Colonization... contained every expression of communal life and every action that tended to limit or threaten its grip, irrespective of the forms of native political society and the colonial regimes that organised their domination.

Georges Balanda* The claim has often been made that Australia as a colony was possessed of a particular, humanitarian virtue. Indeed, in relation to Papua New Guinea, it appears that Australians did not consider themselves colonists at all. However, a look at the reality rather than the rhetoric of its administration in Papua New Guinea shows Australia to be a colony much like any other. Australia may have been ostensibly a more humane colonist than many, but its record in this can be explained in terms of its position as a late and little imperialist. Contrary explanations in terms of Australian subjective morality and good intentions do not stand up to the facts. This essay will try to illustrate and support this argument in relation to the colonial regulation of wage-labour—an area that is of central importance to the type of colonialism that operated in Papua New Guinea.

The indenture system has been basic to the supply of wage-labour in Papua New Guinea. First, that system and the official view of it will be described here. The official view is then contrasted with the actual operation of the system to show that it was used to tie Papua New Guinean societies into the colonial economy in such a way as to ensure and maintain a supply of cheap labour to that economy. However, it is then suggested that explanation in terms of supply does not fully account for the colonial regulation of labour; one must look also at the threat to the colonist of non-traditional organisation that has a potentiality for class action. After applying this last type of explanation to the indenture system, it is then applied to more recent colonial labour laws dealing with trade unions and 'industrial relations'. The essay concludes with a brief look at the neo-colonial situation.

The indenture system and its ideology

The indenture system was inherited from the Germans in New Guinea and from the British in Papua; the Australians did not make any basic changes in its legal provisions or in its operation, but initially they did modify the system in the interests of planters. There were two main aspects of the system. First, it was recognized that the 'native' had to be forced to work; he was seen by planters and officials as 'lazy' but even those who apologised for the system now acknowledge that force was needed to some extent because Papua New Guinea generally preferred village life to working on plantations or at mining sites. In any case, the result was that the worker in the indenture system was subject to criminal penalties if, among other things, he 'deserted' his employer or failed to work diligently. To this extent the system was 'really rather like slavery' as Lieutenant-Governor Murray of Papua described it. Unlike slavery, the entry into employment was, in theory, voluntary. The other main aspect of the system - 'the gesture at justice' as Rowley has put it - comprised measures that purported to protect the 'native' and to assure his welfare. In terms of the Covenant of the League of Nations which was binding on Australia in the case of New Guinea and accepted as policy in Papua 'the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation'. Consequently, labour law in Papua and in New Guinea made provision for such things as maximum hours of work and minimum wages and for health, dietary and accommodation standards. The law also provided for the protection of the worker against fraud and cruelty on the part of employers and labour recruiters. A recent academic study says that the law was mostly complied with, and so the system 'on the human level... was neither brutal nor particularly oppressive'. As the same account shows, Australia was also concerned to fulfill the ' Sacred Trust' by seeking to preserve traditional Papua New Guinean societies - to prevent 'deterioration' and the creation of a 'landless proletariat'. Hence labour laws provided that after a certain period in employment the worker had to be returned to his village and not 're-engaged' under indenture for a certain further period. As well, limitations were: from time to time, imposed to prevent over-recruiting of labour in some areas.

As will be shown later, most of these various protective provisions in the system did not fit the reality of its operation but it should also be mentioned that the provisions themselves were not always beneficial and humane. For much of the colonial period, the minimum wage (which was in practice a 'maximum wage') was five shillings a month in New Guinea and ten shillings in Papua. To take only one more of many possible instances, the death-rate among labourers, especially on the...
goldfields, was frequently extremely high and this was mainly because of the inadequate dietary standards; yet despite official recognition of this, little was done to correct the situation. More generally, the ‘native’ must be ‘taught’ ... the highest civilisation of which he is capable’ but the process must not be rushed. It was believed by the colonists (ostensibly anyway) that requiring the ‘native’ to work on plantations and at mines was part of the ‘sacred trust’ because it so work was a civilising influence and the best sort of education the ‘native’ could get. As for ‘economic development’, this could only be developed by Europeans; apart from some limited cash-cropping, the only role the Papua New Guinean could play in development was that of labourer for the European. Altogether, this was a neat and omni-sufficient ideology.

