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When is a peasant not a peasant: first thoughts on rural proletarianisation in Papua New Guinea

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It outlines some tentative proposals and questions concerning the emergence of proletarians in rural Papua New Guinea.

HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE

Discussion Papers (to November, 1977)

1. Papers on primary industry commodities, part I (Cocoa, Coconuts, Coffee, Rubber).

2. Papers on primary industry commodities, part II (Fishing, Livestock, Passion Fruit, Plywood, Pyrethrum, Rice, Sugar, Timber, Tobacco).

3. Papers on institutions in agriculture (Agriculture Education, Co-operatives).

4. Aspects of the rural economy (Wages, Business Development).

5. Notes on the history of the winged bean in Papua New Guinea, by Alan Claydon.

6. Papers on village agricultural change, by Morea Vele and Hilary Manda Pumuye.

7. When is a peasant not a peasant: first thoughts on rural proletarianisation in Papua New Guinea, by Diana Howlett.

8. Interpretations of pre-colonial agriculture; an introductory essay, by Rod Lacey.

History of Agriculture Discussion Papers are lodged with the following libraries: University of Papua New Guinea, PNG University of Technology, Administrative College of PNG, Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research, Department of Primary Industry and the Highlands, Vudal and Popondetta Agricultural Colleges.

> When thinking of development in terms of structural change, it is necessary to bear always in mind the criterion of productivity. Not all changes in structural relationships result in more productive structures, and some changes that are productive for certain persons or sectors are not productive for others. We would, for example, decline to identify structural *differentiation* with development. (Uphoff and Ilchman 1972:89.)

This paper is a first attempt to examine what appears to be a process of structural change in Papua New Guinea, the emergence of a rural, or perhaps more accurately an agricultural, proletariat. In a sense I am following Mintz when in 1951 he first identified the existence of a rural proletariat in the Caribbean (although he says it emerged 'clear-cut' after 1899): '...the aim was merely to advance an idea already old in other literatures, to describe a kind of population only newly discerned by anthropological fieldworkers' (1974: 298). In the case of Papua New Guinea, it would appear that the 'kind of population' which I hope to investigate has not yet been recognised by the government and its policy makers, although the spatial, economic, social and political implications of its evolution are considerable.

Rural proletarianisation in the Third World

The proletarianisation of rural society in the Third World, notably in Latin America, India and parts of Africa, appears without exception to have been associated with colonialism, although in some cases colonial strategies leading to proletarianisation seem to have been reinforced by pre-existing social structures (Uganda) or religious codes (Hindu and Moslem societies), and in other instances a significant rural proletariat emerged only after independence as a result of trends installed during the colonial era (Latin America). In some countries a rural proletariat was created by specific colonial policies (Kenya), whereas in others such structural change arose from official neglect of certain regions (as in west and northwest Tanzania). Whatever the particular impulse, it would seem that the emergence of rural proletariats in the Third World has been a response to land shortage or landlessness in predominantly agricultural communities, brought about either by increasing pressure of population or

by the introduction of capitalist agriculture,[1] or both (see, for example, Barrington Moore Jr 1973; Beckford 1972; Cliffe 1977; Diamond 1963; Feder 1971; Gutkind 1973; Mintz 1953, 1974; Moore 1975; Scott 1976; Weeks 1973; Wilkinson 1973; Wolf 1966, 1969). Lipton, however, is emphatic that:

> Pressures toward rural differentiation are urban rather than capitalist:— in the rural phenomena they create; ...and in their demonstrable origin in urban extraction of rural surplus.
>
> ....
>
> Not 'capitalism' but the urban interest in cheap food supplies, leads the policy-makers of the urban state to 'polarise' villagers into surplus-delivering maxi-farmers...and the squeezed poor...(1977:112).

I have no present commitment to either point of view, but consider that both must be examined in the analysis of rural differentiation in Papua New Guinea.

