of his officers, the Lieutenant Governor reviewed the twelve most recent plantation inspection reports of the Native Affairs inspectors, Leslie Bell and Stanley Greenland, which had exposed sixteen clear breaches of the Ordinance and three cases of assault. Action was taken in only one case of assault - that against an overseer at Mamai on six charges of assaulting his workers, and in the case of two breaches of the NLO - against Fairfax Harbour for allowing the latrine to become 'a serious menace to health' and against Itikimumu for failure to provide adequate accommodation for sick labourers. With these cases action could not be avoided. In fifty other cases in the year ending 30 June 1918, where a total of 320 labourers had laid complaints, action had not in the end been taken by the Department. Here surely was evidence of restraint, hardly

²⁰ CRS A1 19/9923. 'G. Wiseman, Report on Plantation, Papua'. Murray's comments.

of 'too literal' an interpreting of the law. Murray could argue persuasively that while

I do not of course claim that the Department makes no mistakes . . . I do claim that the figures I have given prove that the Department exercised a very free discretion in distinguishing between the complaints which are genuine and those which are not.

He concluded,

I think the opposition of the ordinary settler to the Government, in such countries as Papua, is really quite independent of evidence, and arises from the very nature of things . . . he is naturally inclined to view with impatience any desire on the part of the Government to protect and assist the native . . . as a piece of sickly and unpractical sentimentality . . . [He] is not a fair critic of the Government's native policy.²¹

A planter, understandably, preferred to deal in labour matters with the Resident Magistrate in his own Division. This was a neighbour with whom he could build a rapport. They might mix socially. Their wives might become friends. If an RM was also a qualified Native Labour Inspector whose reports were forwarded on to the CNA by the Government Secretary, plantation inspections occupied only a small part of his time. On several occasions planters would suggest that the functions of the CNA and the RMs be reversed - that the CNA be responsible only for 'uncivilised' natives and unemployed villagers and the RMs responsible for all aspects of the indentured labour system.²² In a letter to Atlee Hunt in July 1918, G. A. Loudon described Bertram Bramell as 'more or less a joke with the natives themselves' and went on to point out the excellent relations that existed between Milne Bay planters and the RM at Samarai, Charles Higginson.²³ The editorial in the *Papuan Courier* of 6 September 1918 - certainly appearing with Loudon's knowledge - identified the Department of Native Affairs as the particular agency of harassment of the employers, the source of innumerable 'vexatious pin-pricks', a quite unnecessary body that went to such 'ridiculous lengths to protect the native' that settlement was being discouraged.

Murray could only have seen the Department's unpopularity with planters as a measure of its success, and one reason for the frequent transfers of RMs may indeed have been to prevent them developing too close a relationship with settlers in any one Division. In a letter reporting the departure from Kikori of Louis Brown, an RM he liked, and his replacement by the shell-shocked young Jack Keelan - 'mad as a hatter, but, thank heaven a type I can manage' -

²¹ Ibid., 8.

²² In the *Papuan Times* of 4 Apr. 1915, and in 'representations' of the Samarai Chamber of Commerce to Poynton, 1921 in CRS A1 21/15921. See above also p. 188.

²³ CRS A1 18/12377, Loudon to Hunt, 22 July 1918.

Percy Robinson thought 'the Govt. sickening the way they treat their officials. The Browns toiled day and night to make the station habitable'. He added, 'you have no idea to what extent the efficient management of our job depends on the tactful handling of Government officials. They can just about double our costs of development by a wave of the hand'.²⁴

In 1922, following the climactic events of the preceding two years, Leslie Bell, previously Chief Inspector, succeeded Bramell and faced a then much tamed settler community. Bell had been sent to Malaya in 1912 to bring back a report on the labour system and conditions there. A former senior RM, J. T. O'Malley, yet another officer with an intense personal loyalty to Murray and in complete sympathy with his determination to maintain the law without fear or favour, succeeded Bell in 1926.²⁵

By 1924 C. F. Jackson could explain to the newcomer, with no hint of the ridicule that William Bruce would have brought to bear a decade earlier, that

The guiding principle behind the administrative policy is the necessity to render impossible . . . where Europeans of mixed temperaments and antecedents are working and living under health conditions that tend to exaggerate 'nerves' and 'liver', the adoption of a general spirit of domineering and careless brutality in relations with the native population.²⁶

Most employer infringements of the NLO - neglecting or failing to provide good and sufficient food, adequate housing or medical treatment - were classed as minor and cases could be heard by the RMs at a Court of Petty Sessions constituted on an inspection visit to a plantation or at the nearest government station. It was on the high incidence of charges over these offences - together with actions brought against managers for failure to maintain proper records - that the perception of some in the years before 1922 that the government was engaged in a frenzy of unnecessary prosecutions was based. In cases brought by the Native Affairs Department on behalf of Papuan workers, the CNA's inspectors themselves would act as prosecutors before an RM, the Department also providing a solicitor in the defence of labourers charged by employers where its officers believed a defence could be made. While convictions recorded against planters were frequent - hardly an overseer or manager was not at some time convicted of an offence - so also were dismissals and acquittals.

Cases of common assault, like breaches of the NLO, could be tried summarily by an RM. The Resident Magistrates generally would only convict

²⁴ Robinson Letters, May 1920. In Penelope Hope, *Long ago is far away* (Canberra 1979), 175.

²⁵ Bell became an optician in Sydney. In the early 1930s he advertised in the *Papuan Courier*.

²⁶ Jackson, *Native Labour Law and Practice in Papua*, 39.

a European if a complaint was repeated, where witnesses were clearly agreed or where some injury appeared to have resulted. The slaps and hair pullings, the type of humiliating treatment employed to coerce labourers by some assistants and overseers, generally went unpunished. Most managers and owner-planters using boss-boys as intermediaries could avoid such methods altogether. As noted above, more serious cases considered to warrant criminal prosecution were referred to the Central Court, either in Port Moresby or Samarai or on circuit, and heard before the CJO - Murray himself throughout almost the whole period of this study, or from 1910 until 1928 before the DCJO, Charles Herbert, and subsequently Justice Ralph Gore.

The number of Europeans convicted of serious criminal acts involving Papuans was actually small. In June 1921, with the visit of Alexander Poynton, Murray had a list prepared of all cases of Europeans charged under the Criminal Code heard before the Central Court in the eleven years since 1910.²⁷ There had been forty-two. Offences ranged from stealing and forgery to murder. The majority of those tried appear not to have been planters or plantation employees though these were well represented. Of the cases where planters, assistants or overseers were convicted of offences against Papuans the trial in October 1911 of the Osborne brothers of Rossel Island for arson, the Bernesconi affair of 1914 previously considered,²⁸ and the case of A. M. Sinclair of 'The Palms', Hisiu, arraigned on a charge of murder, stood out.

The Osborne trial was the outcome of the first visit by a government patrol in three years to Rossel or Yela Island at the extreme east of the Territory in July 1911. The visitors were unexpected. It became apparent that the brothers Frank and Eric Osborne, for much of the time the only white men on the island and planters and traders there since 1903, had taken advantage of their position to intimidate the islanders and engage in a wide range of illegal activities. They had felled timber and operated *bêche-de-mer* boats without licence, had placed buildings on native land, and supplied islanders with shot-guns. The more serious of their offences were the burning down of the houses of men who had refused to work for them and a possible case of incitement to murder. The lesser cases were tried summarily by the RM and the criminal charges referred to Port Moresby. At a sitting of the Central Court on 27 October Frank Osborne threw himself upon the mercy of the Lieutenant Governor denying the incitement charge but admitting arson and wilful

²⁷ NAPNG & CRS G179, Item 7/2, 'Return Shewing Europeans Charged with Criminal Offences in the Territory of Papua since the 1st January, 1910', 1921. The Queensland Criminal Code of 1899 had been adopted as a whole in British New Guinea in 1902.

²⁸ See above pp. 127-8.

destruction of property. Both brothers were convicted of the offences against property, fined and made to enter a £50 bond to keep the peace.²⁹

A. M. Sinclair was tried in January 1920 for the murder in 1919 of Kaima, an employee blown up while Sinclair was using dynamite to stun fish. He was found guilty of manslaughter and given a suspended sentence.³⁰ Charges of the manslaughter of a plantation labourer were made against Charles Adolphe Smith, an assistant on Jawarere, in 1915, and against the manager of Robinson River in 1920, Helge Holm. Smith was found guilty and imprisoned for three months. Holm had kicked a labourer who had taken more than his share of a catch of fish. The man subsequently died, probably of a ruptured spleen. Because there had been no *post mortem* the exact cause of death could not be determined and the case against the manager was dismissed. He had been previously convicted on several occasions since 1914 of assault on labourers.

Over the whole period 1910-21 seven out of nine Europeans charged with inflicting bodily harm and four out of five charged with unlawful wounding were convicted. Two at least were plantations overseers, one a recruiter. Richard Jensen, whose treatment and neglect of his workers led to the crisis at Itikinumu in 1918, as previously noted, had barely escaped conviction the year before for causing the loss of an eye when he threw a lamp 'in mistake' at a labourer.

Of other criminal offences little need be said here. These were not unique to planters nor particularly associated with plantation life. And not all victims in cases of serious assault recorded on the 1921 list were Papuans. There were violent crimes committed by Europeans against other Europeans. August Frese, the contractor who cleared Jawarere in 1910, serving subsequently as manager on several estates, was charged with the murder and convicted of the manslaughter of 'Handsome Harry' Baker in 1915. They had quarrelled over a Papuan woman.³¹ Convictions for sexual crimes committed by Europeans

²⁹ See Margriet Roe, 'The History of South East Papua to 1930' (ANU, PhD thesis, 1962), 475-6.

³⁰ NAPNG & CRS G179, Item 7/2. p. 2; *Papuan Courter*, 16 Jan. 1920.

³¹ NAPNG & CRS G179, Item 7/2. Capital offences committed by Europeans against each other were indeed very few. Towards the end of our period in Sept. 1939, Margaret Sinclair, widow of A. M. Sinclair of Hisiu, was arrested on suspicion of the wilful murder of Ernest Jones found dead in her bed with his throat cut. Both had been drinking heavily the night before and Mrs Sinclair could admit to remembering nothing. She said that Jones must have committed suicide. Dr Jenkins thought the wound one inflicted with great force and incompatible with such a view. At a committal hearing Richard Humphries RM nonetheless accepted R. D. Bertie's defence that there was no *prima facie* case against Mrs Sinclair who was quickly discharged. That the crime was an act of Papuan vengeance remained a possibility, certainly. But though it is unlikely in the circumstances that Mrs Sinclair could have been convicted on the 'wilful' charge it is also possible that in Papua the prospect of

were few if sexual relationships between white men and Papuan women were relatively common. Reginald Chancellor, a plantation assistant in 1912 and a soldier settler at Aroma in 1921, was convicted of the abduction of a Papuan girl in February 1922 and sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour.³² Perhaps as many as one in ten planters fathered Papuan children. Such outcomes could scarcely be concealed for long nor their consequences evaded if a man was to continue to live and work in the Territory. But where conception could be prevented there was much deception practised among wayward settlers anxious to preserve an unblemished reputation among their peers. Public knowledge that a European had sexual intercourse with 'native' women inevitably imposed limits upon his reception in polite company. At the same time acknowledged and sustained inter-racial marriages, whether formalised or not, were in time accepted, the settler admitted at least to masculine society. Homosexual acts on the other hand were a great scandal and for a white man exposure invariably led to early departure from the country.

Between 1918 and 1932 ten managers and assistants were debarred from having charge of labour.³³ A banning order made by the Executive Council as a result of a conviction before either an RM or the Central Court was usually for twelve months in the first instance and perpetual on a second conviction. The most prominent cases were at the beginning and end of this period. The first was that of G. E. Harris, the assistant on Mamai found guilty in 1917 of six charges of assault and as a result permanently banned.³⁴ The second was the case of Richard Jensen and Percy Nunn convicted of breaches of the NLO on Itikimumu in 1918.³⁵ The last was the case of Edward Ditton, a stockman on Giligili in Milne Bay fined for assault in 1930. In 1932 Ditton served two months imprisonment on another assault charge and was committed for trial in the Central Court for the attempted murder of a villager. Though acquitted he was never to be allowed to have charge of labour again. Ditton smashed the windows of the RM's office in Douglas Street in protest. He was imprisoned for a further three months during which he refused to eat.

trying a white woman for murder even of a lesser degree was too daunting for a case to be allowed to proceed. *Papuan Courter*, 22 Sept. 1939.

