

CHAPTER 2

‘OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND’: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RACE AND LABOUR IN THE MACKAY DISTRICT, 1930s -1940s

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Abstract

This chapter endeavours to identify and discuss the labour and economic conditions of three groups, Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander people within the Mackay region. The time period for this analysis is from 1930 to the 1940s. The research will analyse the origins of differences where they exist as well as documenting similarities between the three groups. To achieve this task the investigator first gleaned informants' perceptions of labour and economic conditions from representatives of the three groups in the Mackay region for this period. For this task, the investigator engaged three older participants, living in Mackay, one from each of the groups mentioned above. Their oral histories are contextualised, where possible, with relevant academic accounts, and government publications to clarify the broad contexts, economic and industrial, in which these groups worked and interacted.

INTRODUCTION

The research begins by addressing the origins of the economic conditions experienced by the three racial groups mentioned above, before proceeding to reassess this legacy over the 1930's and 1940's. How durable, for example, were the effects of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, so strongly supported in the Mackay region by the union movement earlier in the century? Did the Pacific War result in greater employment opportunities for the three groups in the Mackay region? Were members of each Mackay group directed to specific industries by authorities during the Pacific war? Finally, in the immediate post-war context, in what industries did recruitment opportunities for the above-mentioned groups arise?

The main sources for this purpose are the participant interviews. The three participants were chosen as individuals who have intermarried and lived between the three cultures. The individuals interviewed in Mackay (2004-5) were Tim Kemp (Aboriginal), Robert Boah (South Sea Islander) and Waway Tapim (Torres Strait Islander). Throughout this project participants bear witness to a series of events, some of them unrecorded in the local context, and seen from a particular viewpoint (Hamilton, 1994, p. 16). Additionally, Mullins' work (1996) and Fatnowna's oral history (1989) remain important local sources because they contextualise the accounts and experience of individuals. Secondary sources also

Section One: Global Formations

determine a timeframe within the decades under examination and can be aligned with the local oral histories undertaken. They may in some instances be used to verify oral information of which historians would otherwise be sceptical. Other useful authors as secondary sources include Sharp (1992) and May (1994) who examine the Torres Strait Islander people within their work. Blake (2001) lays the foundation for understanding relevant Aboriginal issues while May (1994) sheds light on the Aboriginal Protection Act and its effects on Torres Strait Islander people living on the mainland, including Mackay. Moore (1985) and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (1992) document the situation of South Sea Islander people including federal government prejudice and employment from a Mackay perspective. The same Human Rights report (1992) also makes reference to the other two groups in this research, and includes policy information which builds on Moore's (1985) work. Moore's report and interviews (1979), broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in the same year, are in turn an extension of oral history involving Mackay South Sea Islander people. Additionally, research by Evans and Scott (1995) and by Saunders (1993) addresses issues of labour and segregation in Queensland during the period under examination. While Evans and Scott emphasise state control over Aborigines in the context of the war years, this chapter makes a less pessimistic assessment of the outcomes of war time employment on the basis of testimony from the Mackay participants. Saunders' interesting analysis of war-time conditions, mentioned above, deals almost exclusively with black American GIs in Queensland and ensuing policies of segregation from the white population.

LEGISLATION AND EARLY CONDITIONS

In assessing the origins of labour and economic conditions experienced by the three groups and their continuing impact over the 1930s and 1940s, the authors will begin by identifying previous policies that impacted upon the three groups. Twentieth century government and union policies, enshrined in the turn of the century Immigration Restriction Acts, were initially set in place to protect people from social and work place exploitation. For example, the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld) was developed to "make provision for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal half-caste inhabitants of the colony" (Blake, 2001, p. xi). The scheme was "based on humanitarian grounds" and "was a positive attempt to help" Aboriginal people (Blake, 2001, p. 237). The aim was to directly involve the state, while bypassing mission societies and benevolent associations (Blake, 2001, p. 238). Other relevant legislation affecting the three racial groups under examination included Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1901, the Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act 1939, and Pacific wartime and manpower acts.

Ongoing issues dealt with under the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897 included the restriction of the supply or sale of opium to Aborigines, the

formation of a labour force and the appointment of a Government Protector. The Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act of 1939 continued these policies. It did include South Sea Islander people to a degree, as the HREOC (1992, p. 19) confirms that South Sea Islander people who were children of "Aboriginal Mothers from 1934 and Pacific Islanders who associated with Aboriginals could be brought under the control of the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 and 1934". The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld) and the updated Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act 1939 had been transplanted north to the Torres Strait Islands and its indigenous people where similar policy strategies were set in place (Sharp, 1992, p. 110). As a result, this piece of legislation affected all three groups in this project including the Aboriginal communities of Cherbourg, Woorabinda and in Mackay where South Sea Islander people were gathered. The Act hinged on the creation of three strategically selected Reserves across Queensland where Aboriginal people were to be relocated (Blake, 2001, p. 3).

