

**TIME-EXPIRED MELANESIAN LABOR IN QUEENSLAND:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF JOB TURNOVER  
1884-1906**

by Ralph Shlomowitz

**Introduction**

During the past two decades there has been an outpouring of research on the experience of the Melanesian community in Queensland. Much of this research effort was first made toward doctoral dissertations and has concentrated on social, cultural, and political issues using literary and oral sources (see citations to the works of Corris, Graves, Mercer, Moore, Parnaby, Saunders, and Scarr in the Bibliography). The present author has attempted to contribute to this research effort by widening the scope of the research program to include economic issues and by widening the bodies of evidence used to include quantitative evidence (see citations to my work in the Bibliography).

Many contemporary observers and some later historians have argued that Melanesians were forceably brought to Queensland as agricultural laborers, were coerced to work on sugarcane plantations under exploitative conditions, and lived in an economically dependent and socially and politically subordinate relationship to the white majority. White racism appears as the principal explanation for their oppression.

The thrust of recent scholarship, however, has been to dispute significant aspects of this viewpoint. It has been argued that the vast majority of Melanesians were not forced into coming to Queensland, that the degree of coercion of Melanesian labor on sugarcane plantations has been exaggerated, and that the attempt to depict the sugarcane growing

region of Queensland as one vast jail is an error. Although acknowledging that racial discrimination was very much a part of Queensland life, it has been persuasively argued that the Melanesians had considerably more power than was previously thought.

Power relations between white Queenslanders and Melanesian laborers had, of course, many dimensions. One important dimension related to economic matters such as the choices and opportunities open to Melanesians in the labor market. Much of recent scholarship has emphasized that Melanesians learned the ways in which the market for their labor afforded them opportunities and were able to use this marketplace to further their economic and social interests.

This paper will attempt to contribute to the debate on the nature of the options open to Melanesians and how these options were used by investigating the job-change behavior of those Melanesians who had completed their initial contacts of indenture and opted to remain on in Queensland as time-expired workers. Estimates of job change will be provided and the determinants of job-change behavior will be investigated.

The paper commences with some background material on the structure and operation of markets for Melanesian labor in Queensland.

### **Melanesian Labor in Queensland**

From its beginning in 1863 through the rest of the nineteenth century, the sugarcane industry in Queensland was reliant on the procurement of Melanesian labor under the indenture system. The main recruiting areas were the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. Beginning in the 1880s, smaller groups of Chinese, Cingalese, Japanese, Javanese, and Malays were also recruited to supplement the supply of Melanesian labor. The enactment of the "White Australia Policy" by the newly federated Commonwealth government of Australia in 1901 resulted in the phasing out of the use of Melanesian and Asian labor. The recruiting trade in Melanesian labor came to an end in 1904, and, allowing for certain exemptions, the Melanesian community in Queensland was repatriated during and soon after 1906.

During the period 1868-1906, the Queensland government explicitly regulated the procurement and employment of Melanesian labor under the indenture system. Recruits served for three years in Queensland and in return for their labor they received passage to and from Queensland, a wage of at least £6 per annum, and various payments in kind such as shelter, clothing, food, tobacco, and medical care. It was only from

1884 that the Queensland government also explicitly regulated the employment of those Melanesians who opted to stay on in Queensland at the end of their indenture contracts. These Melanesians were called “time-expired” workers. Time-expired labor contracts had to be entered before, and registered with, the Department of Immigration. The minimum and maximum lengths of labor contracts were specified as one month (increased in 1896 to six months) and three years, respectively, and their employment was constrained by the same minimum wage rate and by the receipt of the same payments in kind as their indentured counterparts.