³² Chancellor's lease on the Upagau River was issued in 1920. His trial and conviction were reported in the *Papuan Courter*, 23 Dec. 1921 and 20 Feb. 1922. His lease was for sale in 1924 (*Papuan Courter*, 6 May 1924).

³³ NAPNG G91 Series 485, Box 806, Station Records, Abau, Jackets 18, 19, 1913-1936. The circulars recording debarments were routinely sent to all offices.

³⁴ CRS A1 18/4271, 'Papua: Reports re Native Affairs', 1916-1918. B. W. Bramell to Lieutenant Governor, 10 Feb. 1918, reports Harris's case.

³⁵ See above pp. 152-3.

He was deported in October 1933.³⁶ Among the others debarred at least for a year were Harry Garstang - a former manager of a government plantation, and W. J. Connolly - a former Patrol Officer and Government Land Buyer.

Recruiters could lose their licence as a result of a summary conviction by an RM, and between 1917 and 1921, fourteen, including the planters A. G. S. Frese, Arturo Pilotti, Charles Owen-Turner and Hobart Spiller, had their right to recruit suspended.³⁷ A Recruiter's Licence was issued annually, subject to a guarantee being secured or a surety of £50 being lodged. As with the planters, a second conviction for any serious offence could result in a recruiter being permanently denied the right to employ Papuans and refused a licence.

In the 1923-24 *Annual Report* after noting that there had been no serious breaches of the law in the previous twelve months, Leslie Bell, then CNA, wrote that

The conditions under which native labourers are working at present are as good, I think, as we can expect under an indenture system. The natives seem to have no serious grievances if we may judge by the large numbers in all parts of the Territory who regularly seek further service with Europeans when their contracts expire.³⁸

And in 1926 Bell's successor, J. T. O'Malley, found that generally 'amicable relations' had been maintained between employers and labourers in the preceding twelve months. These he attributed to the 'steady improvement year by year in the conditions under which the natives work' and to employers having absorbed the lesson taught by the Department 'in and out of season that to reduce costs at the expense of labour was really a policy of extra cost'.³⁹ The improvement in the working atmosphere on plantations was above all the consequence, he believed, of the selection of 'a better class' of plantation assistant on the company owned estates. Papuans in the North Eastern Division were now approaching recruiters for work and planters in the Rigo district were almost daily turning applicants away.

Of 138 inspections carried out during 1925-1926 fifty were made by the Commissioner himself or one of his three Native Affairs Department inspectors and the remainder by the twenty RMs in their capacity as Inspectors of Native Labour. Employers now seemed less perturbed by these visitors and on many estates labourers were being encouraged to raise any grievance directly with the manager over the head of subordinate supervisors, a procedure, O'Malley

³⁶ CRS A518, X840/1/5, Prohibitions Employment of Native Labour, 1932-34. This contains the report of the Ditton case.

³⁷ NAPNG G91 Series 485, Box 806, Station Records, Bantara and Cape Nelson, 1914-1934. From 1926 private planters were permitted to recruit labourers locally without a licence. Other businesses had been so free since 1918.

³⁸ PAR 1923-24, 52.

³⁹ PAR 1925-26, 82.

thought, that 'places the responsibility for contentment and efficiency on the right shoulders'.⁴⁰ He went on in the same report to describe unsatisfactory types of overseer that could still occasionally be found: the one who has nothing to learn and believes that sympathetic treatment of labour will be construed as weakness, the man with the 'live mouth' who nags his workers, and the man who has no interest in the labourers and believes he must make every small saving while extracting the maximum of labour. There was 'always the inevitable bias of the white man against the coloured man, which can only be rightly interpreted as race prejudice . . . Opposed to this is the native conviction that the European does not scruple, when opportunity offers, to take advantage of him'.⁴¹ Since 'our pioneering stage of development', the Commissioner believed, employers had learnt that the 'watchful eye' of the Department could not be evaded.

Ten convictions for common assault were recorded against Europeans during the period from July 1925 to June 1926 and eight charges dismissed. There were twenty-four convictions for assault by Papuans upon Europeans with three cases dismissed. Not all of these cases must have been connected with events that took place on plantations. Some 600 cases were heard against labourers in breach of the NLO with 116 being dismissed. Fourteen Europeans were convicted of breaches. The inspections over twelve months had covered 13,669 'units' of labour. There had been 6,716 new engagements and 6,317 labourers paid off. Total wages amounted to £68,082 with £572 being withheld for worker infringements of the Ordinance.⁴²

In proportion to the numbers of white men and brown men, 'of mixed temperament and antecedents' both, who faced each other on plantations at roll call each morning, the number of convictions for 1926, despite O'Malley's reassurances, may still seem excessive. About 150 Europeans were managing owners, employed managers or staff employed on plantations. Perhaps another fifty were traders and recruiters who did some 'planting'. And plantations employed more than half the Papuans in service. While an exact record of the numbers of Papuans engaging and completing contracts was readily maintained, the actual number currently under indenture could only be estimated. Allowing for those labourers with the three year contracts preferred by planters, and who would not appear in the records as entering or ending a period of employment, the total labour force under indenture at any one time in 1926 must have been between 9,000 and 10,000, the majority, or about 6,000, as agricultural labourers.⁴³ If a corresponding two

⁴⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 85, 88.

⁴³ See discussion in Appendix A, pp. 316-8, and Table 8, p. 315 below.

thirds of infringements of the NLO were committed by plantation workers these would account for about 320 of the convictions recorded. Thus perhaps 7% of indentured labourers on plantations might have been charged with such infringements in 1926 and under 6% convicted. If planters or their employees were indeed those among Europeans most likely to commit assaults upon Papuans or offend against the NLO - then perhaps as many as one planter in twenty was convicted of assault and one in fourteen of a breach of the NLO. Fewer than one in 300 indentured labourers all told were convicted of assaulting a European, perhaps one in 250 plantation labourers among them.

By 1930-31 Sir Hubert Murray could record in the *Annual Report* that the Central Court heard few civil cases adding - perhaps a little forgetfully - that 'the trial of Europeans on [criminal] indictment is practically unknown. The law abiding nature of the white population of Papua has been a noticeable feature ever since the days of Sir William MacGregor'.⁴⁴ In May 1936, George Roberts, another stockman employed at Giligili, was charged with murder for the rather brutal killing of a plantation labourer. While Roberts was prepared to admit to striking Kelemesina with his open hand a *post mortem* revealed that the man had a ruptured spleen and other internal injuries. Judge Gore convicted the stockman of manslaughter and sentenced him to eighteen months imprisonment.⁴⁵ This was the nearest a European came to conviction for a capital offence committed against a Papuan before 1942.

Attack and restraint

By 1930 a cumulative list of Papuans convicted of serious offences in the Central Court and debarred from entering further contracts of service - or to be permitted to sign on only under conditions - contained thirty-nine names.⁴⁶ About half of these men had been convicted either of indecent assault involving a European woman or child or of being on premises with intent to 'annoy' a European woman or child, all but two of the instances being in Port Moresby, one in Samarai, and one on Misima. A *Native Offenders' Exclusion Ordinance* was passed in that year to deny access to the towns to Papuans so convicted. Papuans from the Gulf and Delta Division in particular were regarded as untrustworthy near European women and an order was made that no men from these divisions were to be signed on to work

⁴⁴ PAR 1930-31, 7.

⁴⁵ *Papuan Courier*, 15 May 1936.

⁴⁶ NAPNG Series 485, Box 806, Station Records, Banlara and Cape Nelson, Appendix to DNA Circular No. 254, 22 July 1930. The 1930 list did not, it appears, include Papuans currently serving prison sentences and who may have been subsequently debarred on release.

as domestic servants outside their own divisions.⁴⁷ Of the remainder, most of whom might have been plantation labourers, at least one and possibly several others were debarred because of sodomy, perhaps several as 'notorious troublemakers' who had been convicted of fighting or of incitement, and the others for serious assault on a European. Eighteen names were added to the list in 1933 as a result of convictions for the group rape of a Papuan woman of Hisiu. Yet, considering the size of the indentured labour force - and remembering that many thousands of other Papuans had at some time been 'signed on' - the list of debarred labourers, like that of Europeans convicted of criminal offences against Papuans, was brief.

Whether provoked or not Papuans as men and as Melanesians could be violent. Robert Bunting was attacked in August 1913 at Giligili, Milne Bay, by Orokaiva labourers armed with knives after he had struck one who had threatened him. The labourers when questioned by Alexander MacAlpine ARM said that they would surely have killed Bunting had he been a Papuan but desisted because he was 'another kind'.⁴⁸ Much later in 1934, Bunting was attacked by Fergusson Island labourers at Ahioma, Milne Bay, where he had taken over the management of the desiccated coconut plant. Nine of his attackers were given sentences of ten years' imprisonment.⁴⁹ Bunting died a few months later, possibly from the effects of the assault, aged fifty-two. In 1926 Andrew Doyle a small planter or market gardener on the Laloki was murdered, probably by a Papuan employee. The motive apparently had been no more than robbery.⁵⁰ William Bellingham, managing at Hisiu in August 1927, received severe head injuries when he attempted to stop two labourers beating a third, Lalaita. Lalaita had previously complained to Bellingham that he had not been receiving sufficient food and that rations were being withheld and stored by the 'cook-boy'. The cook had been confronted and Lalaita's claims confirmed. At the preliminary hearing the two labourers said that they wanted to punish Lalaita for informing on the cook, who, they alleged, had been assaulted by the manager. In 1936, Laidley Cay, an assistant on Itikinumu, was very badly beaten by labourers after he had punched one for refusing to put out a cigarette. Eight months later Cay was again attacked by workers who were charged with attempted murder. Four of the assailants were sentenced to seven years and two to six years imprisonment. These were

⁴⁷ Ibid., Circular No. 246, 14 Feb. 1930.

⁴⁸ NAPNG & CRS G91 Government Secretary, Patrol Reports Eastern Division, 15 Aug. 1913.

⁴⁹ *Papuan Courler*, 4 May 1934.

⁵⁰ Nohoro of Orokolo was discharged when, after a trial in which he was convicted of Doyle's murder and after the warrant for his execution had been signed, the Crown's evidence was discredited. Murray believed him to be very probably guilty but allowed that the strong circumstantial evidence of itself could not convict the man. See *PAR* 1926-27, 1.

among the more significant incidents that reached the newspaper.⁵¹ But Station Patrol Reports and Journals record numerous acts of violence carried out by Papuans, most of these taking place far from plantations. And it may be, setting aside the greater publicity given to assaults on plantations and especially where Europeans appeared the sufferers, that by comparison with life in many villages, plantations were in fact relatively quiet and peaceful places.⁵²

Papuan communities in the vicinity of plantations were neither free of conflict nor entirely subdued by fear of the *gavamani* and from time to time could probe the limits of its power. Harry Ballot, a 'Russian' managing Jawarere for BNGD, was murdered there in 1915 by Papuans from nearby villages for killing a pig. It was an incident William Bruce in the *Papuan Times* used to 'show' that Papuans held the government in contempt.⁵³ In the same year at Abau in the East Central Division villagers at Oio killed three members of the Armed Constabulary sent to arrest a man wanted for the murder of Mageri people. The dozen Europeans on plantations throughout the area offered to assist L. P. B. Armit RM in a patrol to catch the killers. J. R. Clay, a coastal mariner staying at Robinson River at the time and found wounded, may have been attacked by the Oio.⁵⁴

The same district was disturbed again eighteen years later. In June 1933, Frank Clarke, former manager of Domara and now at Robinson River, wrote a note to the RM at Abau requesting a police patrol. He had been warned 'by the elders not to let my boys go into the bush'. In January 1934 the RM reported that several murders had been committed by Waramabo in a raid on Wanigela. It seemed that the Waramabo thought that if they killed someone they could be sent to gaol 'to see what it was like'.⁵⁵ In May C. R. Corke, managing at Dedele, reported that some of his copra splitters had been frightened by 'bush natives', armed and decorated with feathers.⁵⁶ In August raids were made on Dedele, where an attempt had been made to kill two

⁵¹ *Papuan Courier*, 5 Nov. 1926 (Doyle); 12 Aug. 1927 (Bellingham); 7, 14 Aug. 1936, 2 Apr. 1937 (Cay). Bill Bellingham, like W. A. Simpson (see above pp. 272-3), had been an assistant on Ogamobu in 1920 who failed to satisfy Percy Robinson's requirements. He became relieving manager on the BNGD estates in the twenties and thirties. He left Papua 'for good' in Jan. 1938 but returned in Feb. 1940 and became manager of Epo, the new Kerema Rubber Pty Ltd estate in the Gulf Division.