Some of the preconditions which have created land shortage or landlessness and subsequently rural proletarianisation elsewhere in the Third World are now evident in Papua New Guinea, and indeed have been characteristic of certain regions for many years. The country's spatial variation in resource and population distribution was largely overcome by less advantaged communities in pre-contact times by a variety of strategies ranging from warfare to organised trading expeditions. Colonisation and the introduction of a cash economy, although processes by no means as severe as in many parts of the Third World, have nevertheless intensified and increased regional differences within the country. Cliffe's characterisation of East Africa according to labour-supply areas, cash-crop-producing areas, quiescent areas and frontier areas[2] (1977:201) has general application to Papua New Guinea (although perhaps the 'frontier

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[1] I use this term in the sense of the production of agricultural commodities for export, but not necessarily on plantations, whether foreign owned or acquired by nationals. The cultivation of such commodities in a formerly subsistence economy may also create land shortage.

[2] 'Quiescent areas' were not regarded as suitable for cash cropping, their manpower was not required, and the indigenous mode of production was disturbed to a more limited extent. 'Frontier areas' were the result of population increase and expansion into new areas, aided by the extension of communications (*loc. cit.*).

areas' are more apparent around the towns than in the countryside at present (see p. 4). It is obvious, however, that not all villagers are able to engage in cash cropping in their clan land — some live in densely-populated regions, some areas have suffered 'benign neglect' while in others cash cropping is precluded by environmental or locational constraints. The unskilled from such areas are likely candidates for the proletariat if they wish to enter the monetary sector workforce:

> ...the separation of the producers from their means of production creates a class of proletarians who cannot live otherwise than by hiring out their strength, that is, by selling their labour-power (Mandel 1968:119).

While it is an exaggeration to claim that these Papua New Guineans 'cannot live otherwise' than by becoming wage labourers, certainly the majority now have inescapable needs for cash.

Until quite recently, however, alternatives to rural wage labour were available for those lacking home-based cash earning opportunities. Thus the over-alienation of land by early colonisers in New Britain, New Ireland and along the north coast of the mainland led not to the growth of an agricultural proletariat but rather of an educated and (by now) relatively urbanised sector of the workforce. More recently, the rapid rate of urban growth in the last two decades absorbed a number of migrant job seekers, while those who entered the paid workforce in rural areas through institutions such as the Highlands Labour Scheme usually did so only temporarily, returning to their home clans and to self-employment at the end of the contract period. Such factors have inhibited the proletarianisation of rural society in the past.

Since the early 1970s, employment opportunities and the rate of new job creation for unskilled rural people in the country's urban centres have slowed down markedly, although by contrast the decision to localise the public service at about this time meant wider employment opportunities for the better educated members of the workforce. Unskilled labour increasingly has to compete with better educated younger people for scarce urban employment. Furthermore, Papua New Guinea's *National Development Strategy* states that 'there will only be a limited number of wage employment opportunities and no foreseeable expansion of wage employment in

urban areas is likely to provide jobs for all seeking work. By 1981, it is likely that 40 per cent of adult males [in urban areas] will be without formal wage employment' (1976:36). It would appear therefore that villagers from crowded homelands or regions unsuitable for peasant agriculture will be obliged to seek employment in the rural sector to a greater extent in the future. Acquisition of smallholder blocks in government-sponsored resettlement schemes is an option available to a small minority only of such people, and in any case it is by no means certain that such land is allocated to those whose need is greatest (see Howlett *et al.* 1976:114 ff). Cases of 'spontaneous resettlement' of villagers in other rural areas have been documented by Tomasetti (1966) and Ploeg (1975), but this is a precarious strategy which has often resulted in the eviction of the would-be settlers. While it is true that Papua New Guinea has extensive unoccupied tracts, their isolation and terrain are such that they are unlikely to be settled in any significant degree as were the 'frontier areas' in Africa (Cliffe 1977:201).