Before 1880 there were no occupational restrictions on the employment of Melanesians in Queensland, and Melanesians were employed in sugarcane farming and milling, in the pastoral sector and in the towns. In 1880, 1884, and 1892 a series of discriminatory labor market legislation was enacted: in 1880, indentured Melanesians were restricted to employment in the sugarcane industry; in 1884 both indentured and time-expired Melanesians were restricted to *unskilled* jobs in the sugarcane industry; and in 1892 both indentured and time-expired Melanesians were precluded from working in the sugarcane mills. Time-expired Melanesians who had arrived in Queensland before 1880 were exempt from these occupational restrictions, and they received a certificate to that effect. The possessors of these certificates or tickets were called “ticket-holders,” and they were not required to enter labor contracts before, and registered with, the Department of Immigration.

After 1884, accordingly, the Melanesian population in Queensland was divided into three legal categories: those who were under indenture; those who had completed their indentures and held certificates exempting them from having to register their employment contracts with the Department of Immigration; and those who had completed their indentures and had to have their employment contracts registered with the Department of Immigration. The proportions of these three legal classes in the Melanesian population fluctuated considerably: between 1884 and 1906 the proportion of ticket-holders in the Melanesian population fluctuated within the range 0.07-0.11 (Shlomowitz 1981a:73) while between 1888 and 1904 the proportion of islanders who had completed their indentures but did not hold such tickets fluctuated within the range 0.31-0.67 (see Table 1).

The legal requirement that the contracts of those time-expired Melanesians who did not hold exemption tickets were to be registered with the Department of Immigration and the fortunate survival of this documentation for the districts of Maryborough and Port Douglas provide a

**TABLE 1 Time-Expired Melanesians as Proportion of Total Melanesian Population in Queensland, 1888-1904**

Year	Total Melanesian Population in Queensland <sup>a</sup>	Time-Expired Melanesian Population in Queensland <sup>b</sup>	Time-Expireds as Proportion of Melanesian Population <sup>c</sup>
1888	8,200	2,449	0.31
1889	7,580	2,469	0.31
1890	8,115	2,760	0.32
1891	9,362	2,964	0.33
1892	8,627	2,935	0.35
1893	7,979	3,988	0.52
1894	7,489	5,139	0.67
1895	7,853	4,979	0.62
1896	8,163	4,773	0.57
1897	8,444	4,916	0.59
1898	8,224	5,342	0.64
1899	8,485	5,024	0.58
1900	8,795	4,131	0.46
1901	9,324	3,996	0.42
1902	9,841	3,569	0.38
1903	8,878	2,781	0.32
1904	8,614	3,205	0.39

Source: Annual Reports of the Department of Pacific Island Immigration, published in *Queensland Votes and Proceedings*.

<sup>a</sup>Data relate to the population at the beginning of each year.

<sup>b</sup>Data relate to the number of time-expired employment contracts entered into before the Department of Immigration each year.

<sup>c</sup>To calculate this proportion, the number of time-expired employment contracts entered into before the Department of Immigration was divided by an estimate of population in mid-year (which was taken as the average of the population at the beginning and at the end of the year).

unique body of evidence for studying the working of the market for time-expired Melanesians. This material consists of memoranda of agreements for Maryborough and registers of agreements for both Maryborough and Port Douglas.<sup>1</sup> Memoranda of agreements refer to the actual labor contracts entered into by employers and time-expired Melanesians; registers of agreements refer to volumes in which information from these labor contracts was transcribed by government officials in charge of supervising the employment of Melanesians in Queensland. For Maryborough, the memoranda and registers of agreements contain information on 1,940 and 4,067 labor contracts entered into during the

periods 1886-1906 and 1884-1905, respectively; for Port Douglas, the registers of agreements contain information on 2,185 labor contracts entered into during the period 1894-1906. The registers for Maryborough and Port Douglas contain data on what appear to be the complete set of labor contracts that were entered into and registered in those districts, while the memoranda from Maryborough form an important subset of this original set.