⁵² For testimony to the muted atmosphere on a plantation as remembered by a Papuan born on Koltaki, see John Kadiba, 'Growing up in Mailu', in Ulli Beier, *Black Writing from New Guinea* (Brisbane 1973).

⁵³ *Papuan Times*, 10 Mar. 1915.

⁵⁴ NAPNG & CRS G91, Station Journal, East Central Division, Apr. 1915.

⁵⁵ NAPNG Series 485, Box 809. Station Records Abau, 1913-1936. Grist ARM to government Secretary, 25 Jan. 1934.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Corke to ARM Abau, 8 May 1934.

Goaribaris, and on Robinson River, where the house of an absent assistant was ransacked. In October there were killings and rumours of killings by 'Keveri' men from the villages behind Domara, the range of the unrest stretching over the mountains into the North Eastern Division. In December Richard Walshe of Domara reported that his Aroma tappers worked 'in fear and trembling of being knocked on the head by "bushmen" who were 'hanging around the outskirts of our plantation'.⁵⁷ One worker from Aroma had been killed there in 1931. Walshe had been forced to place a 'stalwart gang of Goaribaris' on guard while rubber was being tapped. In July 1935, Awara of Ganai, a labourer on BNGD's Baubauguina estate nearby, was murdered. The Lieutenant Governor directed that the RM at Abau see that the people of the district understood that murderers of plantation labourers would in future be punished with death.⁵⁸ The disturbance ceased.

Small societies previously hostile to each other could readily be dominated by comparatively few intruders supported by the organisation and technology of the larger world outside. Clearly the Europeans were powerful men possessed of desirable objects and formidable weapons. But Papuans would continue to entertain a level of violence as an expression of personal and group power among themselves and could direct violence against white men too if these strangers were perceived as vulnerable or provocative enough. The restraint that many Papuans and Europeans exercised in the interests of satisfying complementary needs enabled economic relationships and a kind of society between them to develop and endure. Plantations were the major arena in which these interactions took place, an arena which quite quickly acquired characteristics that were 'customary' and predictable. By the thirties the European settlers in Papua had tested and acknowledged the limits of their circumstances. And clearly, many Papuans too, if they hoped for a more perfect dispensation, had come to accept the only one that was provided, knew what to expect, and - for a period in their lives at least - took the terms offered them for their labour on plantations.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Walshe to ARM Abau, 17 Dec. 1934.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Government Secretary Minute Paper to ARM Abau, 23 Oct. 1935.

PART VII

Settling accounts

A[t] the possession of British New Guinea, this place was a picturesque backwater of no political or economic consequence. A new order appeared in 1906 when Australia took over the Possession and made it into the Territory of Papua . . . for the next thirty years the same names were appearing in all the movements in the Territory . . . The two ages of the country might be called the savage and the pioneering . . . [The] question is are we passing rapidly into a third age? . . . [T]he men who pioneered the country are retiring from the scene one by one and new men are taking their places. The Commonwealth is, for good or evil, taking a more direct interest in the place.

Papuan Courier, Editorial, 27 Oct. 1939.

Well, such is life. You are quite right; our civilisation is a hollow fraud - all the fun of life is lost by it; all it gains is that a larger number of persons can continue to be contemporaneously unhappy on the surface of the globe . . .

Robert Louis Stevenson, Letter to Mrs Charles Fairchild, Sydney, 1890.

CHAPTER 20

Conclusions and reconciliations

THE WHITE PIONEER episode in Papua was brief and much of the evidence that there was once a small community of 'Anglo-Papuans' who believed that they had a permanent future in the country will soon have disappeared completely. Hardly a structure will be left standing or an original planter's name remembered and many of the older plantations have completed their cycle. While international companies control some of the larger estates and these may retain overseas staff, most plantations in an independent Papua New Guinea - if they survive - will acquire a history increasingly associated with Papua New Guinean ownership and management and with the economic experience of the new nation state. Their white history will recede in memory and in proportion. And among living Australians too the 'Papuan planter' experience will be soon extinguished. Planters were never many. In its colonial period Papua did not attract substantial European settlement or become the economic asset to the Commonwealth that Australians in 1884, 1888 or 1906 imagined it would become. These outcomes could not have been known in advance, of course, however inevitable they seem now in retrospect.

Of the period from 1884 until 1942 we might reach some general conclusions. Firstly, that despite the bold words of the Royal Commissioners and others in 1905-06, and once its strategic needs were met, Australia attempted neither to create a genuine mercantile empire in Papua (or later in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea) with protected industries that complemented her own, nor to develop a thoroughgoing plantation economy based on imported labour with which she could challenge other producers of tropical commodities in international trade. The Australian market-place remained too small ever to absorb more than a small part of the copra produced in its surrounding island region, a region where the Papuan growers were in competition with many other Australian and British producers. And most other tropical commodities imported into the Commonwealth would continue to be obtained more cheaply from nearby Southeast Asia.

Secondly, that as a field for plantation agriculture Papua proved in any case an ungenerous country, less fertile than its verdure suggested, with no advantage in its resources or in the cost and efficiency of its labour force over 'competitors' elsewhere in the tropical world. This, the white settlers discovered to their cost and sorrow. Nothing except much larger discoveries of gold or of oil might have compensated for this and changed Papua's

fortunes as a colonial economy. Comparatively few white men made a living out of the country.

Thirdly, that while the administration of Sir Hubert Murray was indeed one determined to defend Papuans, so too, it is clear, were successive ministries in Melbourne and Canberra. Their concern for Papua primarily strategic and prepared to take few risks they made virtue of a policy of protection. As it became manifest that the country was poor in resources and prospects, this was also the cheapest policy.

If the plantation cycle elsewhere consisted of four phases - a 'pioneer' phase in which the individual planter predominated, a 'capitalist' phase in which companies eclipsed or superseded the private planter, a 'consolidation' phase in which great agency houses provided integrated management services or plantations came under the direct control of the manufacturers downstream, and a 'repatriation' phase as ownership and some degree of control of plantation industries were claimed and acquired by the successor states, then in Papua the third phase had been passed by.¹ With the other South Seas producers on the margins of the plantation world, its small industries uncompetitive, the Papuan economy could not proceed to the consolidation of plantation interests, infrastructure or property management that characterised the plantation economies of Southeast Asia after 1920. If these developments signified 'maturity' in those economies then Papua's economy remained 'immature' even as the last phase approached. Nor, without imported labour, could the Territory have taken the Fijian path whereby Indian tenant farmers replaced white planters as the foundation of an integrated commodity export industry.

Papua had not stood the commercial test. Its copra industry stagnated and its rubber never became competitive. Attempts to develop other industries failed. It became apparent that the Territory could not be another Java or Malaya or Ceylon because Java, Malaya and Ceylon already existed. The reality was that Australians had neither the numbers, nor the wealth, nor indeed sufficient good reason to invest more heavily in their dependency - in either its industries or its administration; only the strategic arguments for the annexation of British New Guinea were in the end, for them, unquestionably vindicated. Papua's industries contributed towards the Territory's upkeep but otherwise they were without importance.

And as demonstration models of industry among the Papuans, plantations can hardly be said to have succeeded. Throughout the period covered by this study smallholder development remained slight - rewarded with meagre

¹ This model of the course of plantation development is discussed in G. C. Goldthorpe, 'Plantation Agriculture in Papua New Guinea', *Institute of National Affairs Occasional Paper No. 19* (Port Moresby 1985), 52.

returns and tainted by the pressure applied upon unwilling villagers by government officers carrying out a policy of 'encouragement'. Despite ancient traditions of exchange between Papuan communities the intrusion of European commerce led to no growth of a class of 'native' traders, small businessmen or skilled managers; perhaps the advantage Europeans possessed in the new trading was such that Papuans were excluded from the beginning; perhaps Papuans were content that the new economic functions carried out by Europeans should remain in the hands of these strangers outside the circle of customary obligation. Smallholder cash-cropping would expand in the fifties as commodity prices rose and a much more resolute programme of agricultural extension was begun but it is doubtful that the presence of commercial plantations was essential in stimulating this development.

Modern Papua New Guineans might have reason to be glad of the 'failure' of colonial Papua as they might be relieved by the determination of the Australian and Papuan governments not to admit an alien labour force into the country when it was within their power to do so. European intervention may have been relatively less destructive of Papuan societies than of small societies in other parts of the world precisely in proportion to the failure of the development the intruders had hoped for. Certainly a much larger white community, if it had become established - and like those elsewhere - might have stubbornly resisted the eventual transfer of power to Papua New Guineans. Papuans might believe that they gained little from their experience of European colonisation but they were also spared much.

Of planters and settlers

To colonise an apparent Eden, to settle and cultivate 'new' lands, are profoundly formative experiences. To create and to defend a permanent stake in a country that may be passed on to others of the settler group may constitute an almost biological imperative. To expect to be justified by time in the possession of territory might seem something well worth the sacrifice and effort of a lifetime. And so it seemed for a time to the white pioneers in Papua. The tenacity of their commitment to the country they claimed is striking. Like their contemporaries in Kenya or Rhodesia, they had come confidently, believing themselves the first fully aware and adult people to tread that earth, the first to really see it for what it was, and to truly possess it. They believed that they had come to stay and they had high hopes. And most of those who put down roots in the boom years remained to take what came. They were greatly disappointed.

For by 1935 the Territory's 'failure' was all too clear. Papua, its settlers now recognised, would never be a 'white man's country'. And those who had foolishly settled there, it seemed, would never find prosperity. Richard Walshe, managing at Domara, and admitting to pessimism, wrote to the *Papuan*

Courier in June to question the assumption made in the leader of 17 May that prosperity might 'return'. 'Has "prosperity" been here then?', he asked. 'Has somebody seen it at last?' The only prosperity Papua had known, he was certain, was the 'mirage' created by 'capital and yet more private capital FLOWING IN'.² In June, 'Adsum' reflected that

At some distant date a "History of Papua" will be written . . . The first thirty years will no doubt be styled the Early or Pioneer Period. The next thirty years might be styled The Grasscutters Period. What will the thirty year period commencing now be styled? Let us hope it will be a period of true development. If not why not let the Germans, Japs, or the real natives have it? There is any amount of room in Australia, and no need to come to Papua to - well, deteriorate.³

Why indeed did settlers now stay? Was it the residual allure of the islands?⁴ Was it because of the natural attachment over time to a climate and landscape, to friends and properties, to a shared way of life? Or was it because of a 'sense of their singularity' among aliens, a deep unadmitted pleasure in being lords over lesser men? Certainly an unwillingness to admit failure and leave Papua, and a strong desire to return after an absence, were repeatedly shown by a whole generation of both settlers and officials between the wars. It is true that if government officers could retire on their pensions to Australia few private settlers could afford to do so, and for many in the depression years to leave Papua was to face hardly less poverty in Australia. And of those who did leave before 1942 - like Elizabeth Mahony, Walter Gors, Percy Robinson and the Keelans - most had known bitterness and defeat. Men like G. A. Loudon were of a kind that might have succeeded anywhere. Perhaps only a stubborn refusal to be beaten can ultimately explain the determination of Loudon and others to carry on. Yet it is also clear that Papua, despite worsening times and greatly dampened hopes, had become for many settlers an adopted homeland, a familiar place, and a focus of personal and group identity. In an emotional and most telling conclusion to his response to suggestions in 1939 that there should be an amalgamation of Papua with the Mandated Territory, Sir Hubert Murray probably spoke as he claimed to speak for the great majority of the Papuan white community when he declared, in opposing the idea, that 'in spite of all sorts of woeful

² *Papuan Courier*, 14 June 1935.