The System in Operation

Mair has said of ‘conditions in practice’ in New Guinea: Where conditions of work were concerned the pressure of economic demand was stronger than humanitarian considerations. Rapid development, it was argued, was in the interests of the whole country, and therefore of course in those of the native population; it must not be hampered by pedantic insistence on the letter of the law. The plantations had had to encounter every kind of difficulty, and should not have their burdens increased beyond what they could bear. Inspection was in any case inadequate, and officers who were anxious to enforce the prescribed conditions felt that they could not count on support from headquarters.

Papua was basically no different. In fact, in Papua and in New Guinea, breaches of the law by employers were flagrant, widespread and usually uncorrected, and in the early days of Australian rule, labour-related atrocities were common. Rowley, a knowledgeable and sensitive observer, saw ‘the (long illegal) use or threat of violence as the basic labour incentive’. Nor is it all this of the past. For example, breaches of the minimum-wage provisions have in recent times been common in the Highlands and perhaps also in the rural areas generally. Officially-recorded complaints by workers that on the face of them could warrant prosecution, run into hundreds and sometimes thousands each year, but prosecutions of employers are few.

The ethos in which the law operated was hardly conducive to compliance with it or to its adequate enforcement. The employer had ready access to a white man’s court to enforce his side of the labour laws, but the Papuan New Guinean had, in practical terms, almost no access to courts to enforce his side. Enforcement of his side depended on a system of official inspection which was grossly inadequate. As Rowley has noted, it was ‘all too commonly the case for officials to regard as their duty assistance to employers’. Generous allowance was made, sometimes in the law and always by officials in its enforcement, if employers found it difficult or impossible to comply. Even when they were inclined to take action, officials have always operated on a ‘warming’ basis that gives the employer a chance to rectify his breach of the law. If the law or the officials were not adequately sympathetic, then planters could resort to their pressure group associations and their usually strong representation in colonial legislatures.

The plantation system (and to a lesser extent the mine) was a ‘total institution’—a ‘small state’—with the employer as the ruler. As an illustration of this, there was legal power given to employers for a time in Australian New Guinea, to mete out ‘disciplinary punishments’ (confine or fines). The worker could only participate in the wider economy through the employer; this position was emphasised in the law which said that, while indentured, the worker could not enter into any other contract apart from his contract of employment. Generally, and in terms of preserving a correct order in the ‘small state’, it was for some time an offence for a worker ‘to create or foster a bad influence among his fellow workers’, and such has usually been a sufficient ground for terminating his employment contract.

The practice of the system is vividly reflected by the people’s response to it. Usually they chose not to ‘sign off’ again after a period under indenture and, on the available figures, almost 4 per cent of the indentured workforce ‘deserted’ each year. Desertion is particularly significant for there were so many pressures on the labourer to stay: as well as the standard criminal sanctions against ‘desertion’, the ‘deserter’ stood to lose his deferred pay (half of his wages were, by law, accumulated for payment on expiry of the indenture). He would usually find himself in a strange and hostile area; even if he got home he could be in trouble with the traditional leader who perhaps had him recruited, and there would still be the economic pressure of the ‘native tax’ forcing him to return or to find work elsewhere.

As for enforcement, if the available figures are taken for the whole colonial period (which means confining the figures to New Guinea), the ‘native labour’ laws were, up to and including the year 1950-51, enforced ten times more against workers than against employers. After 1950-51 (most of the penal sanctions against workers having been abolished at the end of 1950), convictions of employers decreased sharply. The average number of convictions of employers then was 7.56 a year with long periods when there were hardly any at all. For the whole of Papua New Guinea there were only three employers convicted between December 1969 and March 1976 inclusive. Nor did conviction for an offence under the ‘native labour’ laws hold much terror for an employer. He was fined but never imprisoned. For the available figures from New Guinea the average fine per conviction of an employer was A$5.80. Fines have increased recently but not very significantly. The average fine per conviction of an employer in Papua New Guinea between December 1969 and May 1976 inclusive was A$53.00.