A quantitative analysis of the information in the registers of agreements on male time-expireds, who made up about 95% of the time-expired population, has been reported elsewhere (Shlomowitz 1981a: 83-91; 1982b:350-55). The main findings of this analysis can be briefly summarized. First, the length of employment contracts had the following distribution: under 12 months, 55.4%; 12 months, 34.3%; over 12 months, 10.3% (see Table 2). The most popular durations, which accounted for 65% of all contracts, were for 6 and 12 months. Most of the 6-month contracts were to meet the labor requirements of the cane-cutting season (see Table 3).

Second, in contrast to the depressed state of the overall Australian economy, the Queensland sugarcane industry expanded rapidly in the 1890s, and this was associated with an increasing demand for time-expired Melanesian labor, forcing up their wage rates. Their average annual (or annual-equivalent) wage increased from £18 (1884) to £23 (1901) and from £18 (1894) to £35 (1904) in Maryborough and Port Douglas, respectively (see Table 4).

Third, there was in any one year a marked dispersion in wage rates in both Maryborough and Port Douglas (see Table 4). This dispersion can be explained, in part, by a number of socioeconomic factors. It has been found, for example, that, other things remaining the same, higher wages were received by the more experienced, by those who were recruited in the Solomon Islands as compared to the New Hebrides, and by those who worked for small-scale farmers as compared to large-scale planters (Shlomowitz 1982b:354-55).

The shape of the distribution of wage rates in any one year and changes in the average level of wage rates over time provide strong evidence that whatever employer intent, they were unable to impose a uniform level of wages or a ceiling to their wage offers, at least in Maryborough and Port Douglas. A variety of other direct and indirect evidence provides further support for the proposition that the market for time-expired Melanesian labor was significantly open to the influence of market forces (Shlomowitz 1981a:83-86).

**TABLE 2 Distribution of Length of Employment Contracts of Male Time-Expired Melanesians, 1884-1906.**

District and Year	Number of Observations	Average Length of Contracts (months)	Distribution of Length of Contracts		
			Under 12 months %	12 months %	Over 12 months %
<b>Maryborough</b>					
1884	48	20.1	0	54	46
1885	118	9.3	48	50	2
1886	245	9.8	46	49	6
1887	117	8.9	60	39	1
1888	84	10.0	43	55	2
1889	107	11.4	20	75	6
1890	163	12.0	26	62	12
1891	203	12.6	22	46	32
1892	265	11.9	38	36	26
1893	394	7.7	68	29	4
1894	750	7.7	74	22	4
1895	725	7.1	80	20	0
1896	154	8.3	70	28	3
1897	123	8.5	64	34	2
1898	141	8.8	60	37	4
1899	110	9.2	56	41	3
1900	82	9.2	56	41	2
1901	38	8.6	61	39	0
<i>Total</i>	3,867				
<b>Port Douglas</b>					
1894	10	14.1	40	20	40
1895	38	9.8	53	42	5
1896	77	9.2	52	44	4
1897	244	10.1	57	35	7
1898	197	9.3	59	38	3
1899	140	9.1	71	26	4
1900	136	9.5	66	29	4
1901	170	10.0	56	40	4
1902	241	10.8	59	26	15
1903	203	12.6	57	23	20
1904	316	15.3	11	51	37
1905	296	13.4	21	40	39
1906	115	9.8	95	5	-
<i>Total</i>	2,183				

*Sources:* Register of Agreements entered into for the Employment of Pacific Islanders, 1884-1901, Inspector of Pacific Islanders, Maryborough District, Queensland State Archives, I.P.I. 3/8-9; Register of Agreements entered into by Polynesian Labourers, 1894-1906, Inspector of Pacific Islanders, Port Douglas District, Queensland State Archives, I.P.I. 12/1.

