

**THE RISE AND FALL  
OF THE WHITE SUGAR PLANTER IN FIJI  
1880-1925**

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From early in the period of British rule (1874-1970), capitalism in Fiji was conspicuously corporate. The Australian Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) dominated, and by 1926 monopolized, production of the colony's major export--raw sugar. However, the company did not begin operations in 1880 with the intention of growing much sugarcane. CSR policy, reaffirmed early in the twentieth century, was to buy from individual European planters employing indentured Indian labor. The economic rationale was that cane was acquired without capital outlay on risky cultivation. The related political rationale was that white sugar settlers were useful front-line allies in any battles against unwanted government intervention in the sugar industry.<sup>1</sup>

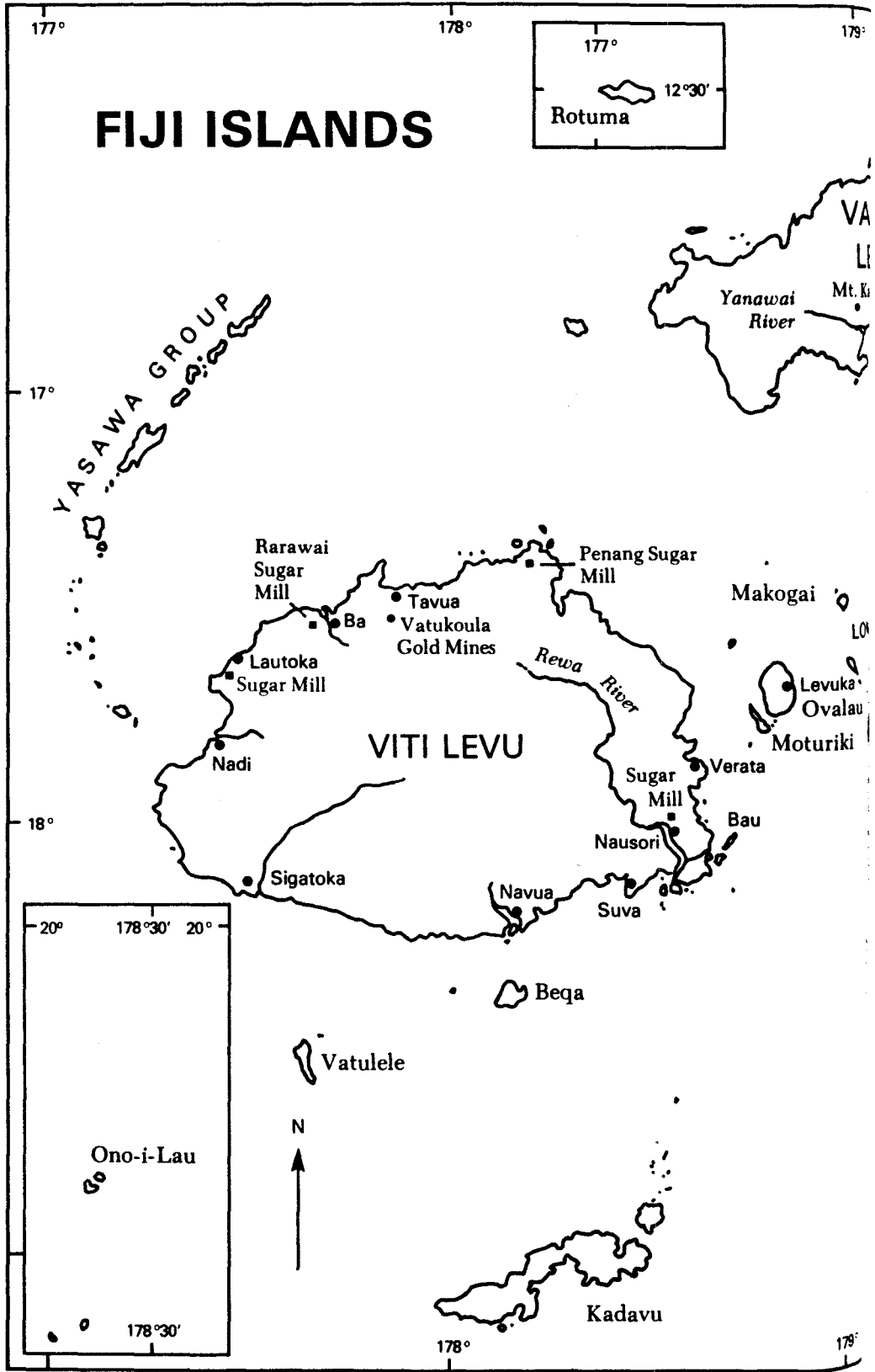
Fiji's sugar export growth, then, was to be accomplished through the harnessing of settler to corporate capital. This article provides a descriptive account of the sugar planters' involvement in export growth, their fortunes, and their demise in the 1920s when corporate capital, true to its profit ethic, turned from white settlers as readily as once it had retained them.

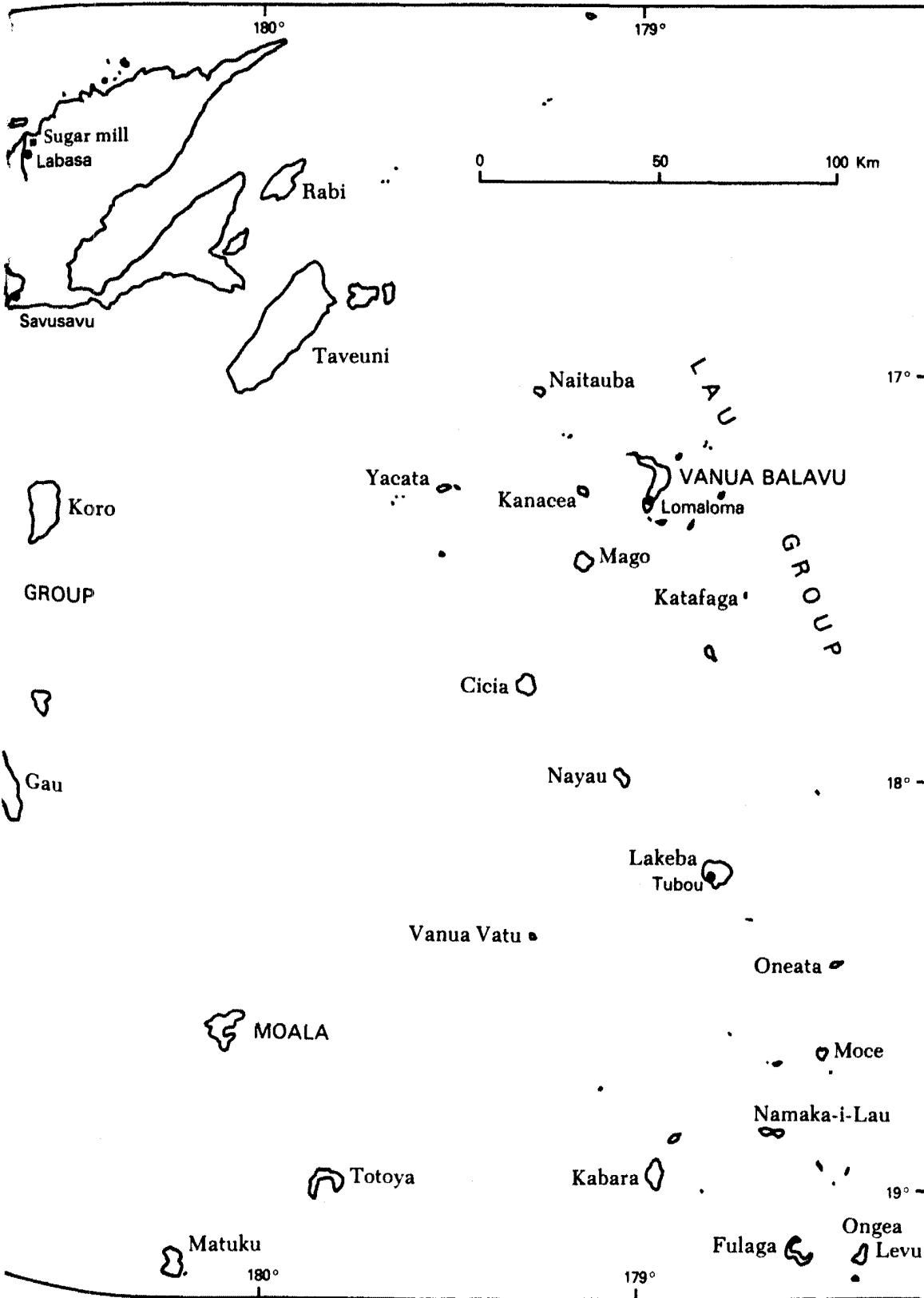
**Prelude**

In the aftermath of the early 1870s cotton collapse, Europeans on about six hundred plantations searched for a new cash crop that would

