The sugar cane industry is of particular interest to Queenslanders as the bulk of Australia's sugar is grown in this state. Today the cultivation of sugar cane is one of the most highly mechanised agricultural industries and is still of paramount importance to the economy of North Queensland. In the period under discussion no single Australian industry received as much attention from the State legislature as sugar growing. Nor was any other agricultural industry subjected to the same amount of political scrutiny and political chicanery as the sugar industry in the nineteenth century.

There are four preliminary points that I would like to make, points that will be further expanded in the course of this lecture. Firstly the sugar industry weathered the early years of Queensland's land legislation as the laws were altered to allow more selection by small farmers of small capital means, as opposed to the pastoral squatters and the large plantation owners of the early period. Secondly the industry was in the forefront of moves to gain government support for co-operative milling and growing organizations; organizations that have since developed in other industries and are commonplace to us today. Thirdly the industry bore the brunt of racial and racist legislation excluding Pacific Island labourers and Asian labourers, culminating in the White Australia policy adopted by the Commonwealth Government at the start of this century. Fourthly the original structure of the industry was vastly different from that which we have today. This transition, this transformation took place in the period under discussion, making it an important era for the industry. With these points in mind I shall go on to talk about the early legislation affecting the industry and to draw a general picture of plantation and small farming life in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Sugar cane had been grown in the Moreton Bay district long before Queensland became a separate colony. In most cases it was its potentialities as a fence rather than a means of producing sugar that made it popular. The earliest records of sugar production in Queensland go back
to 1836, but not until the 1860s was sugar considered in any way a commercial proposition. John Buhot and Captain Lewis Hope are credited with the first commercial operations in the Brisbane area. But even as the first cane growers in New South Wales had found that the crop prospered best in the northern rivers districts and in what is now southern Queensland, eventually the crop found its climatic home in North Queensland around Mackay, on the Burdekin and in the Far North. The only area surviving in the south is on the Mary and Burnett Rivers. During this lecture I have used the Mackay district for detailed examples of plantations and small farms in the industry. The Mackay area was typical of the Queensland industry as a whole and was the largest sugar district in the state.

Turning firstly to land legislation affecting the industry. The inducements offered by the 1864 Sugar and Coffee Regulations and the lack of restrictions upon importation of Pacific Island labourers, attracted the first cane growers to the industry. Under the regulations, cane planters were able to lease unoccupied crown land within ten miles of the coast or equidistant along any navigable river. These regulations later became incorporated in the 1868 Crown Lands Alienation Act which was an extremely important act for agricultural industries in Queensland. Sugar growing progressed rapidly until the late 1860s and although it was checked by a disease called 'rust' in 1874-75 it rebounded with a new lease of prosperity until a high point in the early years of its growth was achieved at the beginning of the 1880s. The legislation of the 1860s was the basis for the formation of the sugar industry until the Crown Lands Alienation Act of 1884. In the intervening decades a system of plantation agriculture developed, climaxing in the 1880s. In the following two decades until the turn of the century, after many years of depression and doubt as to the future of the industry, it emerged again as a strong and successful industry with new farming patterns. The plantations previously operating with their own mills, gave way to small farmers sending their production to communally owned central mills, and without the coloured labour that had been so essential in earlier decades.
The plantation era, then, began in the 1860s with the first commercial growth of sugar cane and the manufacture of sugar. By the end of 1867 there were nearly 2,000 acres under cane and six mills had been erected in Queensland, between them manufacturing the not very magnificent figure of 168 tons of sugar. Sugar growing progressed rapidly from the 1860s and the planters worked their way northward, taking up land on the fertile coastal regions in the north of Queensland. By 1869 there were 10 mills operating in Queensland, by 1870 there had been a tremendous growth and there were 28 mills operating in the state. By the early 1880s, when the era was at its peak, the Mackay district alone had 26 functioning mills. Also we must not forget the accompanying alcohol distilleries and the foundries to produce machinery for the mills, which must be considered in any study of the quick fire growth of the sugar industry in Queensland.

Plantation agriculture meant farming on a large scale, plantations usually included several hundred acres with only part of the area under cultivation. The plantation owners were usually well-to-do Englishmen or men from the other British sugar growing colonies; from the West Indies in particular. Often from rather aristocratic backgrounds the planters lived in a style unknown to others in North Queensland. Perhaps not the Grecian pillared and Georgian houses of the sugar planters of the southern United States, but decidedly comfortable rambling homes. The plantation owners themselves were typical of the heyday of the early sugar industry. They enjoyed the boom years just as they participated in the subsequent depression. The Honourable Harold Finch-Hatton spent some time in Queensland in the late 1870s and early 1880s. His description of plantation life runs rather like a modern day tourist brochure.