³ *Papuan Courier*, 3 July 1936.

⁴ Dexter, 'Reminiscences', 287. For Henry Dexter it was the 'Call of the islands'. Years before he had been advised 'You take my tip and get out of this country as soon as you can or every time you go away you'll be hearing the Call and be always coming back. It's damned unsettling, I can tell you' (p. 297).

prognostications we have made a success of our territory . . . and we have come to love Papua not only as our home, but as our own creation'.⁵

In May 1935, a poem by 'R.H.' - probably Richard Humphries RM - was published in the paper. In 'This Land' the writer defined a relationship with the country shared by many of his contemporaries among the white Papuans - whether officials or private settlers it did not now matter. R.H.'s poem presents a profound contrast in mood and substance to J. G. Fowler's strident settler verse of 1911.

Whatever call I felt to leave this land
In days gone by, a prey to thoughts that seemed
To promise more than what I had in hand
Of calm and ease and pleasures real or dreamed;
Whatever call I felt I must obey
To find relief from longing's plaintiff cry,
It is to this wild land that now today
My spirit clings, my calmer soul gives way.

I feel and know that here I have fought
And sinned and suffered, laughed at passion's heat,
Drunk all the draughts of pleasure life has brought,
And bitter cups of misery and defeat,
Here in this land whose discords suit my ear,
Whose features once were sullen in my eyes,
This very land, which has to me grown dear,
Now holds me close in mild but sweet surprise.

Whatever call I feel to wander now
To distant lands with wider ways that hold
For other men a heavy laden bough
Of care, success, or crop of gleaming gold;
This land, mother of all I know unkind,
Whose wayward steps I never could explain,
This very land the only place I find
Where I can live at peace with heart and mind.⁶

But with the pioneer planters who had shared the old optimism of the development years or had cleared with their 'boys' half a square mile of virgin scrub, a particular relationship between some white men and women and the land of Papua was already passing away. From 1930 onwards no year went by, it seemed, without the deaths of several of the central figures of the pre-

⁵ Sir Hubert Murray, *Notes on the Suggested Combination of the Administrations of Papua and New Guinea* (Port Moresby 1939), 17.

⁶ *Papuan Courier*, 17 May 1935. Richard Humphries remained in Papua after 1945 becoming Director of Labour in the post-war administration of Papua and New Guinea. He was killed in the eruption of Mt Lamington in 1951. J. G. Fowler's 'Wake up Papua' is above, p. 125.

1914 generation of settlers whose presence had given continuity and structure to the community. Among these 'old friends', Leo Gors of 'Iki-ikina' at Hisiu, and Horace Harbord, a miner in the 1880s rush and first manager of Angabunga, died in 1931. Bob Bunting of Sanaroa and Ahioma died in August 1934, Allan B. Sinclair of Orokololo in May 1936, Elias Solomon once of Loani in August 1936, Robert Hunter - the rough sandalwood getter who had planted Daugo for Sir William MacGregor - in September 1936, and Charlie Talbot of 'Taupota', Punipuni, in January 1937. Robert Whitten, the surviving brother of the Whitten Bros partnership, died on 16 April 1937. Allan MacGregor Sinclair of Hisiu died in December 1937, Mrs Anna 'Granny' Clunn of Ramaga in December 1938. Arthur Bunting - the eldest of the Bunting brothers and with the Whittens and Mahonys a major planter of small properties in the Eastern Division, Jim Matley of Waigani - a BNGD manager since 1910, Mrs Daisy English of Rigo, 'Gus' Nelsson MLC of Doini and Woodlark, and Don Irvine of Giligili, all died in 1939. 'Scotty' Currie of Oiapu died in 1940, Fred Kruger of Gamododo and Fred 'Brassy' Evenett of Moununa in 1941. Brassy had blown himself up in a boat accident. News had been received of other deaths - in 1934 of Staniforth Smith in retirement in Western Australia, and in 1936 of Walter Gors, British New Guinea's first planter, dead in Sydney at seventy-one. Others tempted by the plantation dream came to buy or manage the smaller properties but the newcomers seemed to dilute rather than strengthen the old community.

Reconciliations

By 1940 the circle was closing. Hubert Murray was in his seventy-ninth year and had been Lieutenant Governor for thirty-two years having acted in the position for two years preceding his appointment. He had also been Chief Judicial Officer in Papua since 1904. Now frail if still unbending, the 'Old Man' had become the object of some pride even among those who had once sought to bring him down. The social committee of Steamships Trading Company arranged a ball in September 1938. Unexpectedly Murray accepted an invitation to attend. Captain Fitch, so long alienated from the Lieutenant Governor by the telegram of 1920, told his general manager E. V. Crisp that Murray's presence there had made the moment the proudest of his life. The two had seldom met, and then only officially, in the nineteen years Fitch had been in the country. On 28 January 1940, 'Gal' Loudon's elder daughter was married to an American geologist in Port Moresby and Murray was invited to propose a toast at the reception. It was another moment of reconciliation. His 'bitterest enemy for many years' with whom Murray in 1918 could not contemplate further contact, and the Governor that Loudon, alone among the business community, could not bring himself to congratulate on his thirty years of service only a few months before, could at last see no purpose in continuing to keep their distance. 'I took it as an expression of a wish to bury the

hatchet, and readily accepted', Murray wrote.⁷ A month later while on routine judicial circuit in the Eastern Division he died of pernicious anaemia at Samarai.

Some that had become reconciled to his methods and long prepared to accept the constraints he had consistently maintained were once again able to see the possibility of another 'fresh start' in Papua with a future policy favouring development through government assisted private enterprise. Once more the Papuans were 'too protected'. Once more, the visiting popular writer Frank Clune could write, might Australia 'look to Papua for many tropical products imported from foreign countries - rubber, tea, coffee, cocoa, quinine, kapok, copra, could all be more extensively cultivated. Rice could be grown in the swamplands for native food, and industrial uses could be found in paper-making from the quick-growing grasses and nipa palms of the mighty river valleys and the muddy deltas . . . Our northern frontier, the Land of the Fuzzy-tops, should become an asset instead of a liability'.⁸

When asked his recommendations for a successor for Sir Hubert Murray, Tom Nevitt, BNGD general manager since 1934, now declined to confide in H. W. Champion or Leonard Murray who were obvious candidates. In May 1940, F. C. Tracy, agent for BNGD in Sydney since 1915, submitted proposals on a successor for consideration by the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies. Tracy thought that 'however excellent the qualities of the late Sir Hubert Murray, he was not a financial genius, neither had he any liking or regard for agriculture or commerce and this is clearly shown in the present condition of finance, agriculture and public works in the Territory'.⁹ Considering the public support planters had given Murray since 1922, and the debt they owed him for assistance in the two depressions - as much as he could give within the limits of his resources - this was unjust. Tracy saw the opportunity presented by Murray's death to make him once more the scapegoat for the disappointing progress of Papua with a view, no doubt, that by avoiding any mention of the Commonwealth's failure to provide adequate support for its dependency, a change could be prompted in its policy. But in July, after a meeting of planters, Captain Fitch, as chairman, wrote favourably of Murray's efforts on behalf of the growers.¹⁰ The appointment of Leonard Murray to succeed his

⁷ Francis West, *Selected Letters of Hubert Murray* (Melbourne 1971), letter No. 166, 29 Jan. 1940. As recently as 1938 a long letter from Loudon was published in the *Pacific Islands Monthly*. It attacked, among other things, a failure of the Papuan Government to provide adequate technical training for Papuans (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, Jan. 1938, p. 65).

⁸ Frank Clune, *Prowling through Papua* (Sydney 1942), 236-7.

⁹ NAPNG & CRS G69 1/31 f1-10, 'Correspondence in which Criticism is levelled against the late Sir Hubert Murray's attitude to Agriculture and Commerce', Nevitt to Champion, n.d. 1/31-8; Tracy to Menzies, 5 May 1940.

¹⁰ NAPNG & CRS G69 4/39/20, Fitch to Minister, 31 July 1940.

uncle, if only as an 'Administrator', while it surprised no one, was a disappointment to those, like G. A. Loudon, who wanted a change in direction. The younger Murray was not personally unpopular with planters - they had lived together with him for a generation - but he promised only continuity. One change might have pleased some, at least in principle. In 1941 it was decided that no harm would now follow for Papuan workers if the old Department of Native Affairs and Control - the late Lieutenant Governor's independent 'watch dog' set up to stand guard over employed labour - was amalgamated with the Government Secretary's Department as part of the general administration.¹¹

With the outbreak of the war in the Pacific in December 1941 white women and children in Papua and New Guinea were evacuated to Australia to be followed in January and February by all of the men who could not be placed in the armed forces. The sudden departure of the greater part of the European community left the plantations without direction and their indentured labourers stranded and perplexed. No one had known what to advise their employees to do. On a few estates workers continued to maintain the routines of production until the plantation food stores were exhausted, waiting for a return to normalcy, unable to comprehend so abrupt a discontinuity. Others perhaps long expecting an apocalyptic outcome to European intrusion might not have been disappointed by the war. Many small plantations already reduced to a maintenance state by the depression in the copra market were just abandoned as labourers tried to make their way home. The Australian army's need for carriers would soon exceed by far the annual labour supply Papua had hitherto afforded and for the first time Papuan communities would be subjected to a very large demand for involuntary labour. Many plantation workers were drafted directly into serving the military forces without being able to return to their villages and without regard to the period of their indenture served prior to the war.

A Pacific Territories Association was formed in Sydney in May 1942 by planters and other settlers, mostly those in private business and from both Papua and New Guinea, to represent their interests in exile. The president from July was E. A. James, a customs agent in Port Moresby and proprietor of the *Papuan Courier* since 1924. The treasurer was Gerald Smith, G. A. Loudon's Port agent. The looting of the stores and residences of Port Moresby by the Australian troops following the confusion of the evacuation, together with the destruction of other property, was at first the major concern of the 'Papuan' members. As the war progressed and time elapsed the assumption that they would resume the same life in the Territory as before began to be

¹¹ *Papuan Courier*, 14 Feb. 1941.

threatened by the patriotic and humanitarian rhetoric in the press and the Federal Parliament about giving the native people who had assisted the allies a new deal when the conflict ended. The situation seemed to be growing dangerously out of hand and by not being in Papua and in possession of their properties the settlers could feel their grip loosening.

The *Pacific Islands Monthly*, published in Sydney since 1930 and during the depression years a comforting buttress of the planter establishment throughout the southwestern Pacific, now became the settler's only source of information, and the editor, R. W. Robson, enjoyed the opportunity to strut a little. He became intemperate in his advocacy of settler interests at one point proposing that the Pacific Territories Association appeal over the head of the Australian Government to Britain and the United States for immediate independence for 'New Guinea', a motion overwhelmingly rejected by the Association. In July 1943 the Australian New Guinea Production Control Board was set up to allow production to resume in areas no longer threatened by the enemy and many of the Papuan planters were permitted to return to their properties without their families. Confronted with badly damaged or neglected plantations and the work at hand, their anxiety about the future lessened. If the Labor Party seemed determined to pursue a post-war policy that placed the Papuans above the settlers, practical men could see that the plantations could not easily be done away with nor the property rights of Australian citizens disregarded. By November 1944 the Commonwealth had committed itself to compensation payments for war damage.