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reduce their indebtedness. Some were fortunate enough to claim land partially planted in coconuts by the original Fijian owners, so that a little cash income could be generated from cutting copra while new plantings matured. Planters in Fiji's alluvial river valleys had no such option, for the land was unsuited to coconut palms. Coffee took several years to mature and in any case was quickly eliminated as an alternative in planters' minds because of leaf disease.<sup>2</sup> Maize could be grown in some areas, but the general preference was for sugarcane, of which there was an indigenous variety. By 1879, eighteen out of an 1870 total of thirty Rewa river plantations were under cane cultivation, accounting for 69 percent of the 1,800 acres planted throughout the colony.<sup>3</sup> Even with such a small area planted, there was a marketing problem: the two existing Rewa mills could crush no more than 50 percent of the potential harvest, and that inefficiently.<sup>4</sup> This was a short-lived difficulty though. In 1880, CSR decided to erect a mill that would treble milling capacity on the Rewa--on the understanding that two leading landholders would keep 1,000 acres of their personal estates under cane for ten years, and that all planters would accept a price for their cane fixed at 10s. per ton for twelve years.<sup>5</sup>

Planter acceptance of what they regarded as an inadequate cane price was a measure of their desperation. A CSR-induced revival of the Rewa river economy might at least permit quick sales of freehold land, capital gains sufficient to cancel debts, and rapid departures from Fiji, leaving new owners to live with 10s. per ton.<sup>6</sup> And indeed there was a speculative surge of activity in response to news of CSR's investment decision. Stores, hotels, butchers, and bakers appeared in the Rewa delta. The newly formed Plantation and Agricultural Society called for government financial assistance with bridge building--in the event, unsuccessfully. New towns were planned, with town blocks selling for up to £50 per acre, while the asking price for plantation land soared.<sup>7</sup>

Yet because of a lack of demand at going prices, only a few planters left Fiji with money from plantation sales. One was Edward Reece, who sold 1,600 acres of his Naitasiri plantation to CSR in 1881 for £10 per acre of flat land. Significantly though, the sale was part of an unplanned and undesired expansion of company landholdings beyond the 928 acres acquired for £2 per acre in 1880. Three planters had tried to renege on their cane contracts, which guaranteed supply of a fixed tonnage to the CSR mill. More important, there was an overall shortfall in the 1881 cane plantings promised by planters, precisely because they lacked the capital to acquire available Indian laborers, whose cost of introduction into the colony had to be covered by one lump-sum pay-

ment. E. W. Knox, CSR's general manager, perhaps exaggerated when he told the prolific letter writer and sometime planter W. Fillingham Parr that had he foreseen the difficulties over cane supply, a mill would not have been built; but he observed privately that CSR now needed more land on the Rewa to secure its investment, which by the time of the first crush in 1882 had reached £150,000.

This did not mean wholesale purchase of freehold land on offer. Until a return on invested capital was certain, Knox was unwilling to buy land at the £15 per acre asking price of the man owning more land than anyone else on the river, C. L. Sahl. Instead, CSR leased 860 acres from Sahl and--overcoming the reluctance of acting governor Thurston, who complained that CSR seemed to want the whole Rewa district--secured a lease of 800 acres of Fijian land at Navuso. Adding only one desirable 192-acre plantation to its freeholdings at a price of £11 per acre, the company could then cultivate 3,500 acres on its own account.<sup>8</sup>

Concomitantly, CSR was compelled into prominence as a financial intermediary by the need to ensure its cane supply from individual planters. The company lent at 8 percent against property mortgages, and advanced £2 per acre for four-month-old cane and a further £2 for nine-month-old cane at the rate of 6 percent on the security of the crops. The outstanding mortgager was Sahl, who early in 1882 borrowed £25,000 for five years, renewable for another five, at 7 percent against Property on the Rewa and Sigatoka rivers. But his was the planter's Position writ large. By April 1882, before the first crush, CSR had secured by mortgage eight Rewa plantations covering 2,000 acres, and held crop liens over most others.<sup>9</sup> Six months later it added J. C. Smith's 1,300-acre plantation to its list of mortgaged properties; and in March 1883 it purchased a 500-acre freehold.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of the age of export growth, then, CSR, as sugar grower owned or leased 4,000 acres in the Rewa river valley, and as moneylender held mortgages over 3,300. The latter, and crop liens, bound planters in a structure of forced growing from which they could escape only if fortunate enough either to find a buyer for their land, or to make a financial success of its cultivation.

### **Death of a Pioneer Generation: The 1880s Depression**

From the outset, domestic and international factors worked against Plantation profitability. Cane yields below expectations, a low sugar content in cane, leaf mould disease, and high cultivation and transport costs attributable in part to weed growth--all resulted from a Rewa

rainfall in excess of 100 inches per annum. The cost of imported labor increased as competition from the Queensland sugar industry drove the money wage of Melanesian labor up to a level at which its total cost equalled that of Indian labor. Further restrictions on the mobility of Fijian labor were imposed by the government in 1883.

Nor did technological improvements in cultivation offset higher money wages. Only one or two planters had previous experience of cane growing, making management in general and cultivation in particular less efficient than it might have been; and before 1890 CSR concentrated on improving milling efficiency rather than cultivation techniques. In any case, given the uniqueness of the ecological environment, innovation proffered no immediate panacea. The only change made in cultivation practices affected planters adversely, at least in the short term: in the interests of producing sweeter cane, CSR required a reduction in crops harvested from three every two years to one annually.<sup>11</sup>

It soon became evident that an average cost of production in excess of the cane price threatened to undermine the Rewa planter economy. Planters had contracted to sell cane at the flat rate of 10*s.* per ton until 1892; and though CSR paid 12*s.* 6*d.* in 1884 and 1885, and 11*s.* from 1888 until 1891, the 53 percent drop in the world sugar price between 1882 and 1890 prevented payment of the 15*s.* per ton reasonably regarded by planters as the minimum necessary to ensure plantation profits. After all, CSR's own unit cost of production averaged 14*s.* 4*d.* in 1888-1890.<sup>12</sup>

CSR wrote off £20,000 on its plantation account in 1883, and concentrated its efforts thereafter on cultivating better quality land near Nausori mill and on attempting to reduce labor costs by purchasing food from Fijians instead of growing it on the plantations. Two planters tried to sell out, but CSR was the only likely buyer and it was undertaking a holding operation on the Rewa as it made a more careful assessment of the climatic and economic factors relevant to expansion on the dry side of Viti Levu. The company successfully took two planters to court for breaking their contracts in 1884, ceased advances to some planters, and, bailing others out with further advances, watched the debts accumulate as it held them to their contracts. By late 1883, for example, the old hand Amos Witherow owed CSR £2,300; J. C. Smith owed £12,000; Orr, a tenant of Sahl's, £3,000; and Parr, £4,000 secured by a second mortgage, £11,000 already having been advanced on the first by the Australasian Mortgage and Agency Company.<sup>13</sup>

Members of the Planter's Association of Fiji argued that costs of production were unnecessarily high because of the restricted supply of

Fijian labor, high costs of introducing immigrant labor, and low labor productivity resulting from protective labor regulations. In their view, six hours--the time in which a "task" ought to be completed--was not a "fair day's work." Predictably, planters wanted labor and taxation policies that would compel Fijians into wage labor as the "means of recalling into existence the class of small planters."<sup>14</sup> This hardy perennial had been dismissed so resolutely by colonial government that CSR at least accepted that protest was useless. The only concession obtained was an 1884 ordinance permitting payment for Indian laborers in five annual installments (6 percent being charged on deferred payments) and giving preference to small planters in allocation of laborers by limiting to thirty the number obtainable in any one season, unless there was a surplus after the small planter demand had been satisfied. In the absence of Colonial Office approval for loan finance, however, the ordinance was operative for only one year's labor supply and did little for the undercapitalized planters. In the late 1880s, CSR, the short-lived Rewa Sugar Company, and the debtors Sahl, Smith, Orr, and Harley were the only sugar planters on the Rewa employing Indian indentured labor.<sup>15</sup>

Inevitably, exploitation of plantation labor intensified. There was always exploitation under the indenture system in the sense that indentured labor was paid less than the going free-market wage.<sup>16</sup> But a falling sugar price and production costs in excess of the cane price were bound to increase its incidence, for labor costs were the most important cost item on sugar plantations, especially on the Rewa where there was one laborer for every 2.3 acres of cane land, compared with one for every 5 acres in Queensland.<sup>17</sup>