Social differentiation in Papua New Guinea

Uphoff and Ilchman have stated that 'The idea of a country's social structure refers to the differentiated and differential flows of esteem and deference between and among individuals and sectors' and that the structure of economic and social sectors 'represent identifiable patterns of resource possession and exchange' (1972:88-9). In Papua New Guinea the inherent spatial differences noted in resource pattern and exchange have been intensified and modified since colonisation in ways which have resulted in structural differentiation. Social science research, particularly during the past decade, has documented the country's transformation from the relatively classless, subsistence-based socioeconomy which existed prior to colonisation to an increasingly stratified and monetised society. The transformation has at certain times and in particular places been so rapid that structural changes which elsewhere evolved gradually over many generations have, in Papua New Guinea, been collapsed into a few decades.

The most conspicuous changes, hence those which have received the most attention, have involved the social differentiation of urban populations. They are related not only to the process of urbanisation, but to associated factors such as the increase both horizontally and vertically

of education opportunities since the early 1960s; the increasing access of Papua New Guineans to occupations in government, administration and private enterprise; the increased migration of villagers to towns; and changes in political status from dependent colony to independent nation. Indigenous urban society is now comprised of the elite, the bureaucracy, the petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and marginal groups including squatters and *pasendia*.

Structural changes and trends in rural areas are less readily identifiable. One reason would seem to be the patchy spread of colonial contact and administrative control, which began in some coastal locations in the 1870s, and in some interior regions not until the 1960s. This has meant that rural structural change occurred in discrete pockets rather than on a broad scale. Another probable reason has been suggested by Mintz who, in a recent paper (1974), commented on the problems surrounding the categorisation of Caribbean populations as a rural proletariat, discussing at length questions of definition and process, and the relationships of the rural proletariat to the peasantry, including the 'concealment' of landless workers in peasant communities. Mintz had previously used the term 'concealment'

> ...to refer to the ways prevailingly proletarian adaptations may be embedded within what appear to be peasant communities, particularly where kin ties between the landed and the landless, or between the land-rich and the land-poor, affect the quality of economic relationships (1973:101).

It seems quite probable, therefore, that socioeconomic change in Papua New Guinea may be leading to rural proletarianisation, even though it may have been obscured for reasons such as those mentioned.

The conventional wisdom of the 1960s in relation to modernisation theory in some respects resembled a cargo cult, in that most exponents firmly believed that modernisation could be achieved, if only the vital secret ingredient (the big push, n-achievement, modernisation crises, balanced growth, unbalanced growth...) to enable the transition from less developed states such as peasantries to modern socioeconomies could be identified and applied (see Howlett 1973). However, I have argued that 'the condition of peasantry is not always or even often transitional to some higher and more "developed" state. Peasantries most frequently

represent a terminal stage of development' (1973:250). Implicit in a condition of 'arrested modernisation' is the persistence of the peasantry (see also Mortimer 1975 and Low 1976), but I do not contend that peasant society is therefore static and fossilised. My generalisations regarding the peasantry in the Eastern Highlands were presented to emphasise the constraints on the ultimate achievement of an industrialised, 'modern' society in Papua New Guinea, but not to deny the possibility of the transfer of a minority into the country's small, predominantly urban, modern sector, nor the likelihood of differentiation and stratification within the peasantry (Howlett 1973:269-70).

Thus Finney (1973), Morauta (1974), von Fleckenstein (1974), Gerritsen (1975), McKillop (n.d.), Howlett *et al.* (1976), Amarshi and Blaxter (1975) and Good (1976) have all documented, with varying emphases, the emergence of a class of 'big peasants', a rural elite which has gained control of significant resources and monopolised access to government services and agencies intended for wider dissemination. As Low has observed, 'Dominant peasants seem to be springing up all over the place' (1976:24). The government's commitment to the Eight Point Plan (reiterated in October 1976 in the *National Development Strategy* and in campaigning during the recent national elections) notwithstanding, inequality in rural areas is now entrenched and would seem to be increasing. Indeed, it would seem that certain government agencies actually contribute to this process, albeit unwittingly. In the Chimbu study we commented,

> In Chimbu, the concentration of extension assistance and provision of credit to a few, directed to projects such as cattle with (relatively) heavy land requirements, is leading to the stratification of rural society and the emergence of a rural elite with an effective monopoly on these scarce resources, and hence the momentum to further increase its advantage. This result, obviously unlooked for, will be difficult to reverse, and highlights an important dilemma for policy makers: the desire to promote entrepreneurship (itself a scarce resource) as it emerges versus aims of the Eight Point Plan such as achievement of more equal distribution of economic benefits, including movement toward equalisation of incomes among people (Howlett *et al.* 1976: 249-50).