Maintaining the Labour Supply

Development theory of the conventional varieties sees traditional society
as eventually being transformed and replaced in the process of 'modernisation' and as, in the meantime, being a block (in many ways) to such progressive change. However in the perspective of theories of 'under-development' the advance of the capitalist economy 'partly derives from the extraction of cheap factors of production from the... [traditional] sector thereby maintaining its backwardness.'16 More particularly, colonialism (or at least colonialism of a variety relevant to Papua New Guinea) involves 'using the economic basis characteristic of lineage society to establish the conditions of transition to capitalism.'17 But the transition is and remains ambiguous for, as Bettelheim has put it, 'the main tendency is not to dissolution of the non-capitalist modes of production but to their conservation-disclosure.'18 Indeed, and in contrast to only transforming traditional society, capitalism has 'imported a certain solidarity' to it, as Banaji has put it. Further, Banaji would see the capitalist and traditional elements as forming a distinct, interdependent combination in a 'colonial mode of production.'19 Meillassoux has put the emphasis on labour supply as the reason for conserving traditional society and this emphasis fits the Papua New Guinea case. For him, 'the agricultural self-sustaining communities' form 'an organic component of capitalist production' in, basically, performing the 'functions of social security' that capitalism avoids in the colonial situation.20 To elaborate on this: the worker's wage is enough for his sustenance while working and for his and his family's tax (and there is sometimes a small savings component); traditional society continues to support the worker's family, to support the worker when he is not under indenture as a result of compulsory repatriation, illness or old age and, generally, it bears the cost of maintaining the supply of labour. In Papua New Guinea, capitalist penetration and the indentured labour system in particular have certainly made part for the 'dissolution' of traditional society.21 But traditional society has reacted in ways that make for, or are consistent with, its 'conservation'. The introduction of time-saving technologies in the period of initial trade and also later in the colonial period, as well as the reduction in warfare in the latter period, led to the strengthening of traditional forms of organisation.22 These factors also created space, as it were, in the village to accommodate the absence of some men under indenture.23 The indenture system, as Rowley has indicated,24 helped in the 'conservation' of traditional society. Admittedly, restrictions on recruiting were not always enforced, but the repatriation laws were closely administered, and it is indicative of their adequate enforcement that employers constantly complained about them. The tendency of workers not to 'sign-on' for a further period under indenture, combined with the application of these conservation-oriented laws, had the effect of pushing the 'labour frontier' further and further back.25 So whilst a new frontier was being tapped, pressure on supply within the frontier was lessened, and this development greatly facilitated the aim of conservation. Other important aspects of the 'native labour' laws can be explained in terms of conservation,26 and it is also in the light of such an explanation that the basis for the Australian ideology described earlier becomes clearer. As Wolfe has put it:

"Really Rather Like Slavery"