But following on as it did from the deaths in the late thirties of so many of their peers, in a profound sense the intervention of the war had provided a final release for the remaining pioneers from a kind of bondage to Papua - a deep transformation in their psychological commitment to the country and a way of life they had been unwilling to acknowledge as leading to nothing. Forced to make many prolonged adjustments of their lives and minds to conditions in Australia most would never again regard Papua as a permanent home. For many Sydney would now remain their fixed point of reference and their plantations 'in the islands' essentially businesses - businesses conducted in surroundings that were familiar and still dear to them, but businesses they all knew that sooner or later they could relinquish. In the post-war prosperity most planters could afford to go 'South' for a brief holiday or for long delayed dental treatment, and nearly all would retire to Sydney or Brisbane forming a small and dwindling circle of old 'Papuans' in friendly rivalry with their contemporaries from New Guinea. If some of those who returned in 1945 chose to recollect the period between the wars as a 'golden age', for others there was a strong impulse to forget a past that had comprised for most

Papuan planters as for the former Government Secretary Herbert Champion - if for different reasons - more of 'a long nightmare'.¹²

After 1945 the rubber estates begun in the late thirties were developed and would come into full production though little use was made of the new profits to replant the older blocks as undertaken in every other producing country. Perhaps the pre-war base of unimproved rubber stock in Papua was too small to bother about. Certainly planters proceeded cautiously in the new circumstances despite a supported price for the whole of Papua's rubber in the Australian market and the establishment of a stabilisation fund for copra. As long as favourable conditions lasted plantations would be extended and managed at least partly with a view to exacting the highest price for them - or to justifying a claim for the greatest compensation - if and when the time eventually came to go. By the mid-sixties 'the writing was on the wall' and their proprietors, awaiting the outcome, were content to work them out as they stood. The new planters who in the fifties had taken up blocks in the old Northern Division to grow cocoa, like those who developed coffee estates in the highlands of New Guinea, re-lived the old certainties but the foundations of the world had shifted.

Post-war production of rubber in Papua greatly exceeded the pre-war output. The area under *hevea brasiliensis* grew to 35,000 acres and exports reached 6,000 tons in 1970. Copra, nearly a third the product of Papuan smallholdings, amounted to 16,519 tons in 1964-65 - the plantation share scarcely more than that of the best years before 1942.¹³ In the early sixties some of the new generation of planters could ignore the signs and still hope for a 'partnership' with Papuans and New Guineans or a continuing constitutional relationship between Australia and the territories - combined since 1949 - that might preserve the economic role and privileges of the 'expatriates'. But by 1965 the pace of decolonisation elsewhere and Australia's paramount interests dictated a rapid progress towards disengagement. Their numbers never large enough to allow them to make demands that might modify the Commonwealth's policy, their dependency on Australian markets now too great and Australia itself far too close for any seizure of power to be remotely contemplated, settlers would accept the inevitable outcome. In the end if some thought that they could afford the risks of carrying on, many were

¹² Ian Stuart, 'Herbert William Champion', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7 (Melbourne 1979). Captain A. S. Fitch was one for whom the wartime exile was decisive. In 1943 he was permitted to return to Papua to re-commence copra and rubber production on the Steamships estates. With a new share issue the company's stores re-opened in Nov. 1945 and Fitch was able to retire to Sydney in Nov. 1946. He died in 1972.

¹³ PAR 1965-66.

given no such option, made the best arrangements they could for the disposal of their assets, and went quietly.

In 1942 both 'Gal' Loudon and Tom Sefton had turned sixty, and Arthur Jewell was sixty-three. Jewell died a year later in wartime exile. Millicent Jewell, always the stronger partner, carried on after 1945 managing their interests until her own death. Loudon joined the ANGAU administration as Assistant Quartermaster General with the rank of major. He had been one of only a few unsentimental Papuan residents in 1939 in favour - on conditions - of amalgamation with New Guinea, in favour of the larger arena that such a change would create as he was in favour of the development policies that gave greater security to the Papuan industries after the war.¹⁴ He was ever consistent. His Eilogo, Mororo and Catalina estates did well in the years following the outbreak of the Korean War and his son, Ian Loudon (born 1921), with Colin Sefton of Koitaki (born 1920), seemed for a time likely to carry on leadership of the Papuan planters into the next generation.¹⁵ Ian Loudon, an RAAF pilot during the war, was drowned in a few inches of water when his car left the road on the low Laloki bridge at Sogeri in November 1957 after a day of business in town. It was a significant tragedy, one that among the older planters could only nourish the deep sense of the futility of it all. Lisle Johnston, an assistant on Itikinumu before the war and manager on Sogeri afterwards, remembered that 'something seemed to go out of the place' with the younger Loudon's death and that it tainted every enjoyment of the better times of the sixties. G. A. Loudon died in Sydney in 1964. He had seen the most prosperous period experienced by the Papuan plantation industries in the last decade of his life at a time when it was becoming clear even to the most refractory of more recent settlers that the future belonged to the Papuans. His wife, Winifred 'Peg' Loudon, *née* Penny, Port Moresby's second school mistress in 1913, spent fifty years in the Territory. Looking back in 1973 she reflected that planter Papua, the Papua of settler hopes, had been 'a washout'.

Postscript 1988

On the Sogeri plateau, in January 1988, there remained exposed patches of the red volcanic soil and the distinctive fenugreek smell of molasses grass. Koitaki Estate was largely cleared of the *hevea brasiliensis* that had covered

¹⁴ On 17 Feb. 1939 it was proposed in the *Papuan Courier* that G. A. Loudon be the representative of 'unofficial' Papua at the amalgamation discussions. The proposal was not followed but Loudon would undoubtedly have proved difficult in the defence of 'Papuan' interests. In the paper of 8 Aug. 1940 he dismissed as 'a joke' the suggestion that the then Administrator of the Mandated Territory might preside over the combined territories - 'We ourselves in Papua can produce at least half a dozen more outstanding men', he thought.

¹⁵ Colin Sefton became vice-president of the Planters' Association of Papua in the sixties.

the land in its tens of thousands for upwards of eighty years. Along the road a flowering pink *cassia javanica* stood out near a thin line of rubber trees that survived as a wind break. Round about cattle grazed in open country. On nearby Sogeri Plantation too the rubber had been grubbed out, the departing manager of thirty years confronted and reproached by expectant villagers in 1976 for having enriched himself on their lands while they had stayed poor. Beyond Koitaki the trees on Itikinumu still stood but tapping had ceased and this also was to become a cattle property supplying the expanding needs of the capital for fresh meat. The collecting bowls hung from the trees with the latex in them coagulated and dirty. Over a rise to the south lay Eilogo. This property remained in the hands of the Loudon family until 1978 when with its trees exhausted it was sold to the government of Papua New Guinea. Ilolo, Percy McDonald's estate on the Kokoda track planted with bud-grafted rubber in the late thirties and since, was still in production and being expanded with even better cloned stock. It was owned by a Koiari co-operative. The greater part of rubber production now came from the belt of lower country seventy kilometres to the west surrounding the old Kanosia, Lolorua and Veimaui estates and in the Mariboi-Rubberlands area. New levels of rural wages were placing the industry in difficulty though with further planting or replanting using high-yielding material and with technical advances in tapping and processing it seemed that it might survive. There was a promising development in smallholder production of rubber in the Western Province and around Otomata at Cape Rodney. Copra production was almost at a standstill with elderly coconut stands, little new planting, and overwhelming competition from palm oil.

The British New Guinea Development Company became a subsidiary of Eastern Plantation Holdings, a part of the Jessell Group, a British conglomerate, in 1970. In 1984 it was acquired together with Kanosia and Veimaui by the Belgian plantation multinational S. A. Sipef N. V. of Antwerp. Sipef also held an equal share with the Papua New Guinea government in a large palm oil development in New Britain. As agents for the remaining Sogeri estates and from its own properties, BNGD - still under the old name - exported 4,200 tons of Papuan rubber in 1986 at around 80 (US) cents a kilogram. Koitaki Limited remained a Sydney based company into the eighties diversifying with cattle at Sogeri and at Mt Hagen in the New Guinea Highlands and with coffee near Mt Hagen at Banz. In 1983 it became one of those enterprises together with the old BNGD managers' venture, Sogeri Rubber Plantations, purchased by the partly state-owned corporation ANGCO which in 1988 was also negotiating the acquisition of Itikinumu from Sipef. Of other pre-1942 plantations controlled or subsequently acquired by Steamships Trading Company, Lolorua, Mariboi and Rubberlands were now wholly owed by the London based Commonwealth Development Corporation,

and Otomata, like many other smaller plantations, had been purchased by or on behalf of a neighbouring Papuan community. Yet others, like Ogamobu on the Kikori River, were abandoned.

Across the water from Samarai on Sariba Island and in the old Port Moresby cemetery at Badihagwa, behind Hanuabada village, lie many of the graves of the white settlers of Papua. At Badihagwa they are found together with that of Sir Hubert Murray. The sites are neglected and many of the headstones and crosses are broken down with parts and inscriptions missing. Many now are quite unmarked. There are the remains of the memorials to two of William and Ellen Bruce's children, to Dr Harse's daughter Enid dead at twenty-two, to Otto, Arthur, Leo and Adela Gors, to Les Joubert's son, to W. J. Little and to L. P. B. Armit, to Richard Edward Weaver murdered on the Laloki in 1906, to Dr Walter Strong, an officer from 1904 and CMO 1915-37, and to E. J. Frame of Burns Philp - his epitaph testifying to 'a pioneer of Papua' now seldom scanned. Ian Loudon's headstone was one of the last set up here before a new cemetery was begun at Bomana. Tom Sefton is buried nearby. He died in 1954 after a stroke had reduced him to a shadow of his old loud and masterful self. His headstone has been knocked over. Papuan children play there.

TABLE 1 **PAPUA: Coconut Plantations, 1940 ¶**

<i>Owners 1940</i>	<i>Original Planter</i>	<i>Name and location</i>	<i>Tons (1940)</i>
Central Division			
A. Aoae	[A. Aoae]	[Lease 843] Laloki River	
British New Guinea Devt	BNGD [Co Ltd]	Aroa, Redscar Bay	320
British New Guinea Devt	R. Hunter/BNGD	Obu, Redscar Bay	375
British New Guinea Devt	BNGD	Baubauguina, Marshall Lgn	300
Burns Philp & Co	L. Clunn/ G. A. Loudon	Ou-Ou Creek, Delena	88
Catholic Mission	Sacred Heart Fathers	Kairuku, Yule Island	133
Catholic Mission	Sacred Heart Fathers	Obu, Redscar Bay	84
Catholic Mission	Teina Materua & Fauolo	Tou, Redscar Bay	20
P. N. Charpentier	T. Petero	Naruna, Laloki River	8
Clarke & Whiting	Clarke & Whiting	Rorona, Galley Reach	(900)
H. S. Exton	Angabunga River Pltns	Angabunga, Hall Sound	110
J. Miller	R.E. Chancellor?, J. Miller	Upagau River, Aroma	70
E. J. Noller		[Lease 524] Laloki River	
Papuan Government	[R. Hunter]	Daugo (Fisherman's I.)	
Mrs K. Pollard	Gors brothers	Iki-ikina, Redscar Bay	
W. J. Priest		[Lease 102] Laloki River	
Dr C. C. Simson	C.C. Simson/A.S. Anthony	Hisiu, Redscar Bay	600
Mrs M. Sinclair	A. M. Sinclair	The Palms, Hisiu, Redscar Bay	
C. Solien	J. Solien	[Lease 42 of 1920] Galley Reach	15
S. & J. Solien	J. Solien	Mariboi Creek, Galley Reach	12
Mrs V. R. Ward	R.S. Whiting/E.T. Ward	Velmauri, Galley Reach	120
Eastern Division			
Anglo-Papuan Pltns Ltd	H.A. Wickham	Conflict Islands [freehold]	
G.E. Aumuller, R.F. Bunting	C. Cowley/G. A. Loudon	Mogubo, Amazon Bay	150
W. G. Blundell		Losau Valley	
British New Guinea Devt	BNGD	*Otomata, Cape Rodney	200
British New Guinea Devt	BNGD	Gadalsu, Orangerie Bay	240
British New Guinea Devt	BNGD	Waigani, Milne Bay	560
British New Guinea Devt	Laka River Plantations	*Pailli, Marshall Lagoon	275
A. H. Bunting Ltd	Bunting brothers	Millgili I. and Imbert I.	
A. H. Bunting Ltd	Bunting brothers	Panamau, Dumoulin Is	35
A. H. Bunting Ltd	Bunting brothers	Mellai, Dumoulin Is	
A. H. Bunting Ltd	Bunting brothers	Sanaroa, D'Entrecasteaux	65
Bunting Trustees	R. Bunting	Teste/Wari I.	45
M. Cadigan	M. Cadigan	Badilla, Milne Bay	40
Commonwealth Copra Co.	F. Kitchen & Sons	Gilgili, Milne Bay	(600)
T. E. Craig	J. Clunn	Ramaga, Milne Bay	
T. E. Craig	M. R. Ballantyne	[Lease 287] China Strait	
T. E. Craig & J. G. Munt	E. S. Tooth	Wagatatuna, Milne Bay	
J. & H. Driver	J.&H. Leetch/J.&H. Driver	Hihila, Milne Bay	102
V. C. Eglestaff	V. C. Eglestaff	Nuatutu, Goodenough I.	12
G. Eichorn	G. Eichorn	Boloboli, China Strait [freehold]	
Enesi Plantations Ltd	Papuan Government	Wagawaga, Milne Bay	
Enesi Plantations Ltd	LMS ?	Gibara, Milne Bay	
Enesi Plantations Ltd	LMS	Killerton I., Milne Bay	
Enesi Plantations Ltd	LMS	Mutuina, Milne Bay	