Items in Papua New Guinea's *Post Courier* in recent months illustrate other aspects of the contemporary rural economy.

> In February 1977 the government established the National Plantation Management Agency, which will begin training Papua New Guineans as plantation managers next month. Trainee managers (25 initially) will be assisted by the UNDP and the Office of Business Development, and will have access to facilities at agricultural colleges in New Britain and the highlands. The first year's budget is between K.50 000 and K.60 000 (*Post Courier*, 30.6.76 and 18.3.77).

It is obviously in the national interest to maintain the productivity of the plantation sector. It is also obvious that indigenous groups such as development and investment corporations with the resources and opportunity to purchase plantations[3] are being assisted to a degree out of all proportion to their numbers, widening the gap between the privileged minority and the rest, as well as creating greater regional inequalities. Meanwhile,

> The president of the Papuan Planters' Association has claimed that higher wages for the rural sector will force copra and rubber planters out of production (*Post Courier*, 7.6.77).

The achievements of some groups in the Eastern Highlands, benefiting from current high coffee prices, have been reported under such headlines as:

> *Lowa pays 20 per cent dividend* (1.2.77)
> *Their money has grown 5-fold in 20 months* (21.12.76)
> *Self-reliance: Komiufa took a year* (10.12.76)

In the latter case, the Komiufa people acknowledged their gratitude to 'the government for giving us a loan, and the local government council for building roads and bringing a water supply from the dam', while a spokesman from the Alienated Land Resources Branch said, 'the handling of the loan repayment was closely scrutinised by the department to ensure there were no foul-ups that could ruin the project' and that 'they have indicated they would still like advice on management and future investments.' A final example will suffice: a statement in late 1976 by the Premier of the Eastern Highlands that 'Some land laws designed to protect traditional land-owners' rights could retard less-fortunate Papua New Guineans' sounds

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[3] In the highlands at least, it is unlikely that clans whose land was alienated for plantations are experiencing land shortage - alienation procedures followed in the 1950s tried to allow for the villagers' needs over the following 99 years (Howlett 1962:222 ff).

less altruistic when one reads on: 'It is true that the Papua New Guinea Government brought in these laws to protect the 'papa bilong gram' [sic] but it will also hinder the more active people who wish to get involved in business' (9.11.76). As all urban land is alienated, the reference is obviously to the acquisition of rural land under customary ownership. A speech by the former Finance Minister, Mr Julius Chan, who in late 1976 'warned of the danger that social, political and economic changes could create new divisions within society' and that 'there was always a possibility that [development] would lead to a worse society and a less satisfying life' (*Post Courier*, 8.11.76), aptly summarises what the future may hold for the majority of rural people.

A corollary of the growth of a rural elite in a situation of limited and increasingly scarce resources[4] is that other sectors of rural society will inevitably suffer relative disadvantage in access to both local resources and government attention. Smith has drawn attention to Gilbert's (1974) work in Latin America, which stresses 'the role of *internal colonialism* as an aspect of the economic and social structure through which the privileged exploit the poorer classes' (1977:237). Thus the parallel creation and growth of marginalised groups may be expected. This suggests that Foster's concept of 'the image of the limited good' (1965) which has been reported in some peasant societies may also become applicable in Papua New Guinea.