Planters reduced the hourly money wage rate by redefining a task to the point where nine hours had to be worked instead of six; and because inadequate staffing prevented detailed inspection by immigration officials, they got away with it. They also reduced real wages by charging exorbitant rates for rations they were obliged to provide during the first twelve months of a laborer's indenture. The daily ration for an adult (a person over ten years of age) was twenty ounces of rice, four ounces of dhal, one ounce of ghee or coconut oil, three-quarters of an ounce of curry powder, two ounces of sugar, and one ounce of salt. Children between five and ten received half this allowance; and those under five received one Imperial pint of milk. Between 1887 and 1891 the adult ration cost the employer an average fourpence per working day. He charged nearly sixpence ha'penny, or 81 percent of the adult male average earnings of eightpence per working day. The legal charge was fivepence.<sup>18</sup>

It is not saying much to point out that Indian indentured labor was nevertheless materially better off than it had been in India. The more relevant observation is that wage rates below the statutory minimum of 1s. per task did not necessarily make labor cheap. Death, absenteeism, and labor inefficiency due to low living standards were quantitatively significant on the Rewa. The death rate among Melanesian laborers in the early 1880s was 32 percent, reaching 56 percent at Naitasiri plantation. Death and disease (particularly hookworm) among Indians were so serious that ultimately the Imperial government threatened cessation of immigration. But the immediate results were apparent in days actually worked by Indians under indenture. In 1888 an average one-quarter of the Rewa Sugar Company's work force was absent, sick, or in jail. A similar proportion of CSR's work force did not work in the years 1890-1893. For the colony as a whole in 1890, laborers put in just over four days out of the five-and-a-half-day working week.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, Knox had noted already: "Altogether, the time seems to have come for us to do something more for the comfort and health of the coloured labour staff."<sup>20</sup>

There was no reversal of the low wage policy, however. Output per man would need to have doubled from the typical 36 cwt. cut each task to leave unit costs unchanged after a doubling of money wages; and cane sugar's international competitiveness could be maintained only if wages in sugar colonies were sufficiently low to offset the advantage the continental beet sugar producer gained from heavy government subsidies and any productivity differential. Even then, profitability of Rewa plantations was not guaranteed: "up to the end of 1885 there was not a planter on the river who could say that he realized a profit."<sup>21</sup>

Only the date had to be altered when planters' supply contracts with CSR finally expired in 1892. The decline of the Rewa planter had been as rapid as the sugar price fall. European contractors supplied an estimated 82 percent of the 1885 crush. In 1890 they supplied just 20 percent and cultivated only 1,400 acres to CSR's 3,500.<sup>22</sup> Parr's plantation had gone to the Australasian Mortgage and Agency Company in 1887, and CSR had ceased advances to Sahl in mid-1888, shortly afterwards acquiring two more plantations to bring its landholdings to 5,000 acres. Many planters left Fiji. Orr, for example, had arrived in the colony with £1,500. He left indebted, his outward passage paid by CSR, and with the stolen cash deposits of Indian laborers in his pockets. Those remaining on the river cultivated small areas of cane (around 80 acres), sublet to free Indians, and tried banana planting. The company, mortgage agencies, and the banks now ran the thirteen larger estates employing indentured labor.<sup>23</sup>



### A New Generation

Nevertheless, CSR retained a preference for drawing cane supplies from nominally independent planters. In effect, these planters could be friends at court who would help minimize, even eliminate, taxation. And if a loss were to be made from cane growing, better that it be made by someone else. Planters bore the risks of growing; they potentially reduced the miller's capital outlay; and, it was thought, they proffered the simultaneous possibilities of cane cheaper to the miller and more profitable to the grower through reduced overheads and better labor relations.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of a stabilized raw sugar price, CSR therefore offered 12*s. 6d.* per ton to those company employees--and respondents to pamphleteers extolling Fiji's virtues as an El Dorado--who were prepared to sign a five-year contract as tenants on company land, or as contractors on other land.<sup>25</sup> Initially, the response was limited. But in the 1890s CSR turned its attention to cultivation technology; and as the yield-raising effects of horsepower, manuring, proper drainage, and a new rain-tolerant cane variety (Malabar) became apparent, the area cultivated by individual planters expanded. Of the 8,000 acres under cane in 1898, just 2,500 were cultivated by CSR.<sup>26</sup>

CSR regretted contracting to pay 12*s. 6d.* when the raw sugar price fell further and reduced net profit on capital employed in the early 1890s to around 1 percent. Knox remarked that "Our Rewa venture . . . is, and has been, the worst investment we have made."<sup>27</sup> Planters, though, could make a profit in years free of drought, flood, or hurricane. Yields averaged 35 tons per acre on the Rewa in 1898, compared with 22 on CSR plantations in 1884, and permitted costs to fall as low as 9*s. 7d.* per ton on the Naitasiri plantation of ex-CSR overseer Peter Gordon.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, low cultivation costs on CSR plantations revitalized the company's hopes of making a grower's profit from its estates.<sup>29</sup> But wide year-to-year fluctuations in costs on the Rewa prompted a continuation of the leasing-out policy; and in any case, CSR's monopsony could be used to capture as miller's profit part of what the company thought possible as grower's profit. The cane price was regulated by the company, and so too was the rent paid by tenants leasing CSR land--the extent of which had been increased with the acquisition in 1899 of Sahl's and Smith's plantations, and of 1,200 acres held by the Australasian Mortgage and Agency Company.<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, in 1902 CSR reduced the contract price to 10*s.* per ton

of cane with a pure obtainable sugar content (P.O.C.S.) of 11 percent. For each percentage point above 11 an additional 1s. 3d. was to be paid; and for each point below, 1s. 8d. was to be deducted. Ten shillings was the minimum Knox thought the average European planter could afford to accept; and since the P.O.C.S. of the dominant Malabar cane usually was closer to 10 percent, this meant in practice a price closer to 8s. 6d., the flat rate paid for Indian-grown cane. CSR executives therefore anticipated a large settlement of Indian growers; and to obtain both cheaper cane and relief from carrying an indentured labor force during the off-season, they encouraged Indian settlement by offering advances at 6 percent, 4 percent less than the going rate obtainable from merchants.<sup>31</sup>

But CSR did not intend to displace the white planter; and to Europeans with visions of planter prosperity, the Indian laborer was a cipher, and the emergent Indian cane grower a tolerable fringe operator --not a portent, CSR employees continued to take out leases in the belief that profits could be made. In 1904 European planters supplied 65 percent of the record amount of cane crushed by Nausori mill, with Indian growers and CSR estates contributing 20 and 15 percent, respectively.<sup>32</sup> The share was down slightly from 1898, yet it confirmed the basic fact that, after a serious decline in importance during the late 1880s, the individual European sugar planter was restored as the major cane supplier on the Rewa. In this, the Rewa experience pointed to colony-wide developments.

As on the Rewa, Europeans had been confirmed in possession of much of the first class land in Fiji's dry zones (rainfall below 100 inches); and, again as on the Rewa, there was more interest in selling cane than in cultivating it when CSR decided to erect mills at Rarawai (first crush 1886) and Labasa (first crush 1894). Confident of these areas' profitability after trial cane plantings, the company acquired 11,600 acres of freehold at Ba in 1883 and 1884, at the low price of £2 10s. per acre. Reassured that sugar could be made "very cheaply," it subsequently purchased and leased from Fijians and Europeans, and by 1906 held at least 18,000 acres of cane land to supply the Rarawai mill. Similar control over land use was achieved at Labasa, where in 1908 CSR held leases on 27,000 acres; and at Lautoka, where it held 16,000 acres to supply its largest Fiji mill, which began crushing in 1903.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to the situation on the Rewa at the turn of the twentieth century, CSR estates dominated cane production in northwestern Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. The latter areas already accounted for 63 percent of the 25,000 acres under cane cultivation. Labasa mill drew all of

its supplies from eight estates for some years before 1906; Rarawai mill drew about one-third of its crush from white planters on non-CSR land; and Lautoka mill drew about 20 percent of its supplies from five planters, notably R. P. Carr & Co. and H. G. Carr and J. C. Doyle, who between them accounted for almost two-thirds of the independently cultivated areas.<sup>34</sup>

The limited reliance on planter supplies did not last long, however. Subdivision and leasing of CSR estates at Rarawai, Lautoka, and Labasa proceeded after 1905 for familiar reasons. Four dozen Australian overseers in their early twenties and anxious to make small fortunes were expected to get more out of 4,000 Indian laborers on individual plantations than they had on estates; and the governor himself had informed local management that leasing of estates would help disarm criticism of CSR.<sup>35</sup> This same governor was responsible for the short-lived opening of Fijian land to alienation (1905-1908) and the extension of leases from twenty-one to ninety-nine years, which produced, in France's words, "a festive atmosphere among the white settlers."<sup>36</sup> The old hand and the ex-CSR employee on his leasehold both looked forward to "a new era of prosperity . . . ushered in on a substantial basis."<sup>37</sup>

Judged by the rate of export growth, 1906-1915 was the golden age anticipated by Fiji's white population, largely because of a 7 percent annual expansion in sugar export tonnage coupled with an annual 3 percent price rise (Table 1). The extent of planter prosperity varied widely between regions and among individuals, however; and nowhere was it sustained.