Indeed, it is as part the very attempt to conserve and control the non-capitalist societies in the face of the tendency of capitalist development to disintegrate them and thereby to undermine the basis of exploitation, that accounts for political policies and ideologies which centre on cultural, ethnic, national and racial characteristics.27 The colonist was also able to build on and 'solidify' particular aspects of traditional society that helped in supplying labour. This was done through using existing inequalities and patterns of authority in Papua New Guinea societies.28 It was common practise for labour recruiters to use persons in authority to put pressure on young men to 'sign-on' and for this purpose a 'bonus' was paid and, it would appear, some leaders became very wealthy in the process.29 In this way traditional authority lent itself also to the maintenance of the labour contract: the returning 'deserter' could incur the displeasure of the traditional leader who had him recruited and this leader would often be or would have control over a laban - a 'native' official appointed by the colonial administration. This factor should be added to the earlier description of the worker's dependence and isolation (he was usually far from the labour frontier where he was recruited), to explain why he served out his contract. On the figures mentioned earlier, convictions of New Guineans under the 'native labour' laws averaged (up to 1950-51) 652 a year, and 93 per cent of these convictions were for 'desertion' or failure to work or 'perform duty'. The number of workers convicted in any year was only a very small proportion of the total number under indenture, but this factor does not exhaust the significance of these laws. As shown earlier, the law, in its enforcement and administration generally, was almost totally biased in favour of the employer; this paternal bias would have made the isolation of the worker more than geographical, and would have under-scored his dependence. Other legal measures were influential on the supply side. The 'native tax' was used to create a need for cash and thus force people into wage-labour.30 Also, and in contrast to the German record, for much of the colonial period, Australian legal measures dis-couraged cash-cropping and cash-crop processing among New Guineans, and this restricted a source of money to pay the tax - a source that successfully competed, in attractiveness, with wage-labour.31 Perhaps similar supply considerations lay behind the provision, for a time, of a legal maximum wage (ten shillings a month) in New Guinea, since a higher wage would enable the tax of more people to be paid, and thus decrease the pressure on the people to seek wage-labour.

The Colonist and Non-Traditional Organisation

The fact of the labour frontier indicates that 'native labour' laws, in seeking to conserve traditional society, were not just concerned with preserving the source of the labour supply. To the extent that labour continued to be supplied from within the frontier, it would often be the case
that such a limited supply would not threaten particular traditional societies, if the repatriation laws were not applied. Yet, in the face of contrary pressures from settlers, the colonial administration continued to enforce the repatriation provisions without distinction. Dealings in land were also strictly controlled with the aim of preserving the traditional society as a supplier of labour, yet such control was also exercised within the labour frontier. For the towns a detailed system of laws dealing with curfews, migration, 'vagrancy', residence location and recreation was used to restrict severely the extent to which Papua New Guineans could stay and could associate together in towns. These laws can be explained in terms of facilitating repatriation of workers, but in this regard they import such a high element of 'overkill' as to prompt further examination.

The explanation suggested here is grounded in Australia's position in the region. Papua New Guinea. Australia was a relatively 'weak' colonist. Despite rapid economic expansion in the early days of Australian rule both New Guinea and, especially, Papua were economically stagnant and weak, and very little interest in them or support came from Australia until the rapid expansion of Australian involvement after the second world war. This weakening was aggravated by the ever-receding labour frontier, and other related factors which resulted in the capitalist economy being too widely dispersed. Australia, in its typical colonial concern to protect its own monopoly, kept out non-Australian or non-Whites interests. Britain was past its expansionist phase. Australia itself, so it has been said, was preoccupied with its own continent and lacked the 'surplus energy' necessary for external colonisation.

A more incise explanation could explore the limitations arising out of Australia's own dependence or 'satellite' status as a colony and neo-colony.

The Australian colonist, with some accuracy then, perceived his position as weak and precarious. Several events could serve to instance this perspective but perhaps the most powerfully indicative was the Rabaul strike of 1929. This was a 'peaceful and purposeful' strike of almost all the New Guinean workers in Rabaul (including the New Guinean police) which was so effectively organised in terms of solidarity that no white resident knew of it until it had happened. The Australian response was swift, fearful and furious and resulted in the infliction of draconic punishments on the leaders of the strike. This response indicated that what most concerned the colonist was the ability of the people to combine across ethnic divisions. It is well recognised that migratory labour systems make the class organisation of workers difficult if not impossible. What the foregoing points try to show is that one aspect of the indenture system or 'native labour' laws, and of other functionally related colonial laws, is a concern to counter organisation outside of the traditional context and independently of the colonists - a type of organisation that could be said to have potentiality for class action. The actual threat involved to the colonist was doubtless much less than that perceived by him, and it would now seem that, given Australia's relatively 'weak' colonial penetration and the geographical dispersal of capitalist economic development, it was most unlikely that any potent working-class organisation would have emerged anyway.

