

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).

BARRIE MACDONALD

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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

Aboriginal totemism and society conducted by Fraser, Lang, Durkheim, and Westermarck, a patron of Australian painting, and as a yanner with bushmen, eccentrics, and bohemians.

One wonders then about the purpose to be served by a long biography that argues that Spencer has been underrated as an anthropologist, unappreciated by the Australian public, frustrated in most of his aims by unsympathetic politicians and colleagues, and unsupported by his society wife.

In seeking to rekindle an interest in Spencer by presenting his life from a partisan point of view, the authors, Mulvaney and Calaby, have missed the opportunity to develop themes of general interest. This detailed work paradoxically fails to take us beyond a superficial rendering of a long and eventful career. *So Much That is New* is a very useful history book and certainly it is the definitive chronicle of Spencer's work. However, as a biography it is flawed. The authors almost appear to use the details of Spencer's life to obscure the man. To bring Spencer back within the human orbit requires that we attempt to read between the lines Mulvaney and Calaby provide us with.

Spencer was a man of diverse interests and talents and he championed many causes outside the confines of his own biology department. To have had any chance of success, each required the active support of powerful local politicians, businessmen, educators, and connoisseurs. Yet for the most part Spencer's activities in these areas did not go beyond participation on numerous committees (usually as chairman), writing submissions and letters, and the passing of motions. He remained 'The Professor', failing to realise that he was operating in an alien and unsympathetic milieu. He had drive, ability, and connections, but these were insufficient to compensate for the absence from Melbourne of influential learned societies, liberal politicians, art patrons, or indeed of most of the accoutrements of metropolitan civil life.

Spencer's significant biological research studies were virtually restricted to the years 1886-1900, overlapping with anthropological fieldwork and writing. At this time he combined his professorship with an honorary directorship of the National Museum of Victoria; in addition he was secretary and editor of the Royal Society of Victoria.

The values Spencer inherited from his Manchester mercantile and religious background seemed to sit uncomfortably with his artistic and intellectual temperament. Instead of commercial empires, Spencer tried to create academic ones, but his interests and energies were spread too thinly. Activity seems to have been substituted for effectiveness.

Aborigines described Spencer as 'all-day-pick-'em-up-pick-'em-up', while his colleague, Gillen, thought of him as '... working like a steam hammer'. On fieldwork he was 'never idle for 10 minutes', skinning birds all day even when the temperature reached 115°. Spencer's vacations (never with his family as he found vacations at the seaside cottage very depressing) were a matter of early risings, striding through the bush at a feverish pace, constant botanizing, and punctual dining. No wonder that his retirement from the university, but not from numerous committees, was accompanied by a bout of alcoholism.

Despite the bonhomie and camaraderie of his relationships with men and with female academics, Spencer was unable to form close relationships. He remained alone and his achievements were individual ones.

If Spencer was able to compensate for possible inner contradictions and for the deficiencies of Melbourne society through feverish public activity, his wife, Lillie, was not so lucky. She missed her family and friends at home in England and the company of her husband in Australia. Consequently she spent much of her married life travelling between the two, her reluctance to settle in Melbourne being indicated by her resistance to purchasing rather than renting a house there. Yet her treatment by the authors of this

biography is highly unsympathetic. Spencer is described as having 'a token marriage with an unsympathetic woman' while his inability to grapple with his drinking problem is partly blamed on her lack of companionship and support, things she had never received from her husband.

In a now familiar scenario, it was another woman half his age, Jean Hamilton, who assisted in Spencer's rehabilitation and gave him his 'two most perfectly happy years'. These years, spent quietly in London working on the manuscripts of *The Arunta* and *Across Australia* with Jean Hamilton as secretary and companion, came to an end with Spencer's ill-conceived expedition to Tierra del Fuego. Although accompanied by Hamilton, the winter and exposed circumstances proved too much for Spencer's heart. Spencer's inability to relax in his old age and draw satisfaction from his laurels is described by Mulvaney and Calaby as an 'impulsive and romantic predisposition towards outdoor life, a boyish eagerness for fresh scientific adventure'! Might this be their unconscious assessment that Spencer, like many men of unrelieved action, never quite grew up?

HARRY ALLEN

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John Batman and the Aborigines. By Alastair H. Campbell. Kibble Books, Malmsbury, Victoria, 1987. 288pp. Australian price: \$20 paperback, \$40 hardback.

THIS BOOK is an interesting addition to the rapidly-growing literature about relations between Australian Aborigines and British settlers. Batman was an important figure in early colonial society. Native-born son of convict parents, he grew up in New South Wales, transferred his operations to Van Diemens Land in the 1820s, and in the following decade led the exodus of island settlers to Port Phillip. Despite premature death Batman had an active and vigorous life; his biography touches on many of the major themes of colonial history. Thrusting, aggressive, and ambitious, he was the epitome of the first generation of Australians who refused to accept inferior status just because he happened to be born Australian and the son of a convict. Campbell admires some aspects of his subject's personality, but he does not really like him.

Campbell does not intend his book to be a conventional biography. He is more interested in the circumstances of Batman's times than with the man himself. This applies particularly to Batman's relations with the Aborigines, and indeed the book is written with an eye to contemporary events, Campbell hoping that his work will encourage European Australians to 'openly examine their roots in Australia, and that it will benefit Aborigines today in their struggle to reclaim their history'.

The most interesting section of the book is about Batman's treaty with the Port Phillip Aborigines. Campbell makes several points which add significantly to our understanding of the episode. He argues that the members of the Port Phillip Association were more liberal than many of their contemporaries, wishing to avoid the disastrous conflict with the Aborigines they had experienced in Tasmania. At much the same time Colonial Office officials were drawing the same conclusions about events in the island and attempted to provide far greater respect for land rights in the two new colonies of the 1830s — South Australia and New Zealand.

But good intentions notwithstanding, Campbell establishes that Batman largely faked the treaty. He argues that

(1) the Port Phillip tribes did not have chiefs capable of transferring land;