It is clear that some groups in Papua New Guinea are strongly conscious of their disadvantages, although much less clear about how to overcome or ameliorate them (see Howlett *et al.* 1976:Appendix 4). From my own field work and the findings of researchers and government officers[5] in various parts of the country, it is also clear that land-short[6] and landless groups, and wage labour for big peasants, are already more widespread than is

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[4] On present trends the country's population will have more than doubled by the end of the century, but there is little evidence of increased productivity in subsistence agriculture, and Barnett reports 'only about four or five pieces of research into subsistence farming being carried out at present' (1976:13). See also Howlett *et al.* 1976.

[5] D. Denoon, L. Grossman, E. Young, R. Skeldon, H. Colebatch, P. Williamson, R. Hiatt, personal communications, November-December 1976.

[6] While land shortage may not be absolute, I use the term from here on to include those whose territories are economically disadvantaged by environmental and locational conditions.

generally recognised. For example, in 1960, a few years after the establishment of European coffee plantations in the Goroka Valley, some villagers near Goroka were employing labourers from the Fore region (Howlett 1962:198-99). William Heaney reports that 'some ex-plantation workers, from Chimbu, the Southern Highlands and the Jimi Valley, were laborers for Wahgi big-men and preferred to work for less pay than they would receive on nearby plantations. Informants stated that working as a client had certain social advantages to being a wage-earner on a plantation' (1977:5).

All four New Ireland villages in which Elspeth Young carried out field work in 1976 included men from other provinces who had permanently resettled (in the case of some Sepik men, before the Second World War). Some were employed by local villagers with large areas of land (pers. comm., April 1977). Connell has reported that on Bougainville, 'some Siwais have imported New Guinean labourers' (1977:29) although the practice is not widespread (pers. comm., May 1977). Grossman also reports the hiring of labour by highland cattle owners (pers. comm., December 1976).

It is worth pointing out that the *National Development Strategy* makes only one indirect reference to the existence of landless people, in connection with land policy:

> A National Land Bill is to be introduced to Parliament in 1976-7. This is aimed at preventing land speculation and possible conflicts between a landowning class and dispossessed rural people (1976:24-5).

This would seem to lend further weight to Mintz's argument concerning the concealment of such people within the broad structure of the peasantry, and of course it is likely to be in the interests of provincial and national politicians, who are often also big peasants, and of others in the power structure, to ensure that such concealment is maintained. And as Heaney has noted, it is sometimes perceived to be in the interests of the rural workers themselves to accept employment with big-men: 'shorter and more flexible working hours, and the possibility that their children might become members of the big-man's clan' (1977:5).

Some methodological problems

The first problem I wish to raise is perhaps ideological rather than methodological: is this geography? I should like to dispose of this question by quoting Smith:

> Since the end of the 1960s the condition of mankind has emerged as a major concern for the geographer, with a growing emphasis on economic and social problems, relevance in research, and influence on public policy.
>
> ...a broad multi-disciplinary perspective is essential in modern human geography (1977:ix-x).

My second problem is rather more complex. Although the discussion so far has been couched in terms of the formation of a rural proletariat, I must now admit that an appropriate typology by which to characterise the quasi-peasant or non-peasant rural people in Papua New Guinea is by no means clear to me. I would also stress that it is not the purpose of this research to carry out an exercise in historical determinism, but rather to investigate a set of trends in their spatial and structural dimensions and to analyse their implications. In spite of many parallels with other Third World nations, especially in Africa, the circumstances of Papua New Guinea's pre-contact socioeconomy, and the recency of its colonial experience, demand empirical enquiry.

Rural societies in developing nations are varied and dynamic, as attested by the efforts of those who have attempted to construct typologies. Mintz has written somewhat ruefully, 'Debates about who peasants are, or how to define peasantries...promise to be unending' (1973:92). Perhaps for this reason the peasantry has been termed 'the awkward class' and 'not a class but a notion.' I am in agreement with Hobsbawm when he says,

> A good deal of the effort of definition is, of course, for theoretical rather than practical purposes. It may well be a very complex matter for a zoologist to define a horse, but this does not normally mean that there is any difficulty about recognizing one (1973:3).