TABLE 1 **PAPUA: Coconut Plantations, 1940** contd

<i>Owners 1940</i>	<i>Original Planter</i>	<i>Name and location</i>	<i>Tons</i>
Enesi Plantations Ltd	LMS	Salaoni I.	
Engineer Grp Pltg Ass.	Bunting brothers	Engineer Group	
Engineer Grp Pltg Ass.		Duchateau Is.	85
D'Entrecasteaux Tr.&Pltg	G. Harrison	Kedidia, Fergusson I.	40
D'Entrecasteaux Tr.&Pltg	J. Olsen	Sebulagomwa, Fergusson I.	
F. Evenett	F. Evenett	Moununa, East Cape	
F. Evenett	F. Evenett	Ito I.	
F. Evenett	F. Evenett	[Lease 510] Fergusson I.	
F. Evenett	F. Evenett	Deirina I.	
F. Evenett	F. Evenett	[Lease 694] China Strait	
M. M. Fitzgerald	M. M. Fitzgerald	[Lease 271 of 1919] Normanby I.	
Dr W. E. Giblin	W. E. Giblin	Nonowai, China Strait	
D. & W. Gill	Walker brothers;		
	Loani Rubber Ltd	Loani, China Strait	
J. Gray	J. Gray	Annie Inlet, East Cape	40
W. Grieg	W. Gray?	Marlawatte, Mullens Harbour	16
J. Inman	J. Inman	Nuamato I.	
J. Inman	J. Inman	[Lease 311 of 1926]	
		Goodenough I.	
C. J. Izod	N. Izod	Wakaluna, Normanby I.	
I. T. Jenkins	G. Harden/A. C. Pilotti	*Baramata, Cape Rodney	60
Mrs C. M. Johns	R. Johns	Matadona, China Strait	8
F. Kruger	F. Kruger	Gamododo, Milne Bay	
London Missionary Soc.	LMS	Isu Isu, Lawes Bay	
C. E. Mitchell	C. E. Mitchell	*Villrupu, Marshall Lagoon	
NG Anglican Mission	New Guinea Mission	Hloge, Goodenough Bay	
P. Osborne		Milne Bay	
L. M. Owen-Turner	C. Owen-Turner	Eabuli, China Strait	
Papuan Government	Papuan Government	Balbara, Orangerie Bay	
Papuan Government	Papuan Government	Nari (Mudge) I.	
W. L. & D. Tanby	W. Tanby	[Lease 611], Milne Bay	
Robinson River Pltns	Robinson River Ltd	*Robinson R. Cloudy Bay	1,016
(Burns Philp)			
Robinson River Pltns	Milne Bay Rubber Co.	Hagita, Milne Bay	87
Robinson River Pltns	W.H. Gors/W.&E. Whitten	*Dedele, Cloudy Bay [freehold]	171
Robinson River Pltns	Domara River Pltns/		
	T. & J. McCrann	*Kauru/Bala, Domara River	372
Sewataitai Plantations	W. Henderson/A. Bunting	Sewataitai, Normanby I.	240
Steamships Trading Co.	Talbot brothers	Punipuni, East Cape	170
Steamships Trading Co.	J. G. Nelsson/W. Sheddon	Doimi I. nr Samarai, & Tuyam I.	120
Steamships Trading Co.	Papuan Rubber & Copra Co		
	of NZ & Papuan Prod. Ltd	Mamai, Port Glasgow	290
Dr G. H. Vernon	G. H. Vernon	Oni-oni, Port Glasgow	18
Whitten Brothers Ltd	W. Whitten	Bubuleta, Milne Bay	
Whitten Brothers Ltd	R. F. Whitten	Kularo, China Strait	

TABLE 1 **PAPUA: Coconut Plantations, 1940** contd

<i>Owners 1940</i>	<i>Original Planter</i>	<i>Name and location</i>	<i>Tons</i>
South-Eastern Division			
G. Aumuller, T. Nevitt & A. H. Bunting		Panawina, Calvados Chain	45
C. O. Anderson	J. Anderson	Panamotu, Calvados Chain	
E. Auerback	E. Auerback	Muwo, Trobriand Is	186
Bank of New South Wales	E. & F. Osborne	Abuleti, Rossel I.	
G. Brett	A. Bernier	Kauboga, Misima	
G. Brett	J. & E. Mahony	Motorina, Calvados Chain	48
S. Brudo	R. & S. Brudo	Bomapau I. & Kavataria, Trobriand Is	
G. Burfitt	C. Sampson?	Panawina, Calvados Chain	18
C. Cameron	C. Cameron	Kitava, Trobriand Is	85
C. Coppard	C. Coppard	Kauboga, Misima	25
A. Dawkins	A. Dawkins	Murua, Woodlark [Ls 353, 354]	60
Mrs E. Delaney	J. E. Delaney	Sinaketa, Trobriand Is	
I. Ede	R. H. Ede & Rabbitt	Guasopa, Woodlark	70
R. H. Ede	R. H. Ede	Laughlin Is	78
H. W. Hughes	Johannessen & Hughes	Madau, Woodlark	
H. W. Hughes	P. N. Charpentier	Lauani, Woodlark	
A. LeBoutillier	R. & B. Boyd	Tauhik, Misima	6
E. Mahony	J. & E. Mahony	Bonagai, Woodlark	
E. Mahony	J. & E. Mahony	Moguiva, Griffin Point, Sudest	
E. Mahony	J. & E. Mahony	Dunvara, Rossel I.	
J. G. Munt	BNG Government	Nivani I. Torlesse Group	80
J. G. Munt	J. G. Munt	Panapompom I., Torlesse Group	
J. G. Nelsson	J. G. Nelsson	Kwalapan Bay, Woodlark	
D. H. Osborne	Osborne brothers	Kanadu & Abuleti, Rossel I.	142
F. Palisbo	Ah Gow	Nimoa I.(Sudest) & Panapompom I.	
Tagula Plantations Ltd	T. E. Craig	Madaua, Hinal Bay, Sudest	60
Gulf Division			
F. W. Burke	F. W. Burke	Muru Ck., Kerema	65
H. T. Coghill	H. T. Coghill	Muru Ck., Kerema	50
A. D. Drummond	R. Shaw Moody	Keuru, Huiva, Ie Inlet	186
London Missionary Soc.	F. W. Clark	Koaru, Mopu Inlet	40
Mrs V. Priddle	Mrs Ashton/V. Priddle	Arimiri, Huiva, Ie Inlet	80
Mrs C. J. Smith	J.G. Fowler (or G.W. Lupson?)	[Lease 964] Vailala River	
Mrs C. J. Smith	A. B. Sinclair	Vaiviri, Orokol Roads	
Steamships Trading Co.	L. Lett/J. F. Puxley	Maira, Vailala River	125
Steamships Trading Co.	D. McDonald	Vaiviri, Vailala River	70
Delta Division			
E. F. Clay	P. Robinson	Varoe (Kanibo?), Kikori	15
London Missionary Soc.	LMS	Aird Hills	

TABLE 1 **PAPUA: Coconut Plantations, 1940** contd

<i>Owners 1940</i>	<i>Original Planter</i>	<i>Name and location</i>	<i>Tons</i>
Western Division			
S. Cowling	J. & J. Cowling	Mibu, Fly River mouth	150
L. Luff & N. M. Gordon	Papuan Industries Ltd	Dirimu, Binaturl River	100
W. A. Maldment		[Lease 268] Daru	
Northern Division			
British New Guinea Devt	L. Joubert & E. Oates?	Jaropa[Giropa], C. Endaiadere	70
A. H. Bunting	E. Oates	Tungora, near Buna	
A.H.Bunting, A.McCallum & J. Boland	Oro Bay Plantations Ltd	Wiresota, Amboga Ck, Oro Bay	120
Papuan Government	A. Clunas & M. Clark?	Giriwu River & Giroa Point, Buna	
North Eastern Division			
H. Spiller	H. Spiller/Davis?	Abuaro, Menapi, Goodenough Bay	
Papuan Government	Papuan Government	Tufi	

* These plantations midway between Port Moresby and Samarai were at different times within the boundaries of the Central Division, an 'East Central' Division (Abau), and the Eastern Division.

† Except where Papuans took out leases [in the cases of Augustine Aoae, Teina Materua and the Soliens - a Malay-Papuan family] the list comprises only non-indigenous owned plantations. See note 29, p.127 above for a discussion about the village plantations set up under the Native Plantations scheme.

Sources: CRS & NAPNG G69 25/20 C.117/1/1825. 'Amended list of Copra growers', 21 Nov. 1940, and Territory of Papua, *Government Gazette* No. 1 1940, List of Rents Due, 1 Jan. 1940. Except in the case of Rorona and Giligili where the 1939 production figures are given, the tonnages shown represent the copra on hand for shipment in late 1940. Many smaller plantations had ceased production with the outbreak of the war in Europe, their unsold copra being held in store by Burns Philp or Steamships Trading Company.

TABLE 2 PAPUA: Rubber Plantations, 1940

<i>Plantation & District</i>	<i>Owners</i>	<i>\$ Area planted (acres)</i>	<i>Area in productn (acres)</i>
Central Division			
Barodobo (Rigo)	A. C. English [freehold]	(100)?	?
Bislatabu (Sogeri)	Seventh Day Adventist Church		20
Doa (Galley Reach)	British New Guinea Development	809	581
Eilogo (Sogeri)	G. A. Loudon	600	117
Gobaregere (or 'Kapagere') (Kemp Welch River)	Papuan Government	217	179
Itikinum (Sogeri)	British New Guinea Development	1,559	1,158
Jawarere (Musgrave River)	British New Guinea Development	(288)	?
Kanosia (Galley Reach)	Clarke & Whiting	1,638	1,398
Koitaki (Sogeri)	Koitaki Ltd	2,180	1,050
Koke Bagu [¶] (Kemp Welch River)*	Koke Bagu Ltd	(248)	111
Lolorua (Galley Reach)	Anglo-Papuan Plantations	2,853	1,100
New Guinea Rubber Estates (Kemp Welch River)	Steamships Trading Company	100	70
Velmauri (Galley Reach)*	Mrs Vera Ruby Ward	430	110
Northern Division			
Ioma	Durcher & Spellacy	(200)	?
Kokoda	Papuan Government	125	90
Oro Bay*	A. H. Bunting		7
Eastern Division			
Hagita (Maiwara River Milne Bay)	Robinson River Plantations (Burns Philp)		58
Kauru (Domara River, including 'Bala')*	Robinson River Plantations (Burns Philp)		250
Loani (China Strait)*	D. & W. Gill	170	45
Mamali (Port Glasgow)*	Steamships Trading Company	270	120
Sagarai (Mullens Harbour)	Mrs Millicent Jewell	450	420
Tomanau (Mullens Harbour)	S. & J. Horton	(80)	?
Delta Division			
Kikori (Kikori River)	Papuan Government	250	190
Ogamobu (Kikori River)	British New Guinea Development	507	410
Western Division			
Madiri (Fly River)	Unevangelised Fields Mission	300	
TOTAL			7,784

* These estates were also copra producers.

[¶] The former Kemp Welch River Rubber Estates property.

[§] The areas planted but not in production may represent either trees in decline or new plantings since 1935. The new estates being cleared and just being planted in 1940 - Sogeri, Iloilo, Mamba, Mariboi, Rubberlands, Aroana, Baumata, Cupola and Epo - do not appear on this list.

Source: CRS A518, Item P812/1/5 Part 4. Papuan Rubber Plantations as at 15 May 1940; and CRS G69, Item 25/19, 24 May 1926.