The Emergence of Free Labour and The Quasi-Indenture System

To be an effective means of containment and control, the indenture system had to cover all or almost all employees. But the law did allow some very limited exceptions - sometimes for employment near the worker's home and other times for short periods of employment. Through these exceptions a non-indentured or 'free' labour force emerged, and the exceptions themselves were progressively widened. After the greater Australian involvement from the end of the second world war, the indenture system could no longer meet the demand for labour. It was also inconsistent with investment in the needed development of a more skilled workforce. The non-indentured workforce grew fairly rapidly and by 1950, it has been suggested, a 'free' labour force had emerged, 'forced to rely on the European for existence'.

This would fit neatly with the abolition of the indenture system at the end of 1950. It might be said that with 'free' labour the legal controls of the indenture system were no longer appropriate or needed, but other more appropriate legal controls may be seen as needed to contain this new labour force. This needs some qualification. The labour force was not free in the classical (and paradoxically) sense of being totally dependent on wages; even to-day it seems to be the unusual case where land and subsistence livelihood are not available to the Papua New Guinean. Also at this stage 33 per cent of the total workforce was still under indenture. The abolition of the indenture system was a consequence of the 'new deal' promised by the Australian Labor Government after the second world war. However, this abolition of the system and its replacement by the 'agreement system' amounted to little more than a change in name. The basic structure of the system (especially the repatriation provisions) remained unchanged, but most of the penal provisions, such as those requiring workers to be diligent and not to desert, were repealed. To a considerable extent, at least initially, the system 'survived' by bluff; officials would act as if the penal provisions still existed and the worker, not having heard otherwise, would usually fall into line. Further, an alternative type of sanction was then introduced: this involved a simple type of court action whereby, on certain grounds, an employer (and, on other grounds, a worker) could apply to the court to have the employment contract terminated and to have 'damages' paid out of the worker's deferred pay. The grounds included such as being absent from work for more than seven days, and 'exerting a bad influence on his fellow workers'. Taking the New Guinea figures as referred to earlier, the average number of court orders of this type made annually in favour of employers was 549 (the average number a year in favour of workers was five) and this figure...
was quite on a par with the pre-1950 level of convictions of workers under the penal provisions of the indentured labour system. 39

Any foreseeable risk in ‘abolishing’ the indenture system was more than offset by the opening up of the Highlands—the greatest labour frontier of them all. The Highlands Labour Scheme was introduced because the supply of indentured labour was drying up. 40 It was a massive recruiting operation run by the colonial administration. 41 Although the scheme did not formally come into operation until the end of 1951, it had, effectively, been operating on a trial basis for two years before that.

By the time the indenture system was purportedly abolished and replaced by the ‘agreement’ system at the end of 1960, 14 per cent of the indentured workforce had been supplied through the Highlands Labour Scheme; within a further fifteen years more than half the indentured or ‘agreement’ workforce was supplied through the Scheme. 42

The ‘free’ or non-indentured labour force increased in the 1950s (from 35,927 in 1950 to 47,476 in 1960), and the increase was much more rapid in the 1960s (to 93,771 in 1968). Changes were made in the ‘native labour’ law in 1958 to broaden the exceptions under which employment could be entered into outside the indenture or agreement system. The number of workers in the indenture system peaked in 1960 and thereafter gradually declined. 42 On 28 March 1963, all restrictions in the ‘native labour’ law on entering into employment outside the indenture system, were abolished. On the same day new legal methods of controlling labour came into effect—the trade union and industrial relations legislation.