It was suggested in 1895 by government supporters of the Reserve movement that once the movement gained momentum, three years training would provide a labour force on established Reserves for coastal cultivation of cane, coffee or other seasonal crops. This had been attempted previously in the late 1860s, but failed in the case of Sandy Creek, Mackay, and at Baker's Creek, situated ten kilometres south of Mackay. On twentieth-century Reserves like Cherbourg (or Barambah as it was then known), there was a vigorous campaign to hire out labour, to the point that on occasions when work was not available, the Protector allowed residents to look for work away from the Reserve (Blake, 2001, pp. 119-122, 126). This process applied in all Aboriginal communities across Queensland including Woorabinda the community closest to Mackay and the location from which Mr Kemp, one of the project participants, was to emanate years later.

The Protector determined that the greater the paid labour force employed from his reserve, the greater their economic dependence. Therefore, to generate revenue, the Cherbourg Protector and Reserve Protectors elsewhere decided on wage deductions. The majority of the deductions came from those employed outside the Reserve, while smaller deductions were taken from Aboriginal workers who worked on Reserves. The case of Cherbourg is instructive because it is the Reserve from which several local Torres Strait Islander evacuees came before arriving in Mackay some years later. Local knowledge suggests that Torres Strait Islander families also travelled from Woorabinda to Mackay in later years as well strengthening their links to Aboriginal communities across the state (Blake, 2001, pp. 139, 141). The only alternative for Aboriginal people wishing to escape community wage deductions was an exemption process that excluded them from the reserve work force, pay deductions or having to live on a Reserve. The exemption process involved an Aboriginal person applying for an exemption from the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897

(Qld). There were criteria that had to be met and the application had to be assessed by the Protector who then, either authorised or declined it. This was the situation of Mr Kemp the Aboriginal participant in this project, who was granted exemption from the Woorabinda Reserve (Blake, 2001, p. 136).

Like Aborigines of the period, Torres Strait Islander people were under the supervision of a Protector and white Teachers. As with Aboriginal people, all travel, work and social activities was monitored and authorised by a Protector. The system in the Torres Strait also deducted wages to generate revenue for each community. Those deductions were generated to financially support each island group in a manner similar to the Aboriginal 'settlement maintenance'. During the 1930s the shell industry was operating at its height. Therefore, each Islander group was economically comfortable and less likely to migrate to the mainland. In January 1936, Torres Strait Islanders participated in an inter-island strike that called for autonomy and a self-sustained lifestyle (Sharp, 1992, p. 112). The result of the 1936 inter-island strike resulted in the Islanders winning recognition as separate people under the Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939 or the new law as they called it. The Torres Strait Islanders Act granted a significant measure of autonomy to Island councils.

In the case of Mackay, it was the sugar industry that employed most Islanders (HREOC, 1992, p 14). This policy went against the rationale for introducing the very first Pacific Islanders who were recruited in 1863 for work in the pastoral industry in the southern Queensland district (Moore, 1985, p. 129). The Naturalisation of non-European people was addressed in the Aliens Act 1861-67 and put an immediate stop to South Sea Islanders even considering applying for or receiving citizenship. In contrast, among non-Europeans entering the country, Africans and Asians were allowed to apply for citizenship (HREOC, 1992, p 14). The first Act designed specifically for the South Sea Islander indentured labourers was the 1868 Polynesian Labourers Act. The Polynesian Labourers Act stemmed from the horrific abuse and the brutal kidnapping of some of the first indentured labourers over the first five years of the recruiting process. In addition, the policy intended regulating recruitment and employment in Queensland. The policy included a nominated wage over a three year period, a paid return trip to the home island, food, shelter, clothing and medical care. That process included Mackay, although not automatically where health care and paid return trips were concerned (Moore, 1985, 129). Subsequently, an amendment in 1877 to the above Act put an end to work opportunities for South Sea Islander people employed as bush hands and servants. The policy prevented pastoralists operating at distances thirty miles or more from the coast from hiring South Sea Islander as indentured labourers.