TABLE 3 BRITISH NEW GUINEA and PAPUA: Overseas Trade 1888-1941

	(Value of)Imports(£)	Exports(£)	Balance (+/-)
1888-89	11,109	5,943	5,166 -
1889-90	16,104	6,455	9,649 -
1890-91	15,530	8,134	7,396 -
1891-92	23,755	11,239	12,516 -
1892-93	25,261	14,966	10,295 -
1893-94	28,501	14,952	13,549 -
1894-95	28,367	16,215	12,152 -
1895-96	34,521	19,401	15,120 -
1896-97	51,392	44,345	7,047 -
1897-98	46,971	49,858	2,897 +
1898-99	52,170	68,496	16,326 +
1899-1900	72,286	56,167	16,119 -
1900-01	71,618	49,659	21,959 -
1901-02	70,817	68,300	2,517 -
1902-03	62,367	62,891	524 +
1903-04	77,631	75,506	2,125 -
1904-05	67,188	76,435	9,247 +
1905-06	79,761	80,290	529 +
1906-07	87,776	63,756	24,020 -
1907-08	94,061	80,616	13,445 -
1908-09	94,680	79,692	14,988 -
1909-10	120,177	100,599	19,578 -
1910-11	202,910	117,410	85,500 -
1911-12	235,369	99,990	135,379 -
1912-13	218,323	128,016	90,307 -
1913-14	212,134	123,140	88,994 -
1914-15	202,055	94,354	107,701 -
1915-16	223,040	125,428	97,612 -
1916-17	271,640	156,535	115,105 -
1917-18	283,793	220,599	63,194 -
1918-19	258,112	176,247	81,865 -
1919-20	422,741	270,481	152,260 -
1920-21	484,770	172,672	312,098 -
1921-22	305,705	220,236	85,469 -
1922-23	315,423	179,452	135,971 -
1923-24	354,965	239,408	115,557 -
1924-25	459,080	367,629	91,451 -
1925-26	470,774	685,896	215,122 +
1926-27	455,904	454,462	1,442 -
1927-28	403,561	350,363	53,198 -
1928-29	361,271	337,365	23,907 -
1929-30	373,918	324,775	49,143 -
1930-31	240,074	274,354	34,280 +
1931-32	221,843	269,254	47,411 +
1932-33	218,016	275,866	57,850 +
1933-34	220,605	249,135	28,530 +
1934-35	269,299	294,743	25,444 +
1935-36	317,815	355,157	37,342 +
1936-37	452,056	524,001	71,945 +
1937-38	631,497	435,593	195,904 -
1938-39	514,808	490,158	24,650 -
1939-40	826,412	510,672	315,740 -
1940-41	539,152	492,775	46,377 -

Source: Territory of Papua, *Annual Report* 1926-27 (p. 71) and subsequent *Annual Reports*.

TABLE 4 **PAPUA: Agricultural Commodity Exports 1905-1941****Copra and Rubber**

<i>Copra</i>		<i>Rubber</i>	
<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>(tons)</i>	<i>(£)</i>	<i>(tons)</i>	<i>(£)</i>
1905-06	9,315		1,145
1906-07	7,467		1,385
1907-08	7,515		483
1908-09	13,376		113
1909-10	29,498		904
1910-11	17,837		2,054
1911-12	19,368		935
1912-13	16,912		517
1913-14	29,063		1,536
1914-15	12,693		1,501
1915-16	1,156	43.5	14,816
1916-17	2,096	85.0	26,682
1917-18	3,189.7	144.7	37,020
1918-19	2,598	207	33,010
1919-20	4,080	242	41,542
1920-21	2,984	220	28,966
1921-22	5,063	85	5,826
1922-23	5,870	57	5,907
1923-24	7,315	304	33,334
1924-25	7,765	511	68,507
1925-26	8,419	640	194,849
1926-27	9,542	761	156,274
1927-28	9,825	811	102,158
1928-29	12,480	470	46,816
1929-30	11,693	763.75	50,640
1930-31	9,436	785	47,036
1931-32	10,011	806.25	49,262
1932-33	9,686	953.25	56,929
1933-34	8,082	948.5	61,324
1934-35	8,570	1,069.25	79,031
1935-36	10,549	1,096.75	89,467
1936-37	13,600	1,112.5	124,174
1937-38	11,249	1,243	129,448
1938-39	9,357	1,290	114,949
1939-40	6,656	1,345.75	152,487
1940-41	8,936	1,273	

Source: Territory of Papua, *Annual Reports*, 1905-06 - 1940-41.

Note: Copra tonnages include copra exported out of trade with Papuan villagers. See note 29, p. 150.

TABLE 5 **PAPUA: Agricultural Commodity Exports 1905-1941**

Sisal Hemp and Cotton				
	<i>Sisal Hemp</i>			<i>Cotton</i>
	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Value</i>
	<i>(tons)</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>(tons)</i>	<i>£</i>
1905-06				
1906-07				
1907-08				
1908-09				
1909-10				
1910-11		340		
1911-12		720		
1912-13		3,039		
1913-14		3,633		
1914-15		1,269	(138.1)	3,400
1915-16	447	11,999	25.5	1,610
1916-17	326	11,463		
1917-18	343.2	17,682		
1918-19	287	12,532		
1919-20	336	12,284		
1920-21	188	7,723		
1921-22	145	4,630		
1922-23				
1923-24	32	1,125	45	550
1924-25	396	13,141	31	3,761
1925-26	202	7,695	103	4,866
1926-27	1	33	5.8	824
1927-28			1	59
1928-29			3.7	415
1929-30	1.25	3	2	167
1930-31	6.75	271	.5	28
1931-32				
1932-33				
1933-34				
1934-35				
1935-36				
1936-37				
1937-38				
1938-39				
1939-40				
1940-41				

Sources: Territory of Papua, *Annual Reports*, 1905-06 - 1940-41; British New Guinea Development Company *Annual Report*, 1915, for the tonnage of cotton produced in 1914-15.

TABLE 6: **PAPUA: Agricultural Commodity Exports 1905-1941****Coffee and Desiccated Coconut**

	<i>Coffee</i>		<i>Desiccated Coconut</i>	
	<i>Quantity (tons)</i>	<i>Value £</i>	<i>Quantity (tons)</i>	<i>Value £</i>
1905-06		915		
1906-07		700		
1907-08		470		
1908-09		325		
1909-10		654		
1910-11				
1911-12		48		
1912-13		488		
1913-14		488		
1914-15		425		
1915-16				
1916-17				
1917-18				
1918-19				
1919-20				
1920-21				
1921-22				
1922-23				
1923-24				
1924-25				
1925-26				
1926-27			40	2,494
1927-28			108	7,407
1928-29	4.15	313	260.75	16,033
1929-30	5.75	519	747	39,923
1930-31	2.75	242	1,467	79,264
1931-32	8.25	537	1,228	59,826
1932-33	36.25	2,404	1,117.75	49,514
1933-34	60.25	4,993	1,274	48,000
1934-35	79	7,083	1,452.75	37,895
1935-36	54.5	5,217	1,415.25	42,467
1936-37	88	7,536	1,498.75	47,137
1937-38	83.25	6,606	1,541.25	52,628
1938-39	111.75	6,911	1,580.5	48,140
1939-40	77.25	5,289	1,875.5	58,015
1940-41				

Source: Territory of Papua *Annual Reports*, 1905-06 - 1940-41.

TABLE 7: **PAPUA: Principal Mineral Exports 1905-1941**

Gold and Copper				
	Gold		Copper	
	Quantity (Ounces)	Value £	Quantity (tons)	Value £
1905-06	24,227	87,869		
1906-07	16,103	58,886	137 (ore)	4,098
1907-08	14,557	51,024	176 "	2,479
1908-09	14,710	51,108	67 "	1,340
1909-10	16,151	60,181	72 "	1,439
1910-11	18,497	68,803	403 "	12,386
1911-12	17,047	60,628	594 "	9,681
1912-13	18,247	64,115	1,285 "	18,997
1913-14	14,666	50,110	1,150 "	19,733
1914-15	15,290	51,221	695 "	5,606
1915-16	10,930	43,248	1,156 "	19,051
1916-17	9,678	37,988	2,096 "	40,882
1917-18	12,168	33,512	1,112 "	11,572
1918-19	11,769	26,641	224 "	1,613
1919-20	11,751	21,757	10 "	107
1920-21	13,232	18,478	255 "	1,830
1921-22	52,704	58,615	2,700 "	13,514
1922-23	17,033	22,494	1 (smelted)	14
1923-24	2,166	6,702	8 "	120
1924-25	4,947	17,642	2,094 "	41,674
1925-26	7,746	27,134	11,466 "	201,732
1926-27	8,806	29,115	582 "	35,799
1927-28	2,173	6,364	16 "	208
1928-29	2,287	6,767		
1929-30	3,624	10,632	8	194
1930-31	6,923	22,440		
1931-32	8,574	34,338	1.5	60
1932-33	15,268	45,383		
1933-34	19,496	45,933	2.25	74
1934-35	21,732	68,922		
1935-36	26,199	81,034	2	10
1936-37	33,580	87,003		
1937-38	47,308	108,141		
1938-39	64,622	150,198		
1939-40	46,239	135,879		
1940-41	*14,056	133,341		

* 1940-41 gold weight in fine ounces

Source: Territory of Papua, *Annual Reports*, 1905-06 - 1940-41. Where figures are amended in later Reports, latest figures are given.

TABLE 8: PAPUA: Papuans in Employment 1910-1941

Source: PAR, 1910-41

	Workers engaged [New Contracts]	Workers paid-off [Contracts completed]	'Agricultural' workers engaged ¹	'Agricultural' workers paid-off	'General Labourers' engaged	'General Labourers' paid-off	Wages Paid	Monthly average under indenture	Workers under contract during year ²	Crown Servants	'Casual' workers (estimated) ³
1910-11	7,806	5,202	4,514	2,513	872	440	£31,312			959	1,000
1911-12	7,963	6,925	4,722	4,044	842	642				1,496	
1912-13	6,975	6,909	3,674	4,381	1,205	765	42,132			1,438	2,945
1913-14	7,681	6,064	3,667	2,939	1,830	1,332	38,636			1,392	3,702
1914-15	6,769	7,082	3,273	3,234	1,498	1,706	44,598			1,530	1,972
1915-16	6,686	5,880	2,721	2,824	1,889	1,279	38,835			1,606	1,290
1916-17	7,892	6,663	3,306	2,942	2,539	1,930	51,547			1,724	2,520
1917-18	7,059	6,840					46,554				
1918-19	8,610	5,913	3,329	2,559	3,229	1,873	41,884			1,557	2,845
1919-20	6,397	6,930	1,949	3,031	2,706	2,295	54,339			1,502	1,652
1920-21	7,495	7,335	1,878	2,607	3,508	2,786	61,483				2,115
1921-22	4,590	6,251	625	1,964	2,090		57,474				1,230
1922-23	5,473	4,893	370	731	3,006	2,269	47,993	6,083			1,702
1923-24	6,206	4,959	645	563	3,656	2,823	42,776	6,814			1,466
1924-25	6,817	4,661	573	441	3,957	2,430	46,019	6,879			1,295
1925-26	6,716	6,317	628	401	4,041	3,910	63,082	9,672			1,182
1926-27	5,566	6,666	301	529	3,286	3,821	61,663	8,315			1,277
1927-28	6,485	6,269	669	592	3,807	3,758	62,246	8,447(8,411)			
1928-29	5,355							8,653(6,725)			
1929-30	5,470						57,641	7,274			1,379
1930-31	4,217						48,327	6,144			2,183
1931-32	5,244?							5,244			1,927
1932-33	5,059(3716)						35,105	5,059			2,242
1933-34	3,627?						34,918	5,167			2,109
1934-35	5,124						32,750	5,964?	9,994		2,564
1935-36	4,992						41,122	6,952	11,540		2,928
1936-37	6,209	4,767					43,897(46,275)	7,965	13,079		2,863
1937-38	7,115	5,692					50,940	9,648			
1938-39	7,249	7,148					61,837	9,759	16,984		2,749
1939-40	7,515	7,040					64,476	9,829	17,351		3,001
1940-41	6,857						71,426	9,718	17,168		2,897

¹ Resident Magistrates were required to stipulate the kind of work labourers had agreed to perform on Contracts of Service at the outset. The categories preferred by planters shifted over the years from 'Agricultural and Pastoral' to 'General' labourers. See PAR 1925-26, 88, where general labourers are identified as 'mostly rubber tappers'. Plantation workers comprised around half of the indentured labour force from 1910. Other large categories of labourers were those engaged in mining and pearling, and as seamen and domestic servants.