However, my more immediate concern is to try to assess the relationship of agricultural labourers in Papua New Guinea to other strands in its rural socioeconomy. A variety of viewpoints from other researchers is available. Shanin, for example, concluded that a number of 'analytically

marginal groups', including agricultural labourers, frontier squatters and pastoral tribal people must be included with the 'hard core' as elements of increasingly differentiated peasant societies (1971:296-98). In a later publication, he affirmed this position concerning agricultural labourers:

> In his search for supplementary wages the peasant may find himself a hundred miles from home and in the different economic environment of a plantation, mine or factory. He may work on the local estate for wages, or on the basis of various share-cropping arrangements. (1973:72).

Mortimer's position is similar:

> Although many social scientists would exclude the landless labourer from their definition of the peasantry, I believe it does violence to the character of rural social relationships in most poor countries to draw this arbitrary distinction; the livelihood and way of life of the landless labourer and the peasant have so much in common as to be indistinguishable in many cases - indeed, they frequently exchange roles, and are found quite frequently to be one and the same person in different phases of the agricultural cycle (1975:12).

Mintz, on the other hand, considers that:

> However total a peasant society may appear to be, its members rarely - if ever - may be said to compose the entire fabric of rural life. Various modes of share-tenure, sharecropping, squatting, etc...are typical of peasant societies. But in addition, peasantries commonly live in close association with landless, wage-earning agricultural workers whose economic relations incline us to define them more as rural proletarians than as peasantries (1973:95).

Finally, Cliffe's conclusion is that:

> Sometimes conceptualising the overall class structure ...is difficult, for the same individual may have some access to land in his area of origin, defined by (pre-capitalist) customary rights, and may work it along customary patterns, but may also be involved in purely capitalist relations elsewhere by virtue of his buying land or having to sell his labour (1977:202).

My present inclination is to categorise the land-short and landless in Papua New Guinea according to the strategies they adopt to ameliorate their condition, and to formulate a framework for initial field investigation on this basis. The main strategies employed by such people within the rural sector at present appear to be part or full time employment by others. The employers may be big peasants within or beyond the individual's home clan, or foreign-owned or localised plantations. (I am not certain whether other rural, non-agricultural enterprises such as timber operations should also be included.) Thus, tentatively, I propose to consider those who leave their home clans and gain access to land for cultivation (by outright but unofficial purchase, rent, periodic contributions of labour or some other means) to be part of the peasantry. Others again who have acquired land in formal government-sponsored resettlement schemes are also undeniably peasants. Until 1974, when the Highland Labour Scheme ended, those who became plantation wage labourers for two or more years and then returned to their clans were also peasants taking a temporary leave of absence from their usual socioeconomic activities.

Not yet clear to me is the categorisation of those employed[7] on the holdings of big peasants; those employed on indigenously-owned plantations purchased under the Plantation Acquisition Scheme, and those employed by smallholders in resettlement schemes or by cattle owners. At present I prefer to term these people simply 'non-peasants' and to defer refinements of classification until field work has been carried out. The research will thus concentrate on those who, either within their clans or elsewhere in the rural sector, as a result of land shortage are principally employed by others rather than self-employed in agriculture.

Institutional changes in the plantation sector

Here it is necessary to refer briefly to the country's plantation sector. During the 1970s significant changes have been set in motion in both the pattern of plantation ownership and the organisation of the plantation workforce. With the attainment of self-government and independence, the adoption of the Eight Point Plan, the announcement of citizenship criteria, and the establishment of the government's Plantation Acquisition Scheme, a number of foreign-owned plantations have now been

[7] But not always for wages; see Morauta 1974.

purchased by nationals[8]. Most plantations acquired under the Plantation Acquisition Scheme are held by groups, in some cases by the traditional owners of the land, but in others by groups of big peasants who have formed 'development corporations' or 'investment corporations'. The country has between 1000 and 1200 properties designated as plantations, and according to an inventory taken in mid-1975 over 50 had been 'localised', a few with loans from the Development Bank, and some with no financial assistance, but the majority under the Plantation Acquisition Scheme (Department of Labour, Commerce and Industry, File 45-6-48). Most are in the Eastern and Western Highlands, and East New Britain, producing coffee and copra respectively. According to Joel (1974), plantations were to be localised in areas where population density and the need for more land were great. I have yet to establish whether this principle has been generally followed, but I suspect that in the highlands at least the financial assets of the intending purchasers may have been a more important consideration.