**TABLE 3 Distribution of Employment Contracts of Less Than Twelve Months of Male Time-Expired Melanesians, 1885-1906 (percent)**

District and Year	Distribution by Contract Length <sup>a</sup>			Distribution by Seasonal Contract <sup>b</sup>	
	2-5 months	6 months	7-11 months	High season	Low season
<b>Maryborough</b>					
1885	17	58	25	67	33
1886	26	54	20	70	30
1887	20	34	46	86	14
1888	28	5	67	86	14
1889	–	71	29	86	14
1890	29	29	43	100	–
1891	13	67	20	58	42
1892	37	55	8	68	32
1893	24	74	2	77	23
1894	26	58	16	72	28
1895	26	52	22	69	31
1896	8	75	17	62	38
1897	3	86	11	65	35
1898	2	86	12	57	43
1899	2	82	16	68	32
1900	2	76	22	80	20
1901	–	87	13	83	17
<b>Port Douglas</b>					
1894	25	75	–	75	25
1895	5	85	10	65	35
1896	–	100	–	65	35
1897	1	31	68	86	14
1898	1	50	49	78	22
1899	–	49	52	89	11
1900	–	56	44	77	23
1901	–	32	68	93	7
1902	1	70	29	80	20
1903	–	50	50	88	12
1904	–	67	33	83	17
1905	–	46	54	91	9
1906	1	9	90	99	1

Sources: See Table 2.

<sup>a</sup>In 1896, the Queensland government issued a directive prohibiting contracts of less than six months in length; this restriction did not apply to Melanesians who were waiting for a return voyage to their home islands.

<sup>b</sup>The high season related to the period of sugarcane harvesting and milling. This lasted from June to December; the low season, accordingly, was from January to May. For contracts that overlap these periods, allocation is made to the period in which the major portion of the overlap occurs.

**TABLE 4 Annual Wage Rates of Male Time-Expired Melanesians, 1884-1906 (pounds)<sup>a</sup>**

District and Year	Number of Observations	Average	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation <sup>b</sup>
<b>Maryborough</b>				
1884	48	18.1	5.0	0.276
1885	118	22.5	5.1	0.227
1886	245	17.8	5.2	0.292
1887	117	18.1	4.9	0.271
1888	84	16.0	4.1	0.256
1889	107	16.3	3.5	0.215
1890	163	16.0	3.3	0.206
1891	203	18.6	4.6	0.247
1892	265	18.7	4.8	0.257
1893	394	20.2	3.6	0.178
1894	750	22.3	3.9	0.175
1895	725	23.8	3.2	0.134
1896	154	19.5	3.4	0.174
1897	123	18.7	3.1	0.166
1898	141	20.5	2.6	0.127
1899	110	23.0	3.8	0.165
1900	82	22.7	3.4	0.150
1901	38	22.6	3.6	0.159
<b>Port Douglas</b>				
1894	10	18.0	7.6	0.422
1895	38	22.5	4.8	0.215
1896	77	25.2	3.0	0.120
1897	244	21.8	2.9	0.134
1898	195	28.3	3.5	0.122
1899	140	29.2	3.8	0.129
1900	136	27.1	2.8	0.102
1901	170	26.9	1.9	0.069
1902	241	26.1	4.1	0.156
1903	203	25.1	4.3	0.172
1904	316	31.2	2.1	0.067
1905	296	35.3	3.0	0.086
1906	115	27.3	3.5	0.127

Sources: See Table 2.

<sup>a</sup>Wage rates for contracts of less than 12 months or more than 12 months have been converted to be on an annual basis.

<sup>b</sup>This is a measure of the dispersion of wage rates among time-expired Melanesians. It is derived by dividing the standard deviation by the average.



### Turnover Estimates from Memoranda of Agreements

For the purpose of this paper, a job change relates to a change in both work location and employer. Accordingly, the transfer of a time-expired Melanesian to another plantation or farm owned by the same employer in the same district is not considered a job change; neither is a change in the Melanesian's employer brought about by a change in ownership of the property on which the Melanesian remained employed. It is also noted that only *intradistrict* job-change rates can be calculated from information in the memoranda and registers of agreements for the districts of Maryborough and Port Douglas; these will form the lower bounds on the "true" job-change rates, as job changes that came about through departures from the districts of Maryborough and Port Douglas are not captured in this body of evidence.