Trade Union and Industrial Relations Legislation

The first Papuan New Guinean trade union was an organisation of workers based in the capital and founded in 1960; it emerged out of an ethnic association set up in 1958. These bodies had political as well as ‘industrial’ aims and they strongly (for the times) asserted both. 43 Hasluck, the then Australian minister with responsibility for Papua New Guinea, was quick to provide assistance for the union in pressing its industrial claims. As a result, the union was instrumental in obtaining, in 1960, a doubling of the minimum wage in certain urban areas. In 1960, also, a union based in Madang was formed arising out of a prior ethnic association. Soon after, unions were formed in Lae and Rabaul and in the next few years several more were formed in other urban areas. 44

Of these first two unions the colonial administration said that ‘special attention is being given to such organisations to ensure that they are founded on sound principles and develop along constructive lines’. 45 Until these unions were formed, it was officially thought that the time was not ripe for trade unions, basically because the people would not be able to organise them, and so administration ‘protection’ of the worker would have to continue. On 15 August 1961, Hasluck announced a major change in approach. He said that ‘new labour measures’ would be introduced; these would be of particular ‘interest’ to an emerging group of ‘urban workers’ who were not greatly in need of protection. These changes quite explicitly anticipated the accelerated ‘development’ that Australia would promote in the sixties. 46 Hasluck instanced co-operatives and local government councils (previously successful efforts at colonial containment) 47 as indicating that reliance could be placed on officials to give impartial and disinterested counsel and guidance to those wishing to form a trade union, and to arrange for the training on accepted lines of their union officers. He saw the measures themselves as being the ‘minimum necessary’ and as leaving ‘as much room as possible’ for Papua New Guineans to work things out on their own way. Dr Gunther, the then Deputy Administrator, in introducing the new measures to the colonial legislature in 1961, was even more disarming:

Quite simply the purpose of this [industrial organisations] Bill is to recognize the existence of such formal organisations, and to regulate their existence so that they will best serve the purpose for which their members came together. It can be said that the Bill generally is a fairly standard piece of industrial legislation providing for the prevention and settlement of dispute. 48

But he did add that registration as an ‘industrial organisation’ would be compulsory because of the relatively great degree of supervision, and perhaps assistance, that trade unions would need, and because without this compulsion there would be ‘a strong likelihood’ of unions being used for purposes which were basically non-industrial, perhaps subversive. 49

It was quite clear by 1960, that the rapid growth of trade unions in the Third World after the second world war was due more to growing demand of colonised peoples for freedom than to ‘industrial worst’ narrowly conceived. 50 Perhaps as a result, we find in this ‘fairly standard piece of industrial legislation’ 51 that political affiliation by trade unions is obliquely but effectively prohibited, and strikes by organised workers are in effect prohibited. 52 The ‘industrial organisation’ law makes it an offence for any person to manage or act for an unregistered trade union. The Registrar of Industrial Organisations has wide powers of supervision and control over registered trade unions. In their internal orders, trade unions are subjected to a system of complex and detailed legal rules. For various and numerous infractions, individual unions can be de-registered by the Registrar and thus it would become an offence, then, to manage or act for them.

The actual operation of these new laws followed and refined their general orientation. Under the guise of the new policy ‘to facilitate the growth of industrial organisations’, 53 officials became closely involved in the affairs of trade unions, sometimes going to great lengths to sustain trade union organisation. Trade unions were clearly meant to integrate organised workers into a controlled system of ‘industrial relations’. 54 Officials typically claimed that were it not for their involvement unions would not exist at all. A former head of the Department of Labour has said that the colonial administration could not wait for trade unions to
insufficient lawful means of support' which, in practice, appears to mean those without formal sector employment. The colonial trade union and industrial relations laws continue to apply, and there appears to be no substantial move on foot to liberalise them.

From the end of the second world war, the Australian administration encouraged Papua New Guinea capitalist-type farmers and, later, pasto- rists (again building on the traditional base). Less enthusiastically and less successfully, from the early sixties it encouraged urban 'businessmen'. The considerable number of Papua New Guinean employers emerging through these developments appear to be just as exploitative of their workers as the Europeans. In order to encourage such 'entrepreneurs' the Department of Labour has a policy of not prosecuting them for breaches of legislation protective of workers. Moves have been made by some Papua New Guinean employers and by officials on their behalf formally to allow them to pay less than the otherwise required minimum wage.