It is not known how many Papua New Guineans are agricultural wage labourers. In mid-1975, some 47,000 were employed on non-indigenous rural holdings (Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Bulletin, 24.3.77), but no statistics are available for those employed on the holdings of other nationals. With the transfer of ownership of some former non-indigenous holdings, some plantation labourers may have lost their jobs or potential employment to members of the purchasing group. For example, a Tolai group which bought Bailu plantation retained the imported labour force but when they decided to increase planting, contributed voluntary labour.

> It was an experiment, with up to 150 village people working on the plantation twice a week, alongside the imported labour (*Post Courier*, 14.4.77).

The total number, in any case, probably does not exceed 60,000, and includes many seasonal and temporary workers. This may seem a small number, but

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[8] As far as I am aware, very few individual Papua New Guineans owned plantations established on formally-alienated land during the colonial period. The Australian policy appeared to be one of reserving large holdings for non-indigenous ownership, and small-holdings for nationals. The former cocoa scheme at Popondetta, the New Britain oil palm scheme, and the Wahgi Valley tea industry, all followed this pattern. Some extensive plantings of cash crops were, however, made on customary land.

represents over 30 per cent of the monetary sector workforce, and about 90 per cent of the unskilled rural population in wage employment.

In 1974, following a motion in the previous year by a highland member of the former House of Assembly, the Highland Labour Scheme was terminated. In his speech Mr John Kaupa claimed that:

> Such a scheme is no longer appropriate in a country about to gain independence;
>
> the scheme acts against the interests of national unity; and
>
> it is degrading to the Highlands people in general since the scheme perpetuates the image of Highlanders as cheap labour (quoted in Joel, 1974).

The then Minister for National Development claimed that the scheme had actually 'protected many unsophisticated workers from exploitation' (*Post Courier*, 8.8.73) a claim which would be disputed by many, although it was one of the scheme's general intentions. Nevertheless, the scheme was replaced by the Rural Employment Programme (REP) which 'removed many of the restrictions of the old system and established common provision for the recruitment of agreement labour from the highlands and from coastal areas' (May and Skeldon 1975:7).

I am not yet sufficiently familiar with the structure and operation of the REP to discuss its implications for those engaging in agricultural employment under its auspices. However, it seems likely that future relations between employers and agreement workers may be more flexible than under the former system, with a wider range of accommodations between the two. The proportion undertaking agreement labour may decline. It is possible that rural minimum wages may not be observed in areas where labour is abundant, or that they may be forfeited by workers for other considerations, as Heaney has reported. It is of interest that before the REP replaced the Highland Labour Scheme, the Department of Labour and Industry carried out a survey of 66 plantations to assess the preconditions necessary to encourage a move away from the use of migrant labour in favour of a more settled married workforce in the plantation sector (Joel 1974). Ten of the survey plantations were selected as a control group in that they were known to have workforces consisting mainly of family units more or less

permanently settled[9]. The survey concluded that:

> ...it is relatively cheaper to operate plantations already having settled married workforces than those still concentrating in employing individual workers such as casual, HLS and verbal agreement workers (Joel 1974:37).

If widely adopted, this finding is likely to give considerable impetus to rural proletarianisation. A settled married workforce was considered to be both less expensive and more productive than the agreement system, which involves a high turnover of single workers.