### The Rewa Planters

On the Rewa, the remaining CSR estate was subdivided into three plantations in January 1909 and leased to company employees. Twenty

TABLE 1 **Fiji's Sugar Export Growth Rates, 1876-1934 (percent)**

	Value	Volume	Unit Value
1876-1906	6.0	8.5	-5.3
1906-1915	9.4	6.6	3.0
1915-1934	-2.2	1.4	-3.2

*Note:* Export data contained in the *Fiji Blue Books* were subjected to simple regression analysis. The export growth rate is measured by the regression coefficient divided by mean exports. Cf. Bruce Knapman and S. Schiavo-Campo, "Growth and Fluctuations of Fiji's Exports, 1875-1978," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 32 (October 1983): 92-119.

planters now owned or leased almost 17,000 acres on the river, and had contracted to grow cane for CSR on 8,000 acres of the cultivable area, 5,000 acres being cut annually.<sup>38</sup> Their output in the years 1906-1915 barely registered an upward trend, though, and was characterized by year-to-year fluctuations.<sup>39</sup> With the cane price stable at 10s. per ton of 11 percent P.O.C.S. until 1915, the planter's profitability depended on high yields and years free of natural disasters. Neither occurred consistently for the majority of plantations.

CSR's policy of adjusting the price to the sugar content of cane encouraged planters to replace Malabar cane with the much sweeter Badila variety. While successful in the dry zones of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, on the Rewa the switch generally failed. Badila proved intolerant of the heavy rainfall, was lower-yielding, and showed unpredictable variations in yield from one plantation to another and from one year to the next. The overall yield on the river in 1915 was 16.5 tons to the acre, the lowest since 1905.<sup>40</sup>

Bad weather similarly cut into planters' returns. In 1901, for example, flooding wiped out 40 percent of ex-CSR employee R. J. Freeman's Baulevu crop. More serious, a hurricane early in 1910 damaged CSR mills and equipment to the extent of £18,000, and reduced the Rewa crop from an expected 142,000 tons to 100,000. The direct loss in cash proceeds from cane therefore was about £21,000, or an average 30 percent for each planter. Planters suffered a further loss of £5,000 through the resultant drop in cane quality, the 1910 price being 9s. 6d. compared with the previous year's 10s. 6d. In addition, buildings were damaged, proper preparation of land for planting prevented, and seed cane for the 1911 crop lost.<sup>41</sup>

1911 was an unusually dry year and saw only a limited recovery in cane output to 111,000 tons. Of eight white planters financed by CSR, five had losses in 1911 averaging £722, the biggest loss of £1,660 coming on a plantation yielding just 8.6 tons of cane. The three who made profits averaging £357 were tenants on CSR land who benefited from bullock cultivation and preferential allocation of fertilizer from the Nausori mill.<sup>42</sup>

Among the other planters the less efficient managers were hardest hit. Simeon Lazarus, sugar planter and partner in the merchant company A. M. Brodziak & Co., had lost money on his leases and mortgaged them to the Bank of New South Wales for £50,000 to cover the company's indebtedness, itself the result of reckless lending to Indian sugar growers at Navua.<sup>43</sup> The most notorious example was Waring, onetime manager of CSR's Navuso estate and CSR tenant from

1904. He was in CSR's estimation a failure in both positions, a man whose general remedy for plantation mismanagement was heavy applications of artificial manure, and whose increasing indebtedness sat lightly on his shoulders. Until his takeover in 1912, he had drawn an annual pension of £121 and a living allowance as a tenant of £240, and lost only CSR's money--£9,000 in all.<sup>44</sup>

His indebtedness was exceptionally large, but through his managerial incompetence, Waring exaggerated a truth increasingly apparent to planters: unfavorable growing conditions threatened every plantation's productivity and, through that, the CSR advances on which many depended. In mid-1910 CSR ceased advances to one planter, who then had to abandon his plantation. Even the Cordon brothers, acknowledged as the most successful and experienced planters on the river after fifteen years in which they had cleared their debts as CSR tenants, had been set back in 1910-1911.<sup>45</sup>

A record crop of 143,000 tons in 1912 was followed by a similar output in 1913, despite a March hurricane. Profitability was restored to most plantations, and with it the chance of reducing indebtedness. All but one plantation ended 1913 with a credit on the year's operations, though the credit was insufficient in one case to prevent CSR ceasing advances, and in another to reduce indebtedness to its 1909 level. Bad weather the following year was regarded as largely responsible for a reversal of this performance. Only two planters financed by CSR made a profit, One leasehold was transferred to the company, and one planter had to obtain additional financing from the Gordons.<sup>46</sup>

In 1915 five of nine planters financed by CSR lost an average £480 each, despite the fact that CSR now paid a 2s. 6d.-per-ton cane bonus, and gave planters up to 6d. a week per man in order to assist with higher labor costs resulting from the wartime shortage of indentured labor and from increased food prices. The contribution to ration costs covered food price increases of about 15 percent in 1915.<sup>47</sup> And back-of-the-envelope calculations show the cane bonus permitted increased absolute profits even though money wage rates increased 50 percent where free Indian labor was employed.<sup>48</sup> Again, therefore, low yields due to bad weather explained poor performance. The Rewa crop in 1915 had fallen to its 1911 level.

Contrary to their original expectations, then, many white sugar planters of the Rewa delta found increased indebtedness rather than a small fortune was the end result of years of rising at dawn in order to direct indentured laborers to the cane fields. H. T. Moltke's experience as a CSR tenant was typical. The assets of his plantation, and hence his

initial indebtedness, were assessed at £3,300 at the beginning of his tenancy in 1909. At the end of 1915 his debit balance was £6,631--£1,874 of the difference was interest and £1,434 represented excess of expenses over receipts.<sup>49</sup>

A few men of long experience in running particularly productive plantations *were* successful. Peter Gordon, over twenty-one years at Naitasiri, had cleared his initial takeover debt, drawn at least the typical tenant's living allowance of around £250 a year, taken trips to Europe with his brother, married, purchased property in Australia, and ultimately left the colony with a minimum of £5,000--the value of Naitasiri plantation assets.<sup>50</sup> He, his brother, and R. J. Freeman were conspicuous exceptions to the rule, though, examples of the successful planter reputedly found in greater numbers in Fiji's dry-zone sugar economy.

### **The Dry-Zone Planters**

No small fortunes were ever made in Vanua Levu, where the sugar planters were all CSR tenants. Six company employees took out leases in 1909. By 1913 the number had grown to fourteen, accounting for about 80 percent of Labasa mill's cane supply, the remainder coming from CSR estates (Table 2). Tenants were attracted by a company policy of charging a rent on the typical 400-acre leasehold that theoretically left the tenant room to clear £500 annually, which in turn promised a relatively quick escape from initial indebtedness. Their own experience as CSR employees should have made them wary, however. It was no secret that CSR had found cane-growing on its Labasa estates less profitable than anticipated: yields averaged a low 16.5 tons per acre in the years 1901-1908; and the crop was not as sweet as in dry-zone Viti Levu because Labasa tended to suffer droughts that seriously impeded plant growth one year in four.<sup>51</sup>

The original six tenants' first two years' results showed them growing cane at an average cost of 12s. ½d. per ton and receiving 11s. 11d. Only two planters with higher yields from better weed control had a positive margin of price over cost. Bad weather in 1911 prevented the rally the mill managers felt sure would eventually take place. And in 1912 a hurricane unroofed fourteen of the thirty-nine houses on Labasa's residential hill, damaged tramlines, ruined mangrove swamp reclamations, and caused a 10 percent crop loss.