Those who are certain to gain by the offering Demand a spirit of sacrifice. Brecht

NOTES
1 Giorgio Baladadis, Political Anthropology in the Line, The Penguin Press, London, 1976 p 180. In preparing this paper I have been indebted in various ways to Robert Wynamics, Keith Glennon, Donald Defoe, Ian Schofield, Ulrich Utz and the University of the South Pacific.
4 H N Nelson, 'European Attitudes in Papua, 1906-1914', in The University of Papua and New Guinea, Second Waukani Seminar: The History of Melanesia (Research School of Pacific Studies, Canberra and The University of Papua and New Guinea, Port Moresby, 1969, pp 80-5. Conceptually this material forms part of the history of Papua put to use for people at an early stage of education... argument and moral suasion [no box] have very little influence... and humiliation is made with the sanction of ordinances and regulations... by the Ministerial Formulations with the sanction of ordinances and regulations... by the Ministerial Formulations.' This was from a presidential address to the Anthropology Section of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science.
5 For example, D W Smith, Labour and the Law in Papua New Guinea (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1975), p 20. This acknowledgement is implicit here in the acceptance of 'primitive affluence' as a factor in restructuring supply.
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AUSTRALIAN CAPITALISM

6 Habib Murray. The Scientific Method as Applied to Native Labour Problems in Papua. Government Printer, Port Moresby, 1932, p. 59
7 C.D. Rowley. The Occupation of German New Guinea, in W.J. Hudson (ed.), op. cit., p. 46
9 D.W. Smith. op. cit., p. 33, 37.
10 "Traditional" is used throughout the sources but this or any other "factual" category must be unfruitful in this context.
11 D.W. Smith, op. cit., chapter 2. This concern could be seen as legitimised also by the similar thrust of the I.O.O. Recruiting of Indigenous Workers in New Guinea, No. 50 of 1936.
12 The law on this has changed often, but generally in Papua a worker had to be returned to his village after no more than three years and, in New Guinea, after no more than four and a half years.
13 For example, expressed as a percentage of the average number of labourers in the Northern Division (at Papua) the death rate varied from about 30 percent in 1902-03 to 19 percent in 1905-06, and even in later years it was probably never less than 5 percent (H.N. Nolan, Black, White and Gold: Goldmining in Papua New Guinea, op. cit., p. 144).
14 R. Jons et al. (eds), op. cit., p. 138 quoting Murray, and Don Woodcock, Blacks, Whites... and the Awful Press, New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia, 4 (January, 1974), p. 15.
17 For the Highlands see H.C. Brookfield. Native Employment in the New Guinea Highlands, Journal of the Polynesian Society 50 (1941), pp. 509 and J.E. Jams. The Structure of Unskilled Wages and Relationships between Rural and Non-Rural Employment in Papua and New Guinea (Port Moresby, 1970)., p. 24. For rural areas generally see Public Service Association of Papua New Guinea, Submission to National Minimum Wage Inquiry (two dates), p. 25. This is the final report of 1972 figures submitted by employers to the Department of Labour which strongly suggests that there is no evidence that wages have been being paid in rural areas. One cannot be categorical about the figures because the classifications into major groups do not allow for part-time and piece-work arrangements.
18 For example in New Guinea for the year 1959-60 there were 2286 such complaints and 7230 such prosecutions (Commonwealth, Quarterly Report 1959-60, pp. 225-28).
19 The New Guinea law for much of its history provided merely for an annual inspection of the plantation or mine but even this requirement was often not complied with. See also D.W. Smith, op. cit., p. 131.
21 Here and in a few places later I am relying on information supplied by officers of the Department of Labour. The information was not supplied with publication in mind so, unsatisfactorily as it may be, I cannot adequately attribute these points. Cf. an offending statistician to employers. E.H. Sutherland, Wage Ceiling Crime (Halk, Kinchant and Winton, New York, 1964), p. 25.
25 The worker depended on the employer for the basics of life even as part of his wage in kind and, sometimes, also the only outlet for his cash wage was the employer's store.
26 Here and elsewhere in the text there is a deliberate ambivalence in talking about people not 'springing out' again. In New Guinea a worker could renew his contract for a further period before returning home. On the figures in the New Guinea Reports, the great majority downed to not do this. One reason could have been that they didn't want to go home but would still sign on later. But there was a fairly general aversion to working under indenture since experience.
27 This figure and the rest of the New Guinea figures in the paper are derived from a necessarily hasty sample of half the years of Australia's role in New Guinea. The figures were compiled for the years so selected were then extracted from the Annual Reports covering three years and the same proportion of the text was derived from those figures.
28 For all of Papua New Guinea from 1964 to 1970 inclusive there were only four convictions.
29 This figure comes from a survey of Labour Department files. It is possible but unlikely that all of the relevant files were not found.
34 Jairi Bandy, Backward Capitalism: Primitive Accumulation and Modes of Production. Journal of Contemporary Asia 3 (1973), p. 95 (this edn.).
37 Perhaps the best known study in this period is R.P. Salvato, Toward Social and Economic Consequences of a Technology of Change in New Guinea (Melbourne University Press, 1966).
39 To take one instance, the colonial administration had basically only ever allowed the 'reengagement of simple men' in the sense of engaging the same people constantly on plantations and despite occasional pressure from employers to promote the recruitment of families. The law did allow for wages to accompany workers but this provision was so hedged about and put such greater obligations on the employer that it was rarely used. Allowing families to reside near the workface did lead more towards the desirability of traditional society and the creation of a permanent wage-labour force.
41 This may be thought to result of a remedy as it is common to assert that Papua New Guinea scientists. in L.H. Batt and D. Keane (eds), Melanesia: The Uprising of Isua, Bismarck and Caledonia Challenge (Hague, New Guinea (The University Press, Cambridge, p. 11), 1971.
the entire episode indeed must have been highly disconnecting to those who, like the Administration himself, ‘knowing anything of the native mentality’ found it ‘quite incomprehensible that the natives who belong to different tribes, and who possess hereditary enmities against each other should wish their differences and continue in a general demonstration’.

