

cause some controversy among their intended public, since they differ in some details from local renditions. The Vaitupuan tradition has a distinctly political tinge: it plays down LMS involvement, it justifies the selective veneration shown to certain ancestors, and it helps to explain a special relationship with the people of Funafuti, who helped pay off the debt.

The question of which, if any, history is authoritative therefore becomes contentious. That may be the reason why the oral accounts collected by Doug Munro are not published along with the translated article and documents. Even though they have been used as source material, they are the one incomplete element in this innovative piece of historiography.

The Vaitupuan must have the final say. The achievement they commemorate each year is a substantial one. While the actual size of the debt is difficult to calculate in modern currency, it must have seemed enormous at the time. Yet a resource-poor community of no more than 4-500 people, working in bursts over five years, cut enough tons of copra to repay the debt by the due date. All at a time of steadily falling copra prices. No wonder they celebrate!

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Fiji's Economic History, 1874-1939: Studies of Capitalist Colonial Development. By Bruce Knapman. ANU National Centre for Development Studies, Pacific Research Monograph No.15, Canberra, 1987. 153pp. Australian price: \$15.00.

FROM AN historiography that is overwhelmingly divided between 'Fijian' and 'Indian' issues, it is refreshing to read a recent publication that is firmly directed towards a discussion of issues on a thematic, national basis. In examining the history of Fiji's colonial economy — 'the spread, functioning and impact of capitalism in Fiji' — between 1874 and 1939, Knapman both documents the past and elucidates Fiji's troubled present.

Fiji's Economic History does not attempt a comprehensive history but, rather, is a collection of six case studies sandwiched between an introduction, in which Knapman deftly sketches the broad outlines of British colonial policy and the background to the colony's economic development, and a concluding general chapter that addresses the broader issues of how far the Fiji situation fits into the theoretical debate on the causes of colonial underdevelopment. The case studies deal with the dominance of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company in export growth; continuity and change in the non-capitalist economy; the demise of the white sugar planter; the nature of the colony's dependence for shipping on the Union Steam Ship Company and the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company; competition and collusion among the major merchant firms, and exchange rate policy during the depression.

Readers who have not been educated in the technology and sacred lore of the economist may find models of production, calculations of profitability, the intricacies of exchange rates, and, quite simply, the quantity of statistical material, to be heavy going, off-putting perhaps, but persistence will be rewarded because Knapman provides valuable insight into many features of Fiji's colonial past. The author has drawn on a wide range of sources, many of them unused by other historians, and the work is fully documented.

In his discussions of export growth and the dominance of the CSR, Knapman clearly demonstrates the factors that enabled the CSR to prosper against international trends. These included the backing of Australian capital, the capacity to keep the price to

growers low, and transfer pricing, for example, but also important was the way in which its near-monopoly in the sugar industry was used to apply leverage in such matters as taxation and labour regulation. These conclusions might be expected, just as the demise of the white sugar planter followed inevitably from the ending of indenture and the loss of a cheap source of easily-controlled labour.

In other parts of his work, however, Knapman issues a direct challenge to accepted orthodoxies. He shows, for example, that merchant firms like Burns Philp — a frequent target for left-wing theorists — might well have made higher profits with their money safely invested in Australia. Even more significant, however, is Knapman's examination of the non-capitalist economy. He shows that Fijians were involved not only in the production of crops to meet taxation levies, but were producing cash crops over and above the needs of affluent subsistence — cash crops that were used mostly to cover the costs of consumption and contributions to church. But against the commonly-held view that the rural Fijian economy was 'stagnant', Knapman shows that a significant proportion of Fijians, some 17% by 1936, had broken away from village life, mostly for wage employment. The evidence of Fijian economic activity demonstrates the weakness of the belief — almost a creed among white officials in the first half of the twentieth century — that 'a culture of individualism is a necessary and sufficient condition for development to occur' (p.47).

The colonial authorities are generally portrayed as unwilling to tax, unwilling to spend, unwilling to borrow and, on major policy issues, out-gunned by Fiji's large commercial interests. The government's role is considered as it is relevant, and as part of the final, largely theoretical chapter. The conclusion serves an integrative function, while being primarily directed towards the author's overall position — that deterministic arguments do not satisfactorily explain the economic history of colonial Fiji, and that universality of explanation is an impossible goal. Knapman makes an eloquent plea for 'exploration — aided by principles and theory — of distinctive country experiences' as a means of understanding the complexity of colonial economies (p.140).

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'*So Much That is New*'. Baldwin Spencer, 1860-1929. By D. J. Mulvaney and J. H. Calaby. University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne, 1985. 492pp. Australian price: \$33.50

BALDWIN SPENCER collected many honours during his lifetime. They include a CMG, a knighthood, Fellowship of the Royal Society of London, honorary degrees from Oxford and Melbourne, and the Society of Artists Medal. Amongst the offices he held were the chairmanship of the Melbourne University Professorial Board and the Directorship of the National Museum of Victoria. He served as vice-president of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library, Museums and National Gallery of Victoria, chairman of the War Memorials Advisory Committee, Special Commissioner of the Commonwealth Government and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, president of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, and president of the Victorian Football League. Since his death in 1929, Spencer is remembered as the joint author of books on the Australian Aborigines, *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (1904), author of *The Native Tribes of the Northern Territory* (1914), a participant, through his books, in the debates about Australian