CSR management complained of difficulty in persuading planters to follow recommended rotation practice and intensive cultivation rather

than hoping for a “big year” from large tonnages on short-fallowed land. Yet CSR’s own practice of placing optimistically high valuations on leaseholds and consequently charging high rents contributed to any tendency to mine the land. The fourteen tenants’ plantations were valued on average well in excess of £4,500 on takeover; and rent on E. P. Masters plantation, which at best returned £4,800 annually, was £1,400, leaving £250 after working expenses were met. This meant Masters faced a minimum eighteen years of successful planting in order to clear his debt to CSR. The company accordingly revalued plantation assets and lowered rents at the end of 1912--and hoped for good seasons and an absence of hurricanes.<sup>52</sup>

There was an overall improvement in the Labasa tenants’ position in 1913, debts being reduced by an average £560; and again in 1915, when all tenants showed a credit on the year’s operations after a poor 1914 season. Five planters received an average £220 in cash and reduced debts by an average £270. Nine others reduced their debts by an average £705. But average debts still stood at around £3,500 at the beginning of 1916. Even if future seasons permitted realization of the CSR ideal of £500 annual reductions in indebtedness, planters contemplated! around seven more years of financial dependence.<sup>53</sup>

Planters on Viti Levu’s dry side fared better. There, planter numbers increased steadily between 1906 and 1912 as CSR tenants joined planters on non-CSR land in supplying the Rarawai and Lautoka mills. By 1913 a total of fifty-four white planters were recorded as cultivating 70 to 75 percent of the cane area, with Indian farmers and CSR cultivating about 20 percent and 10 percent respectively (Table 2). All were favored by a relatively predictable climate and soils that produced sweet cane, especially in the Lautoka area where average P O.C.S. between 1905 and 1958 was 14.0 percent, compared with 11.5 percent on the Rewa.<sup>54</sup>

TABLE 2 **The White Planter Contribution to Cane Cultivation, 1913**

	White Planters		Percent of Total Cane Area Cultivated		
	Independent	CSR tenants	White planters	CSR estates	Indian farmers
Rarawai	14	13	75	8	17
Labasa	0	14	80	20	0
Lautoka	11	16	70	10	20

*Sources:* CSR 2078, no. 878; CSR 2079, nos. 47, 57, 95, 978; CSR 2138, no. 932; CSR 2139, nos. 40, 958, 985; CSR 2638, no. 628; CSR 2639, no. 693.

CSR sought to appropriate the benefits from a climate more suited to cane by paying dry-zone planters 10s. per ton for cane of 13 percent P.O.C.S., instead of the 10s. for 11 percent P.O.C.S. paid on the Rewa. Moynagh argues that in terms of cane price received, this policy placed planters on an equal footing throughout Fiji.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the P.O.C.S. of Badila cane--which was substituted progressively for lower-yielding, less sweet Rose Bamboo cane--typically reached 14 to 15 percent. Taking 14 percent as normal, dry-zone planters received 11s. 3d. per ton, since the cane price increased by 1s. 3d. per ton for every percentage point increase in P. O. C. S. On the Rewa, 10s. per ton was the usual price, given an average of 11.5 percent. Dry-zone planters therefore had a price advantage of over a shilling a ton.

They also had a cost advantage. Cultivation costs were lower in the dry areas because of reduced weed growth; and yields, at least in the Lautoka mill area, were higher, averaging over 21 tons per acre in the years 1904-1915. Whereas a cost of production below 10 s. per ton was a rarity on the Rewa, it was common in the Rarawai and especially the Lautoka mill areas. CSR itself had grown cane on its Lautoka estates at a cost of between 7s. and 9s. per ton.<sup>56</sup>

Little wonder, then, that plantation land on Viti Levu's western side was exchanging for £30 per acre in 1907, and that planters supplying Rarawai and Lautoka mills cleared themselves of their indebtedness to CSR fairly rapidly. The Carr brothers, in separate partnerships of H. P. Carr & Co. and H. G. Carr and J. C. Doyle, had both relied on CSR advances to establish plantations in 1903; and both were debt free within five years. H. G. Carr had begun with just £300 to £400 of his own capital and with previous experience of sugar planting in Jamaica. By 1911 he was reputedly the richest man in Fiji. Four other planters of the time were reducing their average indebtedness by £900 per annum when receiving 10s. 11d. per ton of cane.<sup>57</sup>

Subsequently the pace did not slacken. Planter prosperity was revealed most clearly and comprehensively in the improved financial positions of CSR's Ba tenants over the period 1913-1917 (Table 3). Of the ten tenants indebted on 1 January 1913, five had cleared their average debts of £4,244 by 1 January 1918 through average annual credits of £1,422; and two would clear their debts in two or three years, other things equal. Only three were in the position of the Labasa tenants--facing five, ten, and fifteen years of continued indebtedness. The debt reductions represented income over and above tenants' living expenses, house rent, servants' wages, and, in some cases, £200 for a holiday



TABLE 3 CSR Tenants, Ba, 1913-1918

	Average Annual Crop tons	Value (£)	Price (s.)	Debt 1 Jan. 1913 (£)	Average Yearly Debt Reduction (£)	Debt 1 Jan. 1918 (£)
Andrewes, G.	6,413	3,878	12.87	3,797	949	0
Brenan, F.	4,573	2,826	12.45	3,984	265	2,660
Clark, V.	6,675	4,481	13.84	5,875 <sup>a</sup>	1,575	2,725
Francis, E. D.	6,113	4,110	13.76	4,672	934	0
Gale, R. A.	5,196	3,451	13.77	4,782	665	1,459
Holmes, B. H.	15,097	10,318	13.44	5,234	2,617	0
Hunt, C.	7,532	4,782	13.26	7,108 <sup>b</sup>	1,522	1,021
Lamb, C. H.	4,986	3,226	12.97	4,140	515	1,567
Philbrooks, C. J.	3,507	2,396	14.13	3,410	164	2,591
Sidney, J. W.	9,827	7,133	14.64	3,697	1,848	0
Southey, C. M.	6,344	3,967	12.94	3,822	764	0
Southey, C. W.	4,577	3,168	14.59	3,975	379	2,082
Thomas, H. J.	8,656	5,548	13.69	7,331 <sup>b</sup>	2,444	0
Youngman, H. J.	7,715	4,497	11.65	6,427 <sup>a</sup>	1,293	3,840

Source: CSR 3395.

<sup>a</sup>Debt as of 1 Jan. 1916.

<sup>b</sup>Debt as of 1 Jan. 1914.

sometime between 1913 and 1918. The total of the items, excluding the latter, was usually £400 to £500. Financially successful tenants, therefore, were clearing £2,000 after plantation expenses were met. As the Rarawai mill manager observed, most of the tenants were doing exceedingly well.<sup>58</sup>

The same was true of planters on non-CSR land supplying Lautoka mill. In 1915, thirteen Ba planters received an average £542 in cane bonuses alone; six had an additional average £382 credited to their CSR accounts; and the remaining seven planters were free of debt to CSR. An average £589 was credited to fifteen Lautoka planters' accounts, and an average £400 paid in cash to an additional thirteen planters (three Carr partnerships taking 65 percent of the total).<sup>59</sup>

For most of the fifty to sixty dry-zone sugar planters of Viti Levu, then, 1906-1915 had indeed been the prosperous period it was forecast to be. Some fortunes had been made, and many small fortunes were within grasp. In contrast, the thirty to forty sugar planters on the Rewa and at Labasa trusted in good seasons and the passage of time to reduce what seemed to be a persistently high level of indebtedness. Time, however, was not on the planters' side.

### Demise

The year 1916 was a boom year for Fiji's sugar plantation economy. Cane output reached a record level, and high wartime prices were passed on in part to planters, who received the 1915 bonus of 2s. 6d. per ton plus an additional deferred bonus.<sup>80</sup> But the British government had accepted a recommendation from the government of India that the indenture system be abolished: "In Fiji there were celebrations among the Indians and effigies labelled 'coolie' were burned."<sup>61</sup>

One labeled "white planter" appropriately could have been burned also. For the most efficient planter growing cane on the best soil at base depended on a steady supply of cheap labor to sustain his living standard; and there was no chance of that after all recruitment for the colonies stopped in March 1917. The daily wage of free Indian labor rose from 1s. 6d. in 1914, to 1s. 9d. in August 1917, to 2s. in 1918.<sup>62</sup>

On the Rewa, the successful Gordon brothers anticipated events and quit their plantations at the end of 1916. Two other CSR tenants abandoned their leaseholds early in 1917, leaving CSR to write off outstanding debts totaling around £8,000. And a third tenant died of typhoid fever in February. Most planters saw out the year in an effort to clear their debts. They were successful because of a record crop and high cane prices. Then, frightened by the uncertainty of the labor position, they left before their plantation assets depreciated further in value. By January 1918, O. Freeman and A. C. Pain were the only CSR-financed planters on non-CSR land who remained on what the *Fiji Times* called the "ruined Rewa." Pain was killed in action at the Front later in the year and left an uncovered plantation debt in excess of £2,000. Freeman abandoned Navuso at the end of the year having failed to clear his debt to CSR at any time since starting in 1907, having lost £1,500 of his own capital, and having incurred a debt of £1,300 to G. Gordon.<sup>63</sup> In 1917, 10,340 acres were under cane cultivation on the Rewa: 28 percent on CSR estates (over one-third sublet to Indians already); 32 percent on free Indian farms; and 40 percent on European plantations. The following year, with the total cultivated area stationary, the respective percentages were 51, 40, and 9. A few whites lingered on, growing a little cane on small plantations; but they were a remnant of a lost society. By the end of 1922, CSR management expected that company estates would provide 35 percent of the Rewa cane supply, and Indian farmers 61 percent.<sup>64</sup>