² The figures above for the period 1934-35 to 1940-41 are for workers employed under contract agreements at some stage in the year. A better guide to the *residual* labour force is available for 1938-39 and 1939-40. On 1 July 1938, 9,735 workers were on contracts, on 1 July 1939, 9,836, and on 1 July 1940, 10,311. These like the Monthly Average under Indenture figures suggest, I believe, an agricultural labour force, with *casuals*, of at least 6,000.

³ Casual workers could not be employed continuously for more than three months until 1927. Thereafter the term was unrestricted but the distance from the worker's home could not exceed twenty miles. Estimations given in the *Annual Reports* are unreliable. While some plantations could provide plenty of work for local men and women, villagers could juxtapose such labour with garden cultivation, festivals and fishing. See Appendix A below.

APPENDIX A: The Indentured Labour System in Papua: Some Recent Studies

Ralph Shlomowitz's articles 'The internal labour trade in Papua (1884-1941), and New Guinea (1920-1941): an economic analysis' in the *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 82-83 (1986) and 'Mortality and indentured labour in Papua (1885-1941) and New Guinea (1920-1941)' in the *Journal of Pacific History*, 23 (1988) appeared as I was completing the present work but did not cause me to alter my view. I differ with him on several points. He has in the *JPH* article 'shown that between 1906 and 1925 contracts in Papua were usually for 12 months' and not the two years 'average' claimed by an official in the 1920-21 *Papuan Annual Report*. He interprets the data to suggest that between 1926 and 1941 'contracts were usually for 18 months'. I think this view mistaken. Contracts of one year (or less) remained normal among the 50% of workers not employed in agriculture - those in domestic service or as town labourers, or contracted to work in mining or pearling or on coastal shipping for examples - but many *plantation* labourers and from time to time possibly a majority of them from 1912 onwards were employed on *three year* contracts. The reasons why planters sought, obtained and preferred three year contracts are discussed *inter alia* in Chapter 9 above. My impression is that as much as half of the indentured workforce in agriculture were on the longer contracts and that these constituted about a quarter of all contracts. The 'official' in 1921, knowing that a considerable proportion of indentures at least in agriculture were for three years and reporting on the 'average' term of indenture was, I believe, merely taking the mean of two years to give a rough indication - very rough we might think - of this 'average' as if the distribution was normal. Papuan planters (and other officials) would immediately have known what the writer meant and that as description the suggestion that 'two year contracts' might be typical was inaccurate. Most labourers did not enter contracts either of this average length or of Dr Shlomowitz's revised average of eighteen months.

In considering the 'typical' periods of engagement for agricultural workers let us take 1924-25 as an example. If the minimum £6 a year was the common wage, and I think Shlomowitz and I can agree that it was, then the 4,661 labourers discharged under the NLO that year, if they had worked for no more than twelve months, might have collectively earned little more than £28,000. But the *Annual Report* gives the total of the wages paid in the year as £46,019 giving a *per capita* mean of close to £10. I think the discrepancy can be explained in this manner: if three quarters of indentured workers - including about half of those contracted to work in agriculture - were engaged for twelve months, as I have suggested was the case, their wages at the minimum rate must have amounted to about £21,000. Let us allow that it might have been as much as £23,000, for some workers were certainly paid more than the

minimum (as discussed above, pp. 145-6). Left for distribution among the remaining 1,165 is £23,000. If these workers were indeed as I argue workers mostly on three year contracts, then the accrued wages paid should have been not less than £18 *per capita*, the total amounting to a minimum of £20,970 - a sum well covered by the balancing £23,000. It is not known how 'advances' on wages were distributed from year to year in calculating the sum of wages paid, but such advances can hardly have altered the outcome on balance. If three year contracts were other than relatively common it is difficult to account for the government's effort in the 1927-28 *Annual Report* (p.64) and elsewhere to discourage employers from insisting on them. Dr Shlomowitz's Table 11, 'Indentured Labour in Papua and New Guinea: Indirect Measure of the Average Length of Contract, 1920-1 to 1940-1' in the first article cited, gives a ratio of continuing to newly recruited workers for each year. This, I believe, can be re-interpreted to support my view.

We do not possess a complete record of Papuans in employment. (See Table 8 above, p. 315.) The data in the *Annual Reports* until 1923 give only the numbers of workers entering and completing contracts of service in each twelve month period, and mask the presence in most years of between one and two thousand indentured labourers who were in the middle eighteen months of three year contracts. That this was so is suggested by the data provided from 1922-23 which give the estimated monthly average number under indenture for each year. These generally exceed the engagement figures of the preceding two or three years by the missing one or two thousand. The inspection of 13,669 'units' of labour in the 138 inspections carried out in 1925 also suggests that there must have been difficulty in estimating numbers under indenture when there was a large turnover, no day passing, it seems, without contracted service being begun or concluded somewhere. The inspections in the year are unlikely to have been confined to plantations for we know that not all of these were inspected annually, indeed some might not be visited for several years. To estimate actual numbers employed on plantations is made even more difficult when it is remembered that by the 1930s perhaps a quarter of the plantations - especially smaller strings of properties in the two eastern Divisions - were relying wholly on local casual labour engaged outside the indentured labour system. Estimates given of the number of 'free' workers in some *Annual Reports* may be indicative but they can hardly be accurate. (See above the note regarding casuals that accompanies Table 8.) It is true that the 1932-33 *Annual Report* [p. 10] goes so far as to estimate that casuals by then made up a third of all workers, the proportion having risen from 'a ninth' in 1926. It is difficult to know how these figures were reached. Perhaps it should also be noted here that Crown servants, averaging 1,500 a year in the period 1911-20, must have included several hundred employed on the government's own plantations.

I agree with Ralph Shlomowitz that £6 a year was the common wage but it was not as he has suggested elsewhere 'invariable' in Papua (R. Shlomowitz and R. D. Bedford, 'The internal labour trade in New Hebrides and Solomon Islands,

1900-1941', *JSO*, 86, (1988), p. 69). Wages were invariably not less than ten shillings a month after 1907 certainly, but a small minority of experienced workers were paid more, a few even much more. Likewise he also concluded that the recruiting fee for 'eighteen month or two year contracts' was usually between £3 and £4. This may be true as far as it goes but in this form contributes to the misrepresentation of the typical terms of engagement discussed above. Recruiting fees were *almost invariably £3 for each year of contracted service*. A 'three year boy' in Papua cost the employer £9 in recruiting fees before he had commenced work. Since recruiting was a highly competitive business the high price of securing labour must be attributed to the costs incurred by the recruiter in providing the 'presents' he was expected to display and offer as an inducement before villagers would 'consent' to their young men leaving home. Clearly in many districts with few alternative means of obtaining these goods, the recruiters' visits were significant opportunities. The fee charged by a recruiter for the repatriation of a worker was, as Dr Shlomowitz found, between five shillings and £1.

Whether the arguments above regarding the length of contracts, if accepted, might influence conclusions about mortality among indentured workers arrived at by Shlomowitz I do not know. Certainly planters in Papua were much more concerned with treating and containing venereal infections on plantations than troubled by the infrequent deaths that occurred. And although I found myself in disagreement with some of Dr Shlomowitz's conclusions I was grateful for the opportunity to re-consider my own in relation to those of a co-worker approaching the data from an entirely different direction.

APPENDIX B: Plantations in the context of the international economy 1900-1940: a further note

The Plantation Dream is an account of plantation development in one colonial territory in the period 1884-1942 and of the experience of its European settlers. It was inevitable that such a project would suggest or confirm some general conclusions about the whole plantation enterprise and colonial experience in the first forty years of the twentieth century. These now seem commonplace. They may, of course, be contested.

Firstly I agree with Michael Barratt-Brown¹ that prolonged periods of over-production plagued practically every tropical commodity after 1920 and that the benefit undoubtedly flowed to the European consumers. Yet the extent of excessive capacity could hardly have been planned or foreseen. And, contrary to the opinion of many who were dazzled by empire and the prospect of great profits from investment in tropical agriculture, most colonies were irrelevant to the power and wealth of the metropolitan industrial societies - with the probable exception of the Netherlands - whose trade with each other and the regions of European settlement far outweighed trade with their Asian, African and Pacific Island dependencies. No investors in tropical commodities in 1914 foresaw how low prices would go, or might have outlaid the enormous sums expended on development if they had known. There was no unreasonable margin of profit after 1920 from which workers on plantations anywhere in the world - supposing they could have organised to do so - might have wrung improved conditions. The plantation lobbyists themselves were hard-pressed in the interwar period to prevent the value of the investments of many shareholders falling away to nothing. The pressure to minimise costs was remorseless, the plantation workers' expectation of any improvement or change hopeless. Restriction of production, as in the rubber industry, was a palliative that gave only marginal relief and mainly to the least stressed producers. In such circumstances, as Barratt-Brown concluded, the plantation colonies could scarcely have become very significant importers of industrial goods with the bargaining power that as markets they might have exercised if metropolitan exporters had depended on them.

Second, it is naive to imagine that any alternative system of peasant smallholder agriculture producing any of the the major tropical plantation commodities in the period under review could have contributed to the capital accumulation of which, some think, the supposed excessive profits of the capitalist plantation enclave deprived the colonial territories. The investment booms ensured that there would be too many producers on the margins, and

¹ Michael Barratt-Brown, *After Imperialism* (London 1970), 140.

the terms of trade and competition ensured that prices would be held low. Planters themselves were at best no more than well enough paid agents - at worst among the broken casualties - of an international economic order largely, indeed necessarily, indifferent to their particular circumstances. The beneficiaries of this system were not only the metropolitan manufacturers who could manipulate the markets, but all the European, North American and Australasian consumers in general who, as I suggest in the text, did no more than buy more cheaply and well. It might be acknowledged that generally colonial administrations were efficient in providing at least a framework of protection and legality under which 'development' could take place and that metropolitan governments remained sensitive to public opinion in the industrial states that wanted to regard the colonial undertaking in a favourable ethical light.

Third, the advantage in power, wealth, organisation, disposition, flexibility and technology possessed by European industrial societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was such as to allow of no alternative outcome for most non-Western peoples for a time than their subjugation, exploitation, and cultural humiliation - or, as some in the future might again judge, their liberation - and in much of the tropical world, their subjection to highly disadvantageous terms of trade. The transition of Pacific societies from the condition of 'barbaric' independence and cultural integrity, isolated self-sufficiency or 'subsistence affluence'² to that of permanently poor and dissatisfied appendages of the industrial world may indeed be for many the terminal consequence of the colonial episode.³ The dismantling of the plantation system and its replacement with peasant smallholdings as the dominant mode of production for tropical commodities is quite unlikely to influence this result. The further transition to a modern economy, and the abundance this promises, remains almost as far off as ever with now a much more acute awareness of the gap to be covered. It may be considered little consolation that these societies were spared the greater forms of oppression and dispossession experienced by others.

² 'primitive or subsistence affluence' - E. K. Fisk's (1966) description discussed in William C. Clark, 'The dilemma of development', in Harold Brookfield (ed.), *The Pacific in Transition* (Canberra 1973), 289.

³ See Diana Howlett's 'Terminal development: from tribalism to peasantry' also in Brookfield, *ibid.*, 249-73.

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The Plantation Dream provides the first detailed analysis of land settlement by Europeans and the early vicissitudes of plantation agriculture in British New Guinea and Papua up until the outbreak of war in the Pacific in 1942. It also becomes a history of 'planter Papua', the now vanished world of a few hundred white settlers who made their home in 'the first grandchild of Empire' - as the former British New Guinea became when it passed to the new Commonwealth as Australia's first overseas territory. Having assembled a remarkable range of private papers, reminiscences and archival source material the author examines the colonial enterprise in Papua in both economic and human terms.

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