

Kay Saunders, ed., *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920*. London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1984. Pp. 327, illustrated. \$38.00.

Shula Marks and Peter Richardson, eds., *International Labour Migration: Historical Perspectives*. London: Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1984. Pp. 280. £17.50.

These two volumes bring together nineteen essays on labor migration and labor systems. The volume edited by Kay Saunders includes essays on indentured Indian migration to Jamaica (by William A. Green), British Guiana (Alan H. Adamson), Trinidad (Mariane D. Ramesar), Mauritius (M. Daniel North-Coombes), Fiji (Brij V. Lal), and Malaya (Ravindra K. Jain); indentured Chinese migration to South Africa (Peter Richardson); indentured Pacific Islander migration to Queensland (Kay Saunders); and the employment of Aboriginal labor in Queensland (Raymond Evans). The volume edited by Shula Marks and Peter Richardson includes essays on English migration to North America (David Souden and Charlotte Erickson); Cornish overseas migration (Gill Burke); indentured Indian migration to Surinam (Pieter Emmer) and, more generally, overseas (Hugh Tinker); indentured Chinese migration to South Africa (Peter Richardson); indentured Pacific Islander migration to Queensland (Adrian Graves); migrant labor in Southern Africa (Martin Legassick and Francine de Clerq); settler societies in the southern hemisphere (Donald Denoon); and European migration to New Zealand and local migration in Nigeria and New Guinea (Colin Newbury).

Readers of *Pacific Studies* will be familiar with the scholarship of Colin Newbury, Brij Lal, and Kay Saunders and will find their essays on New Guinea, Fiji, and Queensland to be of particular interest.

Newbury's essay includes a discussion of indentured labor in Australian New Guinea, 1914-1971. His concern is with, inter alia, the regulatory role of the government; sectoral competition for indentured labor among plantations, mines, commerce and industry, domestic service, and government; and occupational mobility.

Lal's essay, which draws on material from his fine monograph on indentured Indian labor in Fiji (Lal 1983), deals with, inter alia, the provincial origins of the emigrants; the changes taking place in rural Indian society that made Indians amenable to recruitment; and a number of aspects of their experience as plantation workers in Fiji.

Saunders' essay is primarily concerned with the interconnection between institutional change in the Queensland sugarcane industry and

changes in the recruitment and employment of Pacific Islanders in Queensland. It is shown that the rationale for the demise of the plantation system is to be found in developments in these agricultural labor markets and that, in turn, the growth of the small farm system altered the structure of demand for Pacific Island labor. Although this essay draws on her previously published findings, most notably her well-received monograph (Saunders 1982), the focus of this research is extended to include a discussion of the experience of those Pacific Islanders who were allowed to remain on in Queensland after 1906; Saunders continues their story to 1920.

In general, Saunders' essay is meticulously researched; however, there are a number of statements that can be questioned.

First, it is well known that the Queensland government legislated the restriction of indentured Pacific Islanders to employment in tropical and subtropical agriculture in the coastal districts. However, scholars differ on the date from which this restriction became effective. Saunders suggests on page 223 that this restriction became effective from 1877; others suggest that this 1877 legislation was set aside and the restriction only became effective with the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1880 (Corris 1973:74). There is one piece of evidence that may help resolve this dispute: statistics are available on "transfers" from employers in the coastal districts to employers in the interior and they show that indentured Pacific Islanders continued to be sent to the interior between 1877 and 1880 (*Queenslander*, 10 April 1880, p. 453).

Second, it is stated on page 225 that by 1883 the cost of returning time-expired Pacific Islanders (what contemporaries called the "return passage money") reached £10 per head and that by the mid 1880s Pacific Islanders were able to command a wage of £15 per annum during their terms of indenture. Citations to page 124 and 311 of the 1889 Royal Commission on the Queensland sugar industry are given in support of these statements.