The Australian South Sea Islander community developed its character from the 1880s to the 1920s under the policies introduced by the authorities of the day. Although a sugar industry enjoyed stable conditions from 1885 to 1892, the Australian Government gave warning that South Sea Islander recruitment

was to be scaled down in following years. The result was an Act that would have significant impact upon the South Sea Islander indentured labour pool, the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. The Immigration Restriction Act was developed to restrict the immigration of non-whites particularly Chinese into Australia. This was the forerunner to the White Australia policy that was gaining majority support in federal parliament. However, it was the South Sea Islander indentured labourers who suffered from that policy and consequently were to be repatriated. The recruitment of indentured Islanders was to cease by 1904 and the repatriation of all South Sea Islander indentured labourers was to be completed by 1907. The Polynesian Labourers Act remained in force until 1904 with the end of the recruiting trade (Moore, 1985, pp. 129 & 131). Moore's (1985, p. xvix) view is that the Islander group which was allowed to remain became "insulated from the mainstream life in the Mackay district". While distance and inadequate communication isolated Islanders still in Mackay, the policies relating to race and the sugar industry remained in force (Moore, 1985, p. xvix). Those South Sea Islander people who, under certain criteria were exempted from repatriation and allowed to settle in Australia, became a small minority of permanent Australians. But after the repatriation period, trying to extract an existence was very hard for the South Sea Islander people, with successive policies restricting their employment opportunities. The White Australia policy retained majority support in federal parliament while Queensland unions also endorsed the policy (Moore, 1985, pp. 131, 274).

ISLANDERS AND THE SUGAR INDUSTRY AFTER WORLD WAR ONE

Generally, the union movement continued to restrict non-European employment in the sugar industry, continuously supporting the White Australia movement and discriminating against and denying South Sea Islander people equal opportunity to employment and other living conditions. Included as non-Europeans, in the Mackay region were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under the category of 'coloured labour'. To the Investigator it would appear that South Sea Islander people could pass as members of Aboriginal or Torres Strait groups in Mackay. All three groups were classed similarly as 'coloured labour' (HREOC, 1992, p 14). So successful was the labour movement's fight against 'coloured' labour in the sugar industry that by 1910, sugar grown and harvested by white labour in Queensland reached 92.8% of total production. The labour movement continued with discriminatory policies into the 1940s. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) vehemently opposed South Sea Islander and other non-European workers, which would include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people re-entering the sugar industry. Where necessary the AWU used industrial awards to bypass the federal government's resistance to discrimination against the South Sea Islander indentured labourers (HREOC, 1992, pp. 19-20, 29).

Finally in July 1919 the Queensland Industrial Court introduced an Award that ushered in two decades of restrictions aimed at excluding South Sea Islanders from working on European farms. Around this time, two natural catastrophes impacted upon South Sea Islanders in Mackay: a powerful cyclone in 1918, followed by an influenza epidemic in 1919 that had decimated the South Sea Islander communities. The cyclone destroyed many of the South Sea Islanders flimsy houses while the epidemic took the lives of South Sea Islanders in Mackay. The final blow was the 1919 Sugar Award that was passed while the influenza epidemic was raging and excluded South Sea Islanders from employment in that industry. In the case of Mackay and the award, the last full blood Aboriginal persons in Mackay were displaced in 1922, although those Aboriginal people who had married into South Sea Islander families were still affected (Moore, 1985, p. 333).

If not for the support of several sympathetic farmers and three mill plantations in the Mackay region the South Sea Islander population would have experienced ongoing unemployment (HREOC, 1992, pp. 18, 89-90). It must be noted here that, through grants of freehold and leasehold land, however unsuitable and menial, the mill plantations - Farleigh, Homebush and Palms mills - can be seen as acting sympathetically by providing 'coloured' workers with a means to eke out an existence for coloured workers around the Mackay region after 1906 (Moore, 1985, p. 334). Between the wars, the remnant of the exempted South Sea Islander people earned a living working on small farms no greater than forty acres. The government, supported by the AWU, passed an award that banned 'coloured' people, in particular South Sea Islanders, from cutting cane on farms over forty acres unless they were owned by a South Sea Islander person (HREOC, 1992, p. 14). An estimated fifty of those forty acre farms that were leased to South Sea Islander people by three mills in the Mackay region. The blocks leased from the mills were usually ones that European farmers had no use for, were uncleared bushland or were situated on the side of a hill or a mountain. Moore (1985, p. 332) indicates that those remaining South Sea Islander people in Mackay "lived scattered around the old plantations areas on leased land". The participant Mr Boah, his grandfather, also called Robert Boah, leased land at Alexandra west of Mackay. It can be presumed that he had Islanders working for him, while Mrs Boah's grandmother and her first husband, Robert Kia, also leased land around Mackay near the Leap, north of Mackay. Family oral history confirms that Mr Kia did have other Islanders working for him and he was known to, and had contact with the grandfather of Mr Boah the participant (Moore, 1985, p. 335). Very few South Sea Islander people still leased forty acre farms by the 1930s. The reason for this was that by the 1930s the leasees were too old and their ages would have ranged from sixty to eighty years. An "indigence allowance" was granted to forty-five of the South Sea Islander elderly in the 1930s. The total amount of the Government's "indigence allowance" came to one pound one and eight pence a month, until the 1940s when the Labor government introduced the old age pension in its place (Moore, 1985, pp. 132, 334, 336).