The measurement of job change can be made directly from the memoranda of agreements as each memorandum contains the names of the current, last, and first employer, where the first employer refers to the employer to whom the Melanesian was originally indentured.

A comparison of the names of the current and first employers shows that in only 218 of the 1,940 memoranda entered into in Maryborough did the Melanesian continue to work for the first employer. Of these 218 contracts, 181 were for Melanesians who had only worked for this employer while 37 were for Melanesians who had worked for at least one other employer before returning to the first employer.

The number of contracts that related to time-expired Melanesians who had only worked for one employer, 181, was derived from contracts where current, last, and first employers were the same. This is an estimate of the upper bound, as contracts with other employers could have been held between the last and the first employer.

It is also possible to calculate the proportion of Melanesians who, in each succeeding year following the completion of their indentures, continued to work for their first employer. During the first year after the completion of their indentures, this proportion was already only 39%) and it fell to 19% in the second year, and to 8% in the third year; by the ninth year it had fallen to 2%.

There are some fragments of literary evidence that give support to this quantitative finding that few Melanesians remained with their first employer. In 1898 a newspaper correspondent from the Wide Bay and Burnett district reported that "when a Kanaka has finished his time with the planter who brought him in he is free to engage again if he

likes; but, appreciating a change, he prefers to go to some other employer."<sup>2</sup> In 1905 an official of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company reported from the district of the Johnstone River, "As you are probably aware, Kanakas on the completion of their [indenture] agreements as a rule like a change of Masters, and seldom therefore reengage with the previous employer."<sup>3</sup>

The relatively low retention rate of first employers is understandable. Relatively few Melanesians had the opportunity to express a preference for a particular employer to whom they would be indentured. So it was to be expected that once their indenture was completed, they would want to seek out more preferred employers.

Information in the memoranda of agreements also makes it possible to estimate the job-change rate of Melanesians more generally between all their employment contracts. A comparison of the names of the current and last employers of the time-expired Melanesian shows that in only 660 of the 1,940 memoranda entered into in Maryborough did the time-expired Melanesian continue to work for the same employer in successive employment contracts. This yields a job turnover rate of 66%.

Literary evidence also supports this quantitative finding that time-expired Melanesians, in making new employment contracts, were more likely to change employers than stay with the same employer. In 1884 the police magistrate of Mackay, W. P. Goodall, reported that Melanesians were "constantly changing masters,"<sup>4</sup> and in 1892 a sugarcane planter from Mackay, J. Ewen Davidson, in a letter to the editor of a newspaper, reported, "From their love of change islanders go from plantation to plantation, remaining say a year on each, and often returning to the employer they like best."<sup>5</sup>

What facilitated such job-change behavior was the relative ease with which job changes could be effected. Most of the Melanesians were young, without dependents, and had few possessions. Furthermore, these intradistrict moves did not involve traveling long distances.

It has been shown above that the memoranda of agreements, by including the name of the last employer in the current employment contract, have made it possible to compute job-change rates by simply comparing the names of the last and current employers. Unfortunately, however, the name of the last employer is the only information about the last employment contract that is included in the current contract. This constrains the usefulness of the memoranda of agreements as a body of evidence for investigating job-change behavior in three important respects. First, the absence of information in the current contract on the dates of the commencement and termination (and thus the dura-

tion) of the last contract makes it impossible to distinguish among job changes between annual contracts, between seasonal contracts, and between a seasonal and an annual contract. Second, the absence of information on the termination date of the last contract makes it impossible to distinguish job changes between contracts that followed one another without an interval and contracts that were separated by a period of voluntary or involuntary unemployment. Finally, the absence of information on the wage rate agreed to in the last contract makes it impossible to distinguish job changes that were associated with wage improvement from job changes that were not associated with wage improvement.

### **Turnover Estimates from Registers of Agreements**

The above constraints can be overcome by using information in the registers of agreements to construct work histories of individual time-expired Melanesians and to compute job-change rates from these.