White planter society disintegrated at Labasa as rapidly as it did on

the Rewa, since there too poor yields and sourer cane made cheap labor even more crucial to plantation profitability than it was in dry-zone Viti Levu. By early 1918 only six CSR tenants out of fourteen remained--four of them original lessees of 1909. Two more retired at the end of the year.<sup>65</sup>

The more prosperous planters in dry-zone Viti Levu were less willing to leave their plantations. When recruitment of Indian labor for the colonies stopped in March 1917, they looked to reindenture, employment under the Masters and Servants Ordinance, and the supply of free labor to meet their short-term labor needs, which they hoped would be reduced by labor-saving technical improvements in cultivation and met in the long-term by a resumption of some form of labor immigration, CSR tenants accepted one-year extensions of their leases from the end of 1917, so that whereas by January 1918 few white planters were left in the Rewa and Labasa regions, planters in Ba accounted for 63 percent of the area under cane cultivation. The reduction from 75 percent in 1913 resulted not from a decline in European planting but from extensions in the Indian-cultivated area.<sup>66</sup>

The fact remained that Indians, including those under indenture, were no longer prepared to labor for the white planter for a shilling a day. Early in 1917 a strike occurred on R. P. Carr's plantation in demand of an increase in wages to 1s. 6d. per task. In May free laborers at the Lautoka mill went on strike for an increase in wages from 1s. 9d. to 4s. a day, and were joined by tram gangs and workers at the Sigatoka limestone quarry. The mill manager was stunned: "In all my experience of Indian labor I have never yet seen anything approaching so concerted an action where the castes and classes are mixed together."<sup>67</sup>

Forced to use planters' and its own indentured labor to get the mill started and to operate it through June and July, CSR dismissed two Punjabis considered ringleaders, and was subsequently successful in signing on free Indians--but only by increasing wages from 1s. 6d. to 1s. 9d. in August. In the interim, the strikes had restricted cultivation. Late cane planting in 1917 followed by flood in 1918 caused the yield in the Lautoka mill area to drop to 13.8 tons per acre, equaling the lowest on record.<sup>68</sup>

Knox, though he would continue a public fight for a resumption of immigration, already had privately conceded defeat and informed governor Sweet-Escott that further extension of cane cultivation was impossible, and that the sugar sector would have to be rendered independent of immigration by settling land with Indian growers constituting their own labor force.<sup>69</sup>

For white sugar planters, however, securing an imported labor supply was a matter of survival. Members of the Cane Growers' Association of Fiji contended that prior to the ending of immigration, thirteen laborers at 1s. 6d. per day were required to cultivate and harvest 100 acres of cane land. In 1918, they complained, not less than sixteen laborers were required at 2s. to perform the same amount of work. The March wage increase and lower labor effort had increased labor cultivation costs per acre by 63 percent, whereas cane prices were stable at the base rate of 10s. per ton plus the 2s. 6d. bonus. Moreover, prices of imported goods had increased by 27 percent over prewar prices: 40 percent in the case of food, drink, and tobacco, and 54 percent in the case of raw materials.<sup>70</sup> Money wage gains and tenants' living allowances were eroded substantially, reducing labor availability at a time when its continued supply at low wage rates was crucial to minimizing reductions in white planters' living standards. Against the wishes of CSR management, the colonial government therefore began in 1918 to finance an Immigration Fund by adding 5s. per ton to existing sugar and copra export duties.<sup>71</sup> The basic problem was still to be solved though. On precisely what labor could Fund money be spent?

Meanwhile, sweet crops in 1918 and 1919 produced cane prices 1s. 6d. per ton above 1917 prices, and contributed to healthy financial results for some planters. CSR's Ba tenants Brenan and Lamb, who died during the influenza epidemic of late 1918-early 1919, left respective debts of only £275 and £751 to write off. But at the end of 1918, Lautoka tenants debts had increased (Table 4), and the proportion of acreage cultivated by white planters had fallen to 32 percent. Generally, the labor shortage and retirement of planters was expected to lead to a two-thirds crop in 1919.<sup>72</sup>

As shown in Table 5, all but one Ba tenant started 1920 with a debt larger than that two years before. The same was true of Lautoka tenants (Table 4) and sixty-six Indian growers, who were carrying debts of £380 per capita. More leaseholds reverted to CSR, which took over plantation assets at a revaluation; and with cancellation of existing indentures in January, planter pessimism became a resolve to get out or, in some cases, bordered on inactive fatalism. Planters now accounted for 15 percent of the reduced cultivated area of 23,000 acres supplying Lautoka mill.<sup>73</sup>

High cane prices slowed the abandonment of the remaining European plantations. Skyrocketing world sugar prices encouraged CSR to pay bonuses of 11s. per ton and £1 per acre under cane (equivalent to approximately 1s. 6d. per ton), effectively doubling the received price

TABLE 4 CSR Tenant Debt as of 1 January 1918-1921, Lautoka (pounds)

	1918	1919	1920	1921
Bossley	3,985	4,700	5,800	4,400
Sue Hook	n.d.	reduced	n.d.	880 credit
Lord	5,359	6,170	8,100	7,400
Nugent	319	739	2,100	700
Waddingham	n.d.	1,900	2,388	1,488
Wotton	347	747	2,400	almost clear

Source: CSR 2144, no. 647.

Note: Data were not available for four other tenants.

TABLE 5 CSR Tenant Debt as of 1 January 1918-1922, Ba (pounds)

	1918	1920	1921	1922	Comments
Andrewes	0	1,500	n.d.		
Clark	2,725	1,614	0		
Francis	0	1,500	0		
Gale	1,459	1,868	1,938	4,155	
Holmes	0				died in credit £2,600 c. 1919
Hunt	1,021	2,151	2,080	2,188	
Philbrooks	2,591	2,490			taken over 1 Jan. 1920
Southey, C .W.	2,082	4,500			taken over 20 June 1920
Youngman	3,840	n.d.	debt reduced by £2,053		

Sources: CSR 2640, no. 877; CSR 2641, no. 907; CSR 3394, 3395.

in 1920 and permitting a 6*d.* per day wage bonus. Cane output from dry-zone Viti Levu was also up 42 percent over the 1919 level, so that cane payments were up 284 percent.<sup>74</sup> Self-confessed merchant profiteering reduced the real benefits from the increased money payments: import prices rose by 25 percent in 1920, causing Labasa tenants to petition CSR for an increase in their £300 annual living allowance so that they could still afford overseas education for their children.<sup>75</sup> But the benefits remained substantial enough for Ba and Lautoka tenants to reduce debts significantly, except in two isolated cases of bad management and misfortune (Tables 4, 5).

Any revived hopes of white planter prosperity were lost in 1921. A

falling world sugar price prompted CSR to eliminate the acreage bonus and to reduce the cane bonus to 10s. per ton. And a decline in Indians' real wages between 1913 and 1920 culminated in the "great Indian strike" from February to August 1920.<sup>76</sup> Planters accepted CSR's advice on resisting wage demands but did not advertise the fact. The letter written by the president of the Cane Growers' Association to the colonial secretary in March was calculatedly consistent with the CSR stand:

a victory to the mob would not only mean a triumph of employee over employer but an immoral victory showing the dominance of Indians over Europeans unjustly gained by numerical superiority.<sup>77</sup>

Planters nevertheless sought assurances from the company, as they gathered their women and occupied strategic defense positions like the hill near the Rarawai tennis courts.<sup>78</sup>

CSR's general manager affirmed it was the general aim of the company to facilitate continued European planting, But a CSR circular expressed company understanding if planters responded to the precarious position by quitting their plantations;<sup>79</sup> and when crushing of the 1921 crop began in August, CSR rejected planter requests for preference in cane cutting and loading over Indian growers, whose own vested interests had been instrumental in ensuring a return to work by striking laborers. The mill manager explained that "as a Company we had no separate contracts for white and black."<sup>80</sup>

Nor did the company hesitate in exposing planters to the force of a major slump in the world sugar price at the end of 1921. The cost of cane grown on CSR estates had more than doubled between 1913 and 1921, but company management confirmed that a threatened reduction in the cane price to the 1913 level would be made nevertheless.<sup>81</sup> As the *Pacific Age* noted on November 28, the restoration of the 1913 price was "practically tantamount to ending the cane industry, as far as the European growers are concerned." In an editorial two days later it went on to complain of the purity of CSR's capitalist spirit:

to the board of directors what is it if a man is white, black, or brindle, so long as the dividend is wrested from the far-off soil of Fiji, and the economic outlook for the future, according to the company's doctrines, is being assured?