Noel Fatnowna (1989) recalls that from 1906 through to 1940s, some of his South Sea Islander acquaintances were working illegally in the sugar industry. Mr Fatnowna recalls his father and other South Sea Islander people organising with sympathetic cane farmers to strip cane for planting at night under the cover of darkness. That task, took place after the white workers had finished in the field and gone home for the night. Mr Fatnowna clearly recalls this sort of activity in 1936. Government legislation, industrial awards, federal government members, plantation owners and support among the general white population in the Mackay area for the White Australia policy provoked such clandestine behaviour (Moore, 1979, p. 66). In keeping with Moore's account (1985, p. 335), Mr Fatnowna's recollections of illegal work in the Mackay cane industry suggest that the South Sea Islanders in question did not have connections to other South Sea Islanders who leased or owned land. In all probability, there were not enough South Sea Islander land owners to offer work to the remaining South Sea Island population in the Mackay region.

WORLD WAR TWO LEGISLATION

As stated above, South Sea Islander people continued working in the sugar industry but under the restricted conditions discussed above. By contrast, Torres Strait Islanders were content to live and work in the Islands until the Pacific War brought change to most of the local inhabitants. It was not until the labour shortage, prompted by the war, that work opportunities became easier to access for the South Sea Islander people as well as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. During the 1930s most identified Aboriginal people were living on Reserves that had been set aside for them. Generally, the labour force on Reserves was used to supply surrounding industries. Around the Queensland Reserves of Cherbourg and Woorabinda, the cattle and agriculture industries thrived with the aid of available Aboriginal labour (Blake, 2001, pp. 117-125). For the Aboriginal participant in this project, the cattle industry was his anticipated source of employment. Mr Kemp (Interview, 24 April 2006) recalls the expectation that:

you are from the cattle industry and the cattle industry people are short of labour,

implying that when he left school and went to work, it was inevitably into the cattle industry. In Mackay during the 1930s most Aboriginal people still occupied a marginal status; 'coloured' people were restricted from working in the sugar industry. Instead, Aboriginal people were directed by government and other nominated institutions to work opportunities under the direction by the Protector (Interview, Kemp, 24 May 2006). Although South Sea Islander working conditions were also restricted around Mackay during the 1930s, there were other options, Fatnowna testifies, including working illegally for sympathetic non-indigenous farmers. Yet they continued to operate as an

invisible group, as Aboriginal people had done earlier in colonial society - 'out of sight out of mind' (Moore, 1985, pp. 129, 140-141).

Surprisingly, prior to World War Two, the Torres Strait Islander people were brave enough to strike and were awarded a major part of their claims. However, their job choices remained limited. After Australia entered the war on 3 September 1939, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people did not hesitate to enlist in the Australia Defence Force. Although Aboriginal people had seen active service during World War One they were still not encouraged to apply for the armed services in 1939. Pervasive racism remained throughout Australia during the 1930s and 1940s, even when threatened by Japan. Torres Strait Islander men had little option but to join the Defence Force, given that the shell industry had wound down with the Japanese threat in the Pacific region. It could be argued that, while not subject to conscription, their only real choice was one offered by government, namely the armed forces. Others reluctantly joined up after being denied work on the pearling luggers or in other small maritime enterprises (Hall, 1989, pp. 39, 51-52). The last available option would have been a return to their former hunter-gatherer life style and dependence upon the Protector. There were those who eagerly joined up and there were those who reluctantly joined the wartime defence forces as a work option. The Torres Strait Islander participant Mr Tapim (Interview, 4 May 2004) recalls on this subject that:

I was sixteen years of age. We ... put our age up to eighteen. We join to help fight for our country.