The Raukku Treaty in the same vein was said, ‘the alarming thing is that the matter was well organised’ (Woodward, op. cit., p. 90).


Such convoluted delayed 52 a year but the number of people under indenture at the beginning of the second world war period exceeded the number under indenture, or under agreement, post-war. However it has not been possible to take account of the prewar civil actions against workers for damages and this should be done for a valid comparison. It is not likely that such actions were significant.

G.D. Collins, An Approach of the Highlands Labour Scheme (Department of Labour, Port Moresby, no date, p. 1). By 1940 rehabilitation of indentured labour was due to restoration point (Legge, op. cit., p. 28; and Heather Reid, op. cit., p. 12). The unfulfilled indenture (Papua New Guinea) severity in labour matters of the Australian military administration during the second world war probably had an effect in further delaying the post-war supply.

Employers were changed a ‘hanging for’ but this was below the cost of the operation to the administration (G.D. Collins, op. cit., p. 24).

Curtin Report, op. cit., as in footnote 55, p. 33. As elsewhere, however, people in the Highlands generally did not renew their contracts; see for example Sukhie Hatunku, Leadership and Socio-Economic Change in Sewaumea, New Guinea Highlands, New Guinea Research Bulletin No. 45 (The New Guinea Research Unit, Port Moresby and The Australian University, Canberra, 1972) p. 16.

Curtin Report, op. cit., p. 33. However for recent data separate figures for workers under indenture and for those working as part-time labourers. They form part of the same ‘informal category of strangers and informally employed people’ (Curtin, op. cit., p. 33).


Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, H. of R., 18 August 1946, pp. 11-12, Hartley said: I suggest that we will see the situation more clearly if we recognize the present measures as indicating the direction of changes which are just beginning and which will gather pace in the next few years. What we do now for our people in the Highlands will decide.


That, p. 230.