The strike, of course, had hampered cultivation and planting for the 1922 season, so many planters took the advice given in the *Fiji Times*

*and Herald* of November 2: to take the 1921 cane payment and quit before debts increased further (Table 5). If they needed additional encouragement to leave, it came early in 1922. By then it was clear there would be no resumption of Indian immigration, and that the foundation of the plantation system consequently had been undermined.<sup>82</sup> No alternative, equally cheap supply source had been located. Suggested importation of West Indians had been rejected because “they have peculiar ideas on their equality with white folk,” and were expected to demand half-castes’ wages.<sup>83</sup> Planters had clung to the “promise” in Lord Hardinge’s March 1916 statement in Delhi that the secretary of state had asked the viceroy of India to maintain the existing system of recruitment pending establishment of a substitute. Now, after twenty years residence in most cases, twenty-nine planters of dry-zone Viti Levu stood “grasping at the shadow of labor unsupplied.”<sup>84</sup>

They could not have employed imported labor anyway. CSR ceased advances in January 1922; and though advances warranted by hardship and the expected crop size were permitted later, the decision left planters without working capital, and, for those whose securities were pledged to the company, without a chance of raising it elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> Long a political ally of CSR, the planter community now became a sacrificial lamb. The 1922 cane price and wage rate offer was made conditional upon removal of the sugar export duty imposed since 1916 and increased to £1 per ton in 1920. Given the dominant view--expressed by Maynard Hedstrom in the Legislative Council--that the planter was the “greatest asset of the Colony and should be preserved at any cost,”<sup>86</sup> CSR’s general manager explained how removal might be hastened: “just now it will be as well for us not to hurry about smoothing out difficulties besetting the independent planters.”<sup>87</sup>

After CSR’s general reassurance, epitomized in the assertedly much used slogan “Trust the Company,” planter pessimism turned to despair and resentment. Planters felt CSR--which admitted wartime profits were very large--had appropriated a disproportionate share of the income generated by high wartime sugar prices, leaving planters, despite substantial profits in 1920, with inadequate reserves. And they were dismayed at the brutal immediacy with which CSR chose no longer to protect them from market vicissitudes.<sup>88</sup> The abandonment of their plantations and, for most planters, the subsequent departure from Fiji, even though inevitable, had, in their eyes, been hastened indecently. As planter R. A. Harricks commented:

After one has tackled a bare hill and gradually made a comfortable home and resided therein for nearly 16 years, and has

increased one's crops per acre over 50%, it is not an easy matter to decide to give it up.<sup>89</sup>

But give it up he, and others, did. By March 1922 the remaining four Labasa tenants had left their leaseholds. Forty-six percent of the area usually cropped at Ba was abandoned, the seven, remaining white planters accounting for just 11 percent of the 1922 crop: output on Clapcott's plantation, which had averaged 7,800 tons between 1912 and 1921, dropped to 2,000 tons. At Lautoka, R. P. Carr was quitting. Planters there cultivated just 6 percent of the acreage under cane.<sup>90</sup>

The few who stayed on as planters, in defiance of the trend, went further into debt. S. Coffey at Ba was indebted to CSR for £3,465 in January 1920, which was reduced to £1,024 by January 1921, but had increased steadily to £6,000 by January 1925. Before the strike and sugar slump, he had been worth "some thousands" according to local CSR management. Individual Europeans, aside from several CSR tenants taken back into the company's employ, now made money from sugar only as landlords to Indian growers, themselves heavily in debt and bound for a poverty that white planters had never experienced.<sup>91</sup>

### **A Kind of Prosperity**

Prospective white settlers always were attracted to Fiji by two things, "the halo of romance that surrounded a full-blown 'planter,'"<sup>92</sup> and the promise of rapid wealth. All that was necessary to acquire both, so the propaganda went, was a little capital and a knowledge of tropical agriculture.<sup>93</sup>

What kept white settlers in Fiji after the cotton collapse of the 1870s, and forced them into sugar planting on the Rewa, was indebtedness. And it was an indebtedness frequently unrelieved by expertise in sugarcane cultivation. In 1886 one member of the Levuka Chamber of Commerce contended that the failure of the small planter was the result of the fact that he had the same capital and less experience than a cockatoo settler in Australia.<sup>94</sup> Only one or two of the first generation of Rewa sugar planters had had previous experience in cane growing. Unfounded optimism and general managerial inefficiency also had led in some cases to initial overextension in land acquisition and cultivation, and subsequent increased borrowing against crop liens and ultimately against mortgages.<sup>95</sup>

But these were factors magnifying the basic nonviability of plantation enterprise on the Rewa in the 1880s, a time when individual white planters and even CSR could not grow cane at a profit--this despite the



maintenance of the sugarcane price in the context of a falling world raw sugar price, and despite intensification of the exploitation of indentured Indian laborers. Planter indebtedness increased to the point where their land went to CSR, the banks, and the mortgage companies.

The fascination of a planter life in the Pacific proved compelling nonetheless, and from the 1890s the white sugar planter community was reborn as ex-CSR employees took up company offers of leaseholds, first on the Rewa and then in dry-zone Fiji, and as new white immigrants settled on freehold land and land leased from Fijians. Sweeter cane and improved yields generally permitted a plantation profit margin; but on the Rewa and at Labasa it was not large, and bad seasons tended to set planters back. Good management and long experience of cultivating especially fertile land were needed in these areas if wealth was to be accumulated. By this criterion, only three Rewa planters were successful.

Even in the more profitable sugarcane areas of dry-zone Viti Levu, infertile land producing sour cane could catch competent managers in a web of debt (see the examples of Lord and Gale in Tables 4 and 5). Conversely, incompetent management of good land could lead to similar entrapment, especially if rent was set according to land quality rather than plantation profitability. Ragg's estate at Ba, for example, was managed poorly by Theodore Riaz, and over the period 1914-1921 produced at a net loss of 3*s.* 5*d.* per ton, inclusive of rent equivalent to 6*s.* per ton. A more typical rent equivalent to 1*s.* 6*d.* per ton would have permitted a profit margin of 1*s.* 1*d.*; but even then returns would have been unduly low.<sup>96</sup>

However, the incompetent and the unfortunate were not the first to go when an end to importation of indentured Indian laborers was announced in March 1916. A few successful planters who thought realistically about future prospects instead of clinging to the white planter's dream left Fiji, by choice in the case of the Gordon brothers on the Rewa, and providentially in the case of H. G. Carr's death.<sup>97</sup> For most of the planters who remained, the years of prosperity from 1906 to 1915 had left them on the verge of accumulating savings, and they held on in the hope that wartime cane prices would offset rising labor costs pending a new system of labor immigration. But CSR saw itself relying on the small-scale Indian cane grower in the future, and by 1922 white planters faced Hobson's choice. In one respect, they retired as they had started--without a competency. The difference was that they were older, doubted their ability to succeed in another occupation, and had families to support.

The experience of one CSR tenant, C. Hunt, exaggerated the truth.

Given four weeks notice to vacate his plantation house, in ill-health, and with a young wife and growing children to support, he pleaded a poverty that his CSR benefactors preferred to interpret as a kind of prosperity:

The Hunts state they have no money; they have a governess, at least two servants, an overseer and their own living allowance evidently all provided by us: they also run a motor car.<sup>98</sup>

As CSR management complained, “comfortable living at someone else’s expense has almost invariably been the first thing our tenants have looked for.”<sup>99</sup> That Hunt found it meant that when he joined other ex-planters in forced retirement, he could at least nurse recollections of a brief, lost golden age--an age ending with a retreat of the white settler frontier in Fiji and a confirmation that the white capitalist grip on the colonial economy was emphatically a corporate one.

## NOTES

I am grateful to the government of Fiji for permitting access to Colonial Secretary’s Office, Fiji, Minute Papers and Files (CSO) in the National Archives of Fiji (NAF); to the management of CSR Ltd. for allowing access to the CSR deposit no. 142 in the Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University; and to Fred Fisk, Claudia Knapman, and Rino Schiavo-Campo for helpful comments on an early draft.

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5. Moynagh, pp. 24, 43.

6. Alfred P. Maudslay, *Life in the Pacific Fifty Years Ago* (London: George Routledge & sons, 1930), p. 133.

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9. CSR 2187, p. 493; CSR 2194, p. 20; CSR 2187, p. 449.