By the end of the war three thousand Aboriginal people and eight hundred and fifty Torres Strait Islanders had enlisted. Seven hundred and seventy Torres Strait Islanders had served in the units based in the Torres Straits (Hall, 1995, pp. 8, 11, 16, 30). Fatnowna (Moore, 1979, p. 59) states that South Sea Islanders could not join the armed services unless they identified as Aboriginal people. Ultimately most did; South Sea Islander men denied their South Sea Islander identity and took on an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity in order to join up (Moore, 1979, p. 59). Horner (2004 p.12) writes that World War Two took priority over all social issues in Australia. Both coloured and white people, in the face of existing government policies, enlisted to defend their country against the Japanese forces invading the Asia-Pacific. During the World War Two, legislation resulted in improved circumstances for many Aboriginal and South Sea Islander people. A major effort was made by government to sustain the war effort in such areas as agriculture, including the Mackay sugar industry, as well as the cattle industry to maintain food supplies. With the wartime labour shortage, work became more readily available for Mr Boah in the sugar industry. Nor was Mr Kemp short of work the cattle industry at this period. Both these groups lived under wartime conditions more closely resembling those experienced by the rest of Australia's citizens in respect to access to coupons and everyday restrictions.

A related issue explored in the interviews was whether the participants were directed to specific industries by authorities of the day or chose their own workplace. The establishment of a war-time Allied Works Council and the impact upon exempted South Sea Islander people in Mackay brought employment issues to the fore. During January 1942 a Manpower Directorate was founded which generated a list of occupations to identify human resources required to support the war effort. The aim of the list was to prevent the loss of skilled workers from essential services. Labour controls were set in place for the management and administration of armed services and industry. Early in 1942, as the Japanese advanced into the Pacific, an estimated 100 000 men were enlisted into the armed forces resulting in a labour crisis. In 1942 the Manpower Director authorised and monitored persons moving from industry to industry. The regulations set in place by the Directorate to manage the crisis of the Second World War influenced the daily activities of individuals more than any other Government operation of the early 1940s (Australian War Museum, 2006, p. 1).

The federal government had the authority through the Manpower Directorate to identify industries considered as 'essential' and to exempt people from the armed forces to maintain an 'essential service'. Unemployed people had seven days to register with an employment service. Moreover, the Government through the Directorate determined where each man or woman would give his or her services, whether in the civil industry, war industry or the armed services. Its control extended to such matters as the prevention of service or enlistment, unauthorised employment and the resignation of former employees from the work place. In addition, it restricted supervisor's dismissal rights, directed individuals from job site to job site and could coerce information from individuals (Australian War Museum, 2006, p. 1).

An example of this control occurred in the case of Roy Schaber (Laughton, 1995, p. 6), an Aboriginal man who had to obtain permission from the Manpower Directorate to leave his position on a Northern Territory cattle station at Mount Riddock. Schaber then moved onto Alice Springs and Adelaide before enlisting in the Australian Borneo Campaign in 1943. Mr Kemp (Interview, 10 April 2005) recalls people going to the Court House to speak to the Manpower officers. Mr Kemp was well aware of Manpower and the effect it had on the labour force. Mr After many years in the cattle industry he (Kemp Interview, 10 April, 2005) recalls applying for a position on the railway:

I realised that I only knew stock work so I tried to get some work in the railway. Manpower said no I had to stay in the cattle industry. Manpower told you where you went to work.

Under co-ercive war-time conditions under which 'black workers suffered equally' as whites (Saunders, 1995, pp.144-45), he also recalls that men who had left the Army had to see the Manpower Directorate to get a job cutting cane. Mr Fatnowna (Moore, 1979) did not make mention of the Directorate in his

oral history. Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May, 2004) suggests that the Manpower process may have been phased out by the time Fatnowna was of working age. The investigator recollects his mother informing him that her father a South Sea Islander had to work two days a week on road works in Mackay. Those two days would have been organised by Manpower. The investigator's grandfather rode his bicycle from Balnagowan to Mackay on each of those days. He started at five o'clock in the morning. After work he arrived home after dark around six thirty or seven o'clock. In Mackay the sugar industry had been the main local industry that employed South Sea Islander people. With the end of the war and the labour shortage, they did not see the need to venture outside the industry. Prior to 1942 they could have enlisted in the armed forces as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person (Moore, 1979, p. 59). After the war, with skills learnt while in the service s, Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders were more able to leave less skilled jobs in the sugar industry and venture into employment areas that white Australians were privy to (Hall, 1995, p. 18).