Unfortunately, the citation supposedly in support of the statement on the return passage money does not, in fact, mention the return passage money. Furthermore, the citation in support of the statement on the wage rate commanded by indentured Pacific Islanders has been incorrectly interpreted. This citation relates to evidence given by the Inspector of Pacific Islanders of the Bundaberg District on the effect of a provision of the Pacific Island Labourers Amendment Act of 1884 on the wages of time-expired Pacific Islanders. According to this provision, employers of time-expired Pacific Islanders had to deposit £5 with the Department of Immigration for the return passage of the Pacific Islander. The Inspector argued that this provision shifted the incidence of the

return passage money onto the Islander as his wage rate was lowered by this £5--in the example given, from £20 to £15 (Shlomowitz 1981:76-77). Accordingly, the £15 refers to the wage rate of a time-expired Pacific Islander, not that of an indentured Pacific Islander as inferred by Saunders.

In an investigation undertaken by the present reviewer, the return passage money did not generally exceed £5 (the figure used in setting the deposit for the return passage) and the wage rate of indentured Pacific Islanders does not appear to have exceeded £12 per annum (Shlomowitz 1981:78, 82).

Third, Saunders suggests on page 226 that the extraordinarily high crude death rate of Pacific Islanders in Queensland was primarily due to the lack of sufficient care and consideration given to Islanders during their first twelve months in the Colony, the so-called "seasoning" period when Islanders were most at risk. The change in the epidemiological environment, however, rather than any lack in care and consideration, appears to be the strategic variable explaining the high crude death rate during this period. Clearly more research is needed on the issue.

These remarks are not intended to detract from the merit of Saunders' research; together with Deryck Scarr, Peter Corris, and Clive Moore, Kay Saunders has made an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the labor trade and the experience of Pacific Islanders in Queensland.

It has often been suggested that there is insufficient controversy in the historiography of the Pacific; Adrian Graves' essay will, however, stir up such controversy. Graves' essay draws on his doctoral dissertation (Graves 1979), and the content of this essay forms, perhaps, the main novelty of his dissertation.

Graves' concern is to explain why recruiters were able to procure Pacific Islanders for labor service. His essay commences with a review of the historiography of the subject, contrasting the view of many earlier treatments--most Pacific Islanders were coerced into the trade--with the view of the so-called "revisionists" that after an initial phase of coercion, Pacific Islanders became willing participants in the recruiting trade as they saw advantages in it for themselves. This revisionist view, which has become the "new" orthodoxy, is associated with scholars of the stature of Deryck Scarr, Peter Corris, Dorothy Shineberg, Judy Bennett, Kerry Howe, Kay Saunders, and Clive Moore.

Graves is critical of the emphasis that the new Pacific historiography has placed on "voluntarist explanations," claiming that "the revisionists have by their own historical method reduced the Pacific island immigrant to a caricature, a Pacific Sambo, mindlessly lusting for the bright

lights of civilization” (114). He argues that the “ultimate failure of the revisionists is “their inability to recognize the interactive and disruptive effects of expansive, intrusive capitalism on the agricultural subsistence economy and its role in the migration of clansmen to colonial labour service” (115). “At the heart of the analysis,” Graves argues, is the process of *proletarianization*--“the transformation of the Melanesian economy during the nineteenth century, its increasing dependence on the sale of labour power to secure the subsistence of its members” (115).

Graves’ hypothesis challenges two of the mainstays of received opinion on the recruiting trade: first, that in the nineteenth century, capitalist penetration in the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands, and the Gilbert Islands was slight; second, what limited capitalist penetration did occur was detrimental to the success of recruiting and, accordingly, from the 1870s recruiters increasingly sought out relatively “low” contact areas in the Solomon Islands rather than relying on the relatively “high” contact areas in the New Hebrides.

The evidence that Graves has brought to bear, however, is too meager to support the hypothesis that Pacific Islanders were proletarianized in the nineteenth century, and I suspect that Pacific historians will conclude that Graves has made a serious error of judgment in this matter.

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