The following procedures have been adopted: First, the analysis is limited to job changes between pairs of successive twelve-month contracts; this avoids the problems of interpretation caused by the inclusion of seasonal contracts. For example, if a time-expired Melanesian worked for employer Smith during the harvesting season of 1884 (June to December), for employer Brown during the slack season of 1885 (January to May), and then returned to employer Smith for the harvesting season of 1885, his turnover behavior could be interpreted as either zero, one, or two job changes. Longer-term annual contracts (for twenty-four or thirty-six months) were also excluded as so few of these were entered into.

Second, the analysis allows for an interval of up to five months between pairs of successive twelve-month contracts provided that short-term contracts were not entered into in this interval.

From the work profiles, samples were obtained of 280 and 121 pairs of successive twelve-month contracts entered into by 192 and 81 male time-expired Melanesians for the districts of Maryborough and Port Douglas, respectively. In the combined sample, 90% of the pairs of successive twelve-month contracts were separated by two months or less.

Table 5 shows that, when the data is pooled for the whole period, 1885-1905, Melanesians changed jobs on 131 out of the 280 occasions in the sample for Maryborough and on 52 out of the 121 occasions in the sample for Port Douglas. This yields job-turnover rates of 47% and 43% for Maryborough and Port Douglas, respectively. It is noted that for the

**TABLE 5 Job Turnover and Wage Improvement, 1885-1905, Using Data Pooled for Entire Period**

Turnover Category	Maryborough		Port Douglas	
	Number of cases	Percentage of subtotal	Number of cases	Percentage of subtotal
<b>Stayers</b>				
Wage up	65	43.6	20	29.0
Wage same	67	45.0	48	69.6
Wage down	17	11.4	1	1.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	149	100.0	69	100.0
<b>Changers</b>				
Wage up	81	61.8	33	63.5
Wage same	13	10.0	12	23.1
Wage down	37	28.2	7	13.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	131	100.0	52	100.0
<b>Total</b>	280		121	

**Sources:** See Table 2.

district of Maryborough, the job-turnover rate calculated from the memoranda of agreements, 66%, is higher than the rate calculated from the registers of agreements, 47%. This is because the data used to calculate job-turnover rates from the memoranda of agreements, but not from the registers of agreements, contain an unknown number of seasonal contracts, and job-turnover rates between seasonal contracts were higher than those between annual contracts.

Besides noting the average job-turnover rate for pairs of successive twelve-month contracts, it is also of interest to inquire if some time-expired Melanesians remained for longer periods with the same employer. In the sample for the district of Maryborough, sixteen Melanesians had three successive twelve-month contracts with the same employer; one Melanesian had five successive twelve-month contracts with the same employer; one had seven successive twelve-month contracts; and one had eight such successive contracts. In the sample for Port Douglas, eight Melanesians had three successive twelve-month contracts with the same employer; six had four successive twelve-month contracts; and one had five such successive contracts.

The procedure for modeling the determinants of job change adopted in this paper is to compare the number of Melanesians who experienced an increase, a decrease, or no change in wages for the turnover categories "changers" (that is, those who changed jobs) and "stayers" (those who didn't change jobs).

The following are the more striking findings from the samples of 280 and 121 pairs of successive twelve-month contracts for the districts of Maryborough and Port Douglas. First, when data is pooled for the whole period, as shown in Table 5, wage improvement was experienced by a higher proportion of changers (61.8% for Maryborough and 63.5% for Port Douglas) than stayers (43.6% for Maryborough and 29.0% for Port Douglas). As the data on changers includes both quits (voluntary actions on the part of the Melanesians) and discharges and layoffs (over which the Melanesians may have had little control), and as discharges and layoffs are less likely than quits to be associated with wage improvement, it follows that the percentage of quits experiencing wage improvement was undoubtedly higher than the 61.8% and 63.5% reported above. The finding that wage improvement was experienced by a high proportion of changers, and that this proportion was higher for changers than stayers, suggests that most job changes were quits rather than discharges and layoffs and that pecuniary considerations were an important influence in the choice between jobs.