After the wartime evacuation of several Torres Strait Islands in the early 1940s, several Torres Strait Islander families arrived at the Cherbourg community. After a short period, the majority of Islander families left the community for the warmer climate of the coast which included Mackay. Manpower had regulated employment for white women; however in the case of Islander women there is no evidence to suggest that they were obligated to approach Manpower for work. It seems that they obtained their employment by word of mouth from white friends who knew them on the Islands. This network of Island whites and Indonesians were their source of employment. There were occasions when Torres Strait Islander people operated outside the normal procedures and were not required to register with the Manpower Directorate. This is evident from the fact that they went about finding their own employment (Osborne 1997, pp. 44-46).

AUSTERITY

The Second World War also placed a demand upon the basic every day items in Australian homes. The result was reorganisation by government of Australia's economy and human resources as it emerged from the depression. By 1942 Australia had witnessed the Australia's Prime Minister, John Curtin, called for self-denial or abstinence from material goods, a request that "reached into every home in Australia" (Osborne, 1997, p. 187). Shortages and rationing of every day items became commonplace. There was a constant shortage of tobacco and beer for the general public, although those items were never rationed. The rationing of petrol began in 1940 and only people classified as 'essential users' could purchase tyres and tubes for vehicles during that period. In May 1942 the Prime Minister requested that people make do with what clothing they had. The following month, Australian families were granted equal number of coupons for linen and clothing requirements. During July of 1942, tea also became a

rationed item. In August 1942 sugar was rationed and also meat by January 1944 (Osborne, 1997, p. 187).

One exception to this trend was on the Aboriginal Reserves. Mr Kemp (Interview, 10 April 2005) recalls Aboriginal people on the Woorabinda Aboriginal community not having to use coupons during this period of use. Mr Kemp recalled that there was no tea or sugar made available on the community. He (Interview, 24 May 2006) stated "if you had money you just went and brought it". Therefore, tea and sugar would have been available although blankets and clothing were still issued by the government. Mr Kemp (Interview, 24 May 2006) also stated:

I remember the graziers going to town and swapping their meat, butter and milk coupons for tea coupons. The graziers could do that because they owned cattle and had access to the meat, butter and milk by making their own.

Her Kemp (Interview, 10 April 2005) went on to state:

I had to use a coupon that my brother had to get a hat once. To get coupons you had to go to the court house and speak to a JP. Aboriginal people that were exempt from the Act had to get coupons.

It can be assumed that Mr Kemp's brother must have been exempted to be in possession of the coupons. Mr Kemp (Interview, 10 April 2005) added that the allocation of coupons "ceased at the end of the war in 1945 and that was the last I heard of it". Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May 2004) recalls his family using coupons during the Pacific War. Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May 04) said:

yes I was small at the time. I remember you had a book and when you went to buy things at the shop you had to take a coupon out of the book. I remember you could not buy rice. I like fish and rice so that is why I remember. Plenty fish but no rice.

Similarly, in the north of the state, Mrs Henaway a South Sea Islander from Ayr (Moore 1979, p. 72) states:

I remember the war years when you had to have a docket (coupon) to go and get your ration of butter, tea, milk and meat. I stood (in line) at a butcher's shop.

The investigator's mother recalls her father, a first generation South Sea Islander and indentured labourer from Buka Island in the Solomon Island group using government coupons for the family's basic foods in Mackay. Fatnowna also recalls that his family had to use coupons during World War Two. South Sea Islander people had to use coupons for rationed food like other Mackay residents. Obviously Torres Strait Islander people living on the mainland would also have used the coupons to obtain basic store foods during the early 1940s.

When the Torres Strait Islander evacuees reached Mackay in late 1943 this season of austerity was still in effect. All Australians were living a life of self-denial

to support the war effort. Coupons were used to buy basic store foods. Torres Strait Islander evacuees on the main land were far better off then the people left behind on the outer islands of the Torres Straits. Those Torres Strait Islander people never got the chance to shop for basic store foods. The Island folk did little shopping for basic store foods before or during the Pacific War. On the Islands Torres Strait Islander people had been accustomed to some store food with the cash payment that their menfolk worked for on the shell boats. Their men folk added to basic foods by often bringing turtle or dugong from the shelling boats that they worked on. Like other Australians, Torres Strait Islander evacuees on the mainland, considered their circumstances as either an irritation or an inconvenience. This contrasted with the situation of Torres Strait Islanders still resident in the Straits, where the basic store foods just never arrived at all (Osborne, 1997, p. 188).

For those Islander evacuees at Cherbourg, Osborne (1997, p. 39) states that they:

queued with the local women for rations of basic foods such as flour, rice, sugar tea, jam. Vegetables and meat from the settlements gardens and herbs were handed out on certain days.