The study assumed that the displacement from plantation employment of younger single men would 'greatly boost' economic and social development in their home areas, because plantation recruitment has led to a marked slow-down or complete standstill in such development. However, this seems to be confusing cause and effect in many areas. It would appear that precisely because the recent source areas of agreement labour have so little economic potential their young men migrate. A consequence different from that envisaged by Joel may follow if plantations adopt a preference for a settled workforce, namely permanent rather than circular migration of men from their home clans.

Proposed field work

It is proposed to carry out a two-stage project, the first of which will involve a broad survey to assess the spatial dimensions, regional delineations and occupational characteristics of the land-short stratum, in order to identify more precisely the source regions and receiving areas involved. In general, it is known that the source areas include the Southern Highlands, Enga and Chimbu provinces, remoter regions of the Eastern and Western Highlands, and parts of the Sepik provinces. Inland peoples in coastal provinces such as Morobe, Madang and Northern also form part of this pool. The receiving areas, broadly, are the plantation districts and regions where the availability and suitability of land allow extensive peasant cash cropping. The situation reported

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[9] Joel's study does not indicate the location of these ten plantations.

by Heaney in the Western Highlands, of agricultural workers employed on the holdings of big-men within the same province, may prove to be common to a number of provinces.

In the second stage, ideally at least three locations will be selected for intensive studies on the basis of the initial survey. It is tentatively proposed to include localised plantations, a region in which big peasants employ labour (either in cash cropping or on livestock schemes, or both) and a resettlement scheme in which smallholders employ labourers. Although it is not possible to be precise about the form the case studies will take, the investigation of relationships between employers and employees will include a search for evidence of potential 'feudal' types of landlord/tenant and patron/client relationships, and of various forms of exploitation including political and other pressures. The rural labourers are largely unskilled, are not organised into an interest group, and are inevitably vulnerable to those more powerful. Much recent writing on the peasantry has centred on peasant movements and peasant rebellions, even peasant 'wars'. The small size of Papua New Guinea's population and the relatively short duration of its colonial period may suggest that such events are extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, as Cliffe observed in East Africa,

> ...there is a strong tendency for local political patterns in the post-Independence period to allow coalitions of locally privileged strata in coalition with national ruling classes to manipulate the peasantry to their own advantage (1977:220).

Observers of the political environment during this year's national election campaigns may find this statement applicable to Papua New Guinea also.

The research proposed here thus has broad interdisciplinary implications, as well as policy implications for the Papua New Guinea government. Not least of the latter are considerations vis-a-vis its national development strategy and earlier Eight Point Plan. For some regions and sectors of society, the Plan might never have been enunciated (see Howlett *et al.* 1976:335 ff). Here it is appropriate to emphasise Marx's warning, cited by Cliffe, that

> ...the communal ties of reciprocity in labour use and free access to land [are] unlikely to be effective proof against more individualistic property and labour relations with the growth of commodity production (1977:200).

and the observation by Uphoff and Ilchman that structural differentiation cannot automatically be identified with development.

This paper poses a variety of questions for which there are as yet no answers, and perhaps some answers will not be obtainable by someone from outside the culture. Smith points out that 'Few geographers have yet been able to look at development from a non-Western cultural perspective, looking up the urban hierarchy instead of down it' (1977:235), and the perspective of those in the lower strata of the rural socioeconomy would seem to be essential for the proposal sketched here. The relationship of structural differentiation to development in Papua New Guinea remains an unknown, and it may be too early to hope to establish the relationship. Nor is it yet possible to determine whether structural differentiation within the country's peasantry can be attributed to the penetration of capitalism as the Marxists hold, or to the demands of urban society, which Lipton would assert. Indeed, given the parallel introduction of capitalism and urbanism in Papua New Guinea, it may not prove possible to differentiate between the two processes. I do not know whether the formation of a rural proletariat is indeed in process, or whether present trends are simply leading to further differentiation of the peasantry. Marx, referring to the fragmentation and limited class solidarity of the French peasantry in the nineteenth century, characterised it as 'a sack of potatoes'. By the same token, the twentieth century Papua New Guinean peasantry may prove to be a 'sack of kaukau'.

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