Second, these findings for the district of Maryborough are considerably more pronounced for the periods 1885-1890 and 1900-1905 than for the period 1891-1899. During 1885-1890 wage improvement was experienced by 66.7% of changers and only 29.5% of stayers; during 1891-1899, by 62.5% of changers and 61.5% of stayers; and during 1900-1905, by 47.1% of changers and 20.0% of stayers (see Table 6). There is no obvious explanation for the temporal variation in these statistics.

It is also possible to relate job turnover to the extent of the Melanesian's experience in Queensland's sugar industry. A proxy variable for such experience is the number of years between the date of arrival in Queensland and the date of signing the second of the pair of successive twelve-month contracts. This has to be at least four years from the date of arrival of the Melanesian in Queensland, as the first three years were spent under indenture.

Using this proxy variable for experience, a third finding is that the more experienced Melanesians were less likely to be changers: using combined data for Maryborough and Port Douglas pooled for the whole period, the probability of being a changer decreased from 0.56 in the category of less than seven years of experience, to 0.48 in the category of seven to thirteen years of experience, to 0.26 in the category of more than thirteen years of experience (see Table 7). One explanation for the high initial probability is that for the first few years after the completion of their indenture agreement, many Melanesians tried various jobs as a form of "job shopping"; that is, they may have believed that the

**TABLE 6 Job Turnover and Wage Improvement, 1885-1905, Using Annual Data**

District and Year	Stayers				Changers			
	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Sub- total	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Sub- total
<b>Maryborough</b>								
1885	1	2		3				
1886	1	6	1	8	1		2	3
1887	3	3	2	8	7		2	9
1888	2	3	2	7	1	1	3	5
1889	3	4	1	8	6	1	4	11
1890	3	7		10	13	1		14
1891	3	3		6	11	1	4	16
1892	8	6		14	5		5	10
1893	2	1	1	4	3	2	3	8
1894	3	2		5	11	2	3	16
1895	8	3		11	5	2	1	8
1896	2	2		4	1	1	1	3
1897	4	3	1	8				
1898	5	1		6	3			3
1899	5	2		7	6	1	1	8
1900	2	2	5	9	5		2	7
1901	1	5	1	7		1	3	4
1902	2		1	3			3	3
1903	1	7	2	10				
1904	5	3		8	2			2
1905	1	2		3	1			1
<b>Port Douglas</b>								
1895					1			1
1896	1	2		3				
1897	2	7	1	10	3		2	5
1898	4			4	7	3	1	11
1899	1	10		11	3	2		5
1900	1	6		7	1	2	2	5
1901	1	12		13	2	1		3
1902	2	4		6	3	2	1	6
1903		7		7		1	1	2
1904	5			5	3			3
1905	3			3	10	1		11

Sources: See Table 2.

**TABLE 7 Job Turnover and Wage Improvement by Years of Experience, 1885-1905, Using Data Pooled for Entire Period**

District and Years of Experience	Stayers				Changers			
	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Total	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Total
<b>Maryborough</b>								
4	9	7	1	17	19	1	8	28
5	6	14	2	22	11	2	7	20
6	5	11	4	20	13	3	7	23
7	7	3	3	13	8		4	12
8	6	7		13	7	2	2	11
9	6	4	1	11	2		1	3
10	3	6	1	10	6	1	1	8
11	4	1		5	4	1	1	6
12	1		1	2	2	2	2	6
13	2		1	3	2		1	3
14	2	1	1	7	2		1	3
15	3	2		5	1			1
16	4	2		6	1			1
17	2	3	1	6			1	1
18	3			3		1	1	2
19		2		2	1			1
20			1	1	1			1
21	1			1	1			1
22								
23		1		1				
24	1			1				
<b>Port Douglas</b>								
4		2		2	1	1		2
5		1		1	5			5
6	1	1		2	2		1	3
7	1			1	1	2	1	4
8	1	1		2	4	1		5
9	2	2		4	3			3
10	1	5		6	2	1		3
11	1	4		5	1	4	1	6
12		1	1	2	2	2	1	5
13	2	3		5	1		1	2
14	1	7		8	4			4
15	2	4		6			1	1
16	1	6		7	3			3