The fact that the settlement had gardens confirms that Aboriginal communities also supplemented their rations with produce in a manner similar to South Sea Islander people in Mackay. Once in Mackay Torres Strait Islander evacuees approached the courthouse for their coupons. This was a legal process because Torres Strait Islander evacuees were granted permission to leave the Cherbourg community for reasons of work. Islander evacuees requested a meeting with the Protector O'Leary and, according to Osborne (1997, p. 44) told him that:

All the families want to go out because we are not under the act and we are free people I want to go, go find a job.

Once Torres Strait Islander families had been granted permission to leave the Cherbourg community, they had to comply with the coupon regulations like the rest of the general public.

During the period of coupons, relief work programs and ebbing of cash flow, most South Sea Islander people in Mackay grew their own fruit and vegetables. Moore (1985, p. 226) states that:

taro and yam ... were planted by European and Islanders ... only few years after the labour trade commenced. A decade later yams and taro were commonplace on plantations.

This suggests that, when leaving the islands to return to Australia, South Sea Islander recruits brought with them edible plants to add to their Australian diets. South Sea Islander people are gardening people like those in Torres Strait, so it was only natural that they would continue with this practice in a period of wartime food shortage (Moore, 1985, p. 227). This supplemented what they received from their subsistence diets, coupons and relief work payment. The produce from the

gardens was for their personal use and also enabled them to barter for goods they did not have. Access to water was one reason why they often shifted residence and built their houses along the waterways around Mackay (Moore, 1985, pp. 226-227). As a child, Mr Boah's (Interview, 05 May 2004) family ate a lot of fish as he stated "plenty fish" and no doubt would have traded fish for vegetables. Along the river on the Palms side were springs named after South Sea Islander people. Mr Boah remembers at least five of these. Where Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May 2004) lived "we went to one of them springs and the others used to get all our taro". These springs had a lot of taro, watercress and yam growing wild. Unfortunately, after farmers started sinking wells and using irrigation during the 1960s, the springs all dried up. Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May 2004) attests:

They do planning (islander people) musta been a pretty big spread (taro and water cress) from here up to that house (demonstrates long distance). Now there's nothin because they've got the irrigation pump on it. It (spring water) used to always trickle down through there.

Mr Boah, to this day, still goes fishing in the same waterways of the Palms and Dumblerton Rocks that he fished in as a child. Often he informs the investigator of his fishing trips in the area and how and what he caught.

After Mr Boah moved to the northern Dumblerton side of the Pioneer River, he started work and depended on his cash payments. Mr Fatnowna (Moore, 1978, p. 68) also talks about his parents and his wife's parents:

they grew their own food there. My wife's people had one of the biggest vegetable gardens going ... they used to take their vegetables into the small towns ... and sell the vegetables. Many, many times I remember Islander people would come to our place to bring food for us – fish and sea foods. When they came they got vegetables to take home with them. We helped one another.

What they grew or hunted was then swapped for other food or goods during those lean years. The investigator recollects his mother informing him that her father had many varieties of vegetables in his garden. It also included tobacco and peanuts. Her family stopped gardening after her father, the investigator's grandfather, died in 1945. The older boys of the family had started work and did not have the time to attend to the established gardens. After the war, work and cash was once again becoming accessible so there was no urgent need for the gardens. As Mr Bobongie (Moore, 1978, p. 59) stated:

when they (South Sea Islander men) came back they couldn't fit in to the old ways. They wouldn't even come home. All the boys just left the old people on the farms.

This statement supports the theory that after the war, young South Sea Islander men did not always return to their former lifestyles. Instead, they choose work and

pay awards to which they had been denied prior to the war. This applies equally to most sugar farms in the Mackay area. As Mr Boah, (Interview, 5 May 2004) stated "you just have to walk down the road and get a job". Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were now granted permission to move across the state for work reasons away from their previous allocated work sites (HREOC, 1992, p 14).