10. CSR 2188, p. 55; CSR, Map of Rewa; CSO 637/1890.
11. E. W. Knox to J. Robertson, 27 Nov. 1883, CSR 2188; H. H. Thiele, "Agriculture in Fiji," *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, vol. 21 (1889-1890), p. 362; Sir William C. Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service* (London: John Murray, 1903), p. 335; Moynagh, p. 44.
12. Moynagh, pp. 43, 48; *Fiji Blue Books*, 1882, 1899; CSR 2188, p. 639; CSR 2193, p. 261.
13. CSR 2188, pp. 200-201, 215, 285, 486, 637; CSR 2189, p. 188.
14. CSO 2803/1885.
15. CSR 2189, pp. 238-244; *Fiji Royal Gazette*, vol. 11 (1884); Indian immigration Reports, *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 1888, 1889.
16. Fijians received 1s. 6d. per day, as did free Indians, despite CSR efforts to limit offers to 1s. See Thiele, p. 374; E. W. Knox to manager of Nausori, 16 Mar. 1887, CSR 2189.
17. E. W. Knox to manager of Nausori, 22 Aug. 1892, CSR 2206.
18. K. L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 105, 108 nn. 8, 109; CSO 1329/1894.
19. CSO 2506/1882; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 92; CSO 873/1888, 1329/1894, 1517/1892.
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22. CSR 2188, p. 694; E. W. Knox to J. Robertson, 14 Nov. 1890, CSR 2193.
23. CSR 2189, pp. 118, 476; CSR 2190, p. 307; CSR 2188, p. 486; CSR 2190, p. 445; CSR 2191, pp. 197, 238; CSO 1192/1890, 3046/1893, 70/1894, 1329/1894, 3455/1895.
24. E. W. Knox to J. Robertson, 25 June 1891, CSR 2193; Moynagh, pp. 41-43, 58-64.
25. CSO 1068/1892; CSR 2193, p. 50.
26. CSR 2193, pp. 174, 408, 494; CSR 2211, p. 443; CSR 2207, pp. 93-94; CSR 2215, p. 312; CSR 3511, 3524; Moynagh, pp. 46, 49.
27. CSR 2209, pp. 342, 345.
28. CSR 2212, p. 301; CSR 2211, p. 496; CSR 2188, p. 617.
29. CSR 2212, p. 90; CSR 2213, pp. 15-16.
30. CSR 2213, pp. 278, 340.
31. CSR 2211, pp. 454, 496; CSR 2212, pp. 301, 394; CSR 2215, pp. 3, 26; CSR 2218, p. 365; CSR 2260, letter nos. 136, 333, 338, 345; CSR 2261, letter no. 427.
32. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 100; Moynagh, p. 50.
33. CSR 2188, p. 173; CSR 2189, p. 73; CSR 2190, p. 199; CSR 3394; CSR 4363; CSR 4279-89; CSR 4293-95; CSR 3391; CSR 2193, p. 227; CSR 2136, letter no. 621; CSO 2113/1892.

34. CSR Board to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 Oct. 1900, CSR 2934; H. C. Brookfield, with Doreen Hart, *Melanesia: A Geographical Interpretation of an Island World* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 130; CSR 2635, letter no. 2015; CSR 2639, letter no. 693; CSR 2076, letter no. 350; CSR 2134, letter no. 342; CSR 2135, letter nos. 362, 365; Moynagh, p. 50.
35. CSR 2078, letter no. 867; W. Farquhar to general manager, 30 June 1905, CSR 2909; Fenner to general manager, 16 Aug. 1909, CSR 3126; W. P. Dixon to general manager, 3 Oct. 1900, CSR 2909; Annual Report no. 108, CSR 3527; Moynagh, pp. 51-52.
36. Peter France, *The Charter of the Lund: Custom and Colonization in Fiji* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 156.
37. *Cyclopedia of Fiji, 1907, A Complete History and Commercial Review of Fiji* (Sydney: McCarron & Stewart), p. 25.
38. CSR 3391, 2932.
39. From a simple regression analysis of data in CSR 2262-2270.
40. CSR 2270, letter no. 623.
41. CSR 2265, letter nos. 501, 663.
42. CSR 2266, letter no. 884.
43. CSR 2264, letter no. 204; CSR 2266, letter no. 843; CSR 2261, letter no. 457.
44. CSR 2266, letter no. 666; CSR 3126, letter nos. 123, 58, 92, 99.
45. CSR 2265, letter no. 503; CSR 2266, letter no. 884.
46. CSR 2267, letter no. 41; CSR 2268, letter no. 267; CSR 2269, letter nos. 452, 458.
47. CSR 2270, letter nos. 621, 623; Moynagh, pp. 101-102; Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 175.
48. A plantation cropping 600 acres annually, yielding 20 tons per acre, and employing 200 laborers at £10.10.0 p.a., would have had a total revenue of £6,000, a wages bill of £2,100, and, assuming the latter was 55 percent of working expenses, total expenses of £3,800. Gross profit would thus equal £2,200. An increase in the cane price from 10s. to 12s. 6d. would have increased total revenue to £7,500. An increase in wages to £15.15.0 would have increased the wages bill to £3,150 and total expenses to £4,850, assuming other working expenses were unchanged. Gross profit would have equaled £2,650.
49. CSR 2270, letter no. 614.
50. CSR 2271, letter no. 760; CSR 3126, letter no. 99.
51. CSR 2076, letter no. 386; W. P. Dixon to general manager, 12 June 1899, CSR 2909; CSR 2932, 3391; R. G. Ward, *Land Use and Population in Fiji* (London: HMSO, 1965), p. 53.
52. CSR 3391; CSR 2078, letter no. 940; CSR 2079, letter nos. 950, 951; CSR 2078, letter nos. 945, 847, 950, 951; Moynagh, p. 53.
53. CSR 2079, letter nos. 57, 105, 155.
54. Ward, p. 53.

55. Moynagh, p. 46.
56. CSR 2134, letter no. 189; CSR 2135, letter no. 354; CSR 2136, letter no. 580; CSR 2142, letter no. 428; CSR 2639, letter nos. 693, 744; CSR 2640, letter no. 801; Moynagh, p. 146.
57. CSR 2136, letter no. 530; CSR 3106, letter no. 496; CSR 3126, letter nos. 77, 99; Palgrave Carr to Claudia Knapman, pers. comm., 28 Aug. 1981; CSR 2136, letter no. 580; CSR 2137, letter no. 784; CSR 2138, letter no. 900.
58. CSR 2640, letter no. 861.
59. CSR 2640, letter no. 784; CSR 2142, letter no. 434.
60. CSR 2271, letter no. 760.
61. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 181.
62. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 183; F.C.T. Lord to Corbett, 28 Feb. 1922, CSR 3127.
63. CSR 2271, letter nos. 774, 812, 858, 787; CSR 2272, letter no. 894; CSR 2272, letter nos. 4, 915, 989; Fenner to Freeman, 29 June 1911, CSR 3126; Fiji Times, 3 Jan. 1918.
64. CSR 2272, letter no. 934; CSR 2273, letter no. 46; CSR 2274, letter no. 285; CSR 2275, letter no. 446; *Cyclopedia*, p. 238.
65. CSR 2080, letter nos. 228, 263, 290, 296.
66. CSR 2640, letter nos. 821, 857, 849.
67. CSR 2143, letter no. 560.
68. CSR 2143, letter nos. 568, 572; CSR 2145, letter no. 778.
69. E. W. Knox to Sir Bickham Sweet-Escott, 13 Nov. 1917, CSR 2935.
70. R. A. Harricks to general manager, 1 Nov. 1918, CSR 3397; Notes of CSR meeting with Cane Growers' Association, 6 Nov. 1918, CSR 3397.
71. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, p. 186.
72. CSR 2640, letter no. 877; CSR 2641, letter no. 907; CSR 2145, letter no. 780; Annual Report no. 128, CSR 3528.
73. CSR 2146, letter nos. 879, 858, 876; CSR 2641, letter no. 908.
74. CSR 2923, 2146, 2147, 2641. Cane tonnage crushed is indexed in the last three volumes.
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76. K. L. Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European Dominance 1920-1946* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977), p. 53.
77. Cane Growers' Association of Fiji to the Colonial Secretary, 7 Mar. 1921, CSR 3146.
78. CSR 3146, letter no. 122.
79. Acting Colonial Secretary to F.C.T. Lord, 26 Nov. 1921, CSR 3127; CSR 3146, letter no. 125.

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82. Moynagh, p. 111.
83. G. H. Allen to general manager, 2 Nov. 1921, CSR 3146.
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