*Continued*

TABLE 7 **Continued**

District and Years of Experience	Stayers				Changers			
	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Total	Wage up	Wage same	Wage down	Total
17	1	4		5		1		1
18	2	5		7				
19	2	1		3	3		1	4
20	1	1		2				
24	1			1				
26					1			1

Sources: See Table 2.

only way they could acquire information about various jobs was to actually try them for a time.

A fourth finding is that, among both stayers and changers, the less experienced were more likely to suffer a wage decline: using combined data for Maryborough and Port Douglas pooled for the whole period, the probability of receiving a lower wage decreased from 0.19 in the category of less than nine years of experience to 0.11 in the category of nine or more years of experience (see Table 7). Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify the characteristics of changers who suffered a decline in wages. They could have been quits who traded preferred non-pecuniary amenities for wages or whose expectations in searching for higher wages had been disappointed, or they could have been layoffs and discharges.

To investigate whether job change was spatially dispersed or concentrated among clusters of employers within each district, Maryborough and Port Douglas, the employment changes of Melanesians need to be mapped. This involves obtaining information on the location of individual farm properties, the lessees of Crown Land, and, once this land was purchased, the owners of these farm properties. On the basis of a pilot survey at the Queensland State Archives and the Queensland Lands Office, it appears that there is insufficient information on lessees and owners of properties to perform such a "network" analysis.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has been concerned with job change in the market for time-expired Melanesian labor in Queensland. The main findings of the paper are that at the conclusion of their indenture contracts Melane-



sians usually left the employer to whom they had been indentured and made frequent job changes thereafter;<sup>6</sup> job change involved predominantly quits rather than layoffs or discharges; and, to an important extent, it was intended to take advantage of higher wages. This does not rule out the existence of other motives for job change, such as “job shopping,” the seeking of preferred non-pecuniary amenities in other jobs, or the enjoyment of change for its own sake (the wanderlust that was mentioned by the literary sources cited above), but it does suggest that they might have been of secondary importance.

More generally, the results of this paper suggest that time-expired Melanesians had access to market information about offers in alternative jobs, and that they showed assertiveness in pursuing market-oriented goals. Thus, the evidence contained in this paper provides further support for the viewpoint developed elsewhere (Shlomowitz 1981a:91) that, within the legal structure that constrained their employment in Queensland, time-expired Melanesians participated fully in and obtained the benefits from the free market for their labor.

This paper has emphasized that Melanesians learned the requirements of marketplace economics rather quickly and that they were ever alert to opportunities for advancing their interests. The paper has also pointed out that legal barriers circumscribed the economic opportunities open to them; skilled jobs in sugarcane farming and non-farm jobs were closed to them. Accordingly, although they were “free” in the sense of not being bound to particular employers, their occupational mobility was constrained. They could only move within a political economy that offered them interchangeable jobs in the service of one producer of sugarcane or another.

Ralph Shlomowitz  
Flinders University of South Australia

## NOTES

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1. Memoranda and Registers of Agreements, Inspectors of Pacific Islanders, Queensland State Archives, IPI 3/5-9, 3/37, 12/1.

2. *Queenslander*, 21 May 1898, p. 984.

3. Goondi In, 23 June 1905, unpublished records of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University.
4. Colonial Secretary's Office, In-Letter 1659 of 1884, Queensland State Archives.
5. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 July 1892, p. 2.
6. For an English historical case study in which farm workers on annual contracts exhibited similarly high job-turnover rates, see Kussmaul 1981.

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