There is some evidence to suggest that South Sea Islander people did work in the cattle industry in the 1940s. The investigator recollects his uncle Les Kia and his mother informing him of the days that he worked on a cattle property, south of Sarina and possibly over the Sarina range, from the early 1930s and late 1940s. At the end of a long period with a particular boss, he was awarded with a suit, a saddle and a return train ticket to Townsville. The investigator's uncle always talked with pride about the award and considered it to be a very generous gift in the late 1930s. Mr Kemp came to Mackay and, after working at the Sarina Sugar Mill to the south of the town, tried to obtain work in the railway before the war had ended. However his request was denied by the Manpower Directorate (Interview, 10 April 2005). He recollects there were no Aboriginal people coming off the Woorabinda or Cherbourg communities to work in the Mackay sugar industry at that time. The Torres Strait Islander evacuees were voluntarily emigrating from Cherbourg and later on, others moved from north Queensland to reside in the Mackay region. Aboriginal people were also migrating into the region to work in the sugar industry after the war. Previous government policy and awards had become less stringent in areas where the three groups were once formally denied access. The sugar industry in Mackay now provided labouring work on all cane farms and, in some cases, work was also available at the sugar mills in Mackay (HREOC, 1992, p 21).

POST WAR CONDITIONS AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The post war period continued these more promising labour trends. Mr Kemp the Aboriginal informant arrived in Mackay from Duaringa, north of Woorabinda (Interview, Kemp, 10 April 2005). He recalls Aboriginal people coming to Mackay from the southern towns on the Queensland coast to cut cane from the late 1940s, at a time when he himself was hired to work in Sarina. (Interview, Boah, 05 May 2004). Mr Boah recollects that his relatives organised work for him in the sugar industry when he left school. After the war, conditions did change and work became easier to obtain, although most opportunities remained in the sugar industry (Interview, Boah, 05 May 2004). The shell industry had been the major employer of Torres Strait Islander people prior to the Pacific War. The industry was resurrected after the Pacific War. However, when it failed, the Protector granted leave for men to work on the mainland (Hall, 1995, pp. 17-18). After the Pacific War Torres Strait Islander men were arriving on the Queensland coast to link up with their evacuated families and work opportunities. It can be assumed that Torres Strait Islander men were working in the cane industry from

the 1940s in the Mackay region (Hodes, 1998). Mr Boah also recalls South Sea Islander people coming from Rockhampton to work in the sugar industry in Mackay in the early 1950s (Interview, Boah, 05 May 2004). Mr Tapim came to Cairns to work in a cane cutting gang that was organised from Thursday Island by the Protector during the 1950s. He eventually, made his way to Mackay and began work on the railway (Interview, Tapim, 04 May 2004).

After the Pacific War Torres Strait Islander people were moving freely along the Queensland coast from the towns to which they were evacuated during the war. They travelled voluntarily to centres including Mackay, while others who had remained in the Straits moved to the mainland and chose their place of employment (Hall, 1995, pp. 17-18). Work opportunities were attractive in industries such as sugar industry, carpentry, plumbing, drivers, railway and other construction fields. In these occupations, their armed service skills could be utilised, resulting in better lifestyle for families. In post-war years, they were employed in better paying positions and enjoyed a comfortable standard of living in centres such as Mackay. This contrasted with the situation of Torres Strait Islander people in the Straits, where basic store foods, work opportunities and a mainland lifestyle were still not accessible (Osborne, 1997, p. 201).

For Aboriginal people, the labour shortage had also created work opportunities further afield. For example, Cherbourg people were granted permits to work in Bundaberg in the sugar industry. Aboriginal people were subject to the Aboriginal Act but work was now available at the award rate of pay. However, they were still subject to the Protector commissioning their pay packets for "settlement maintenance". The main reward was the fact that they were able to have time away from the community and still return after a stated period subject to the Protector (Blake, 2001, pp.139 -140). As for Aboriginal people in the Mackay area, work and recruitment was also more rewarding. Mr Boah (Interview, 05 May 2004) recollects Aboriginal people in larger numbers moved into the area after the war years.

CONCLUSION

After the hardship and turbulence of the 1930s and 1940s, the three groups in Mackay enjoyed new opportunities for employment and prosperity. There were many labouring jobs cutting the cane during the crushing and then planting and weeding during the slack season. The exempted South Sea Islander people, previously excluded from the industry, were now legally in work that had been denied them from 1919 (Moore, 1985, p. 332). Torres Strait Islander people after the early 1940s were still subject to the union award that banned 'coloured' workers in the sugar industry. However, after the Pacific War, their armed force status, combined with the labour shortage led to improved recruitment and conditions. For those who had joined the armed forces opportunities arose when previous restrictions and awards became redundant. Returned soldiers, from the three groups in this project, were offered jobs away from the more specific

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tasks allocated to South Sea Islander people. By the late 1940s, rail and road construction as well as fruit and vegetable picking further increased employment opportunities for Aboriginal and South Sea Islander people (Hall. 1995, pp. 17-18). Those employment opportunities and benefits continued into the 1950s for the three groups in this project (HREOC, 1992, p 90).

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