On both banks of the Pioneer [the river at Mackay], at intervals of a few miles, are the residences of the planters, and certainly the lines have fallen to them in pleasant places. Their houses as a rule, are extremely comfortable, and very well furnished, and the gardens of many of them are paradises of beauty. In good times, they make tremendous profits, and their occupation chiefly consists in watching other people work, in the intervals of which they recline in a shady verandah with a pipe and a novel, and drink rum-swizzles. Most of them keep a manager, so that they can always get away for a run down south, or a kangaroo hunt up the country. They are very hospitable and keep their houses always open to strangers visiting the place, and to their friends in the country, who come uninvited, and are welcome to stay as long as they please.
So long it would seem as you are a member of the English aristocracy as was the Hon. Harold Finch-Hatton.

In 1883 Mackay, the leading sugar growing area in the state, had thirty-one major plantations, and twenty-six mills of varying vintage and design. An example of a typical compact plantation of the period was Palmyra, owned by Hugh McCreedy, who by 1883 had twenty-three years cane growing experience, the last nineteen in Queensland. With a total area of 626 acres, he had about 350 acres under cane. His mill machinery was imported from Glasgow for £4,073, and with buildings and erection at Mackay, cost a total of £8,499.

The mill was considered to be very complete when it began operations in 1882. For the next six years it returned six and a half per cent interest on the original capital outlay, which was some £20,000. The average amount expended on wages was almost £5,500, of which only £450 was paid for Islanders' wages, the whole of the balance being paid as white men's wages, and indirectly for white labour. In addition to his own cane, McCreedy accepted as much cane as possible from surrounding small farmers, at rates in proportion to the sugar content of the cane, rather than in proportion to the weight of the cane, as was done by most other plantations. The cane after cutting, was delivered by carts to the mill, where it was fed through the rollers at the rate of five to six tons per hour. The plantation employed an average of sixty Islanders and fifteen white men per year. Experiments with white labour in the fields had all failed, and McCreedy saw no future for the industry unless an adequate supply of cheap labour was available in the future.

In the opposite extreme of plantation size were the plantations belonging to the Melbourne-Mackay Sugar Company. The company operated the lands of six plantations, Peri, Alexandra, Te Kowai, the Palms, Branscombe and Nebia, as one big enterprise. The various estates were managed separately, but all were under the general control of John Ewen Davidson, as one of the principal shareholders and Managing Director. The total area of these estates was 8,242 acres, over 4,000 of which were under cultivation. By 1884 two mills did the crushing for all the properties, as the obsolete nature of the other mills' machinery
made it uneconomic to operate. This meant that with machinery valued at £74,000 on the estates, only £45,000 worth was in operation.

The yearly total Labour and Ration expenses for the company came to the amazing figure of £66,600. A tremendous amount really when you consider that a white ploughman earned at that time about £66 a year, and a Pacific Islander from £6 to £10 a year. At various times J.E. Davidson had Europeans, Islanders, Malays, and Chinese in employment. He considered the Islanders and Malays the most suitable for field work.

The bulk of the labour employed by both planters and the small farmers was made up of Pacific Islanders and other non-white peoples, ranging from Chinese, Japanese and Malays to Indians and Singhalese. However the overwhelming percentage of the sugar labourers were Pacific Islanders. Often descriptions from sources contemporary to the period are dichotomous in their attitude to the Kanaka or Islander. They vary from lilting descriptions of their dark faces, brilliant smiles, and woolly heads, to those of the rabid anti-coloured labour groups who saw only evil in their immigration to Queensland.

The first Pacific Island labourers, the Melanesian people of the South Pacific, called the Kanakas by the early plantation whites, came to Queensland in 1863 when Robert Towns brought New Hebredeans to work on his cotton plantation on the Logan River. Early attempts to import Indian Coolie labour had failed and the Islanders seemed an acceptable substitute. With the end of the American Civil War and for some other reasons cotton soon ceased to be Queensland's major tropical crop. Sugar cane took its place and developed using the legacy of cotton, the Kanaka labourers, the Melanesians. Over the next few decades many legislative acts were passed that affected the Islanders: from the 1868 Act, the first to try to govern the many abuses in recruiting from the Islands and the treatment of the Islanders in Queensland, through a series of acts culminating in the 1885 Exclusion Act which was later postponed by the Extension Act of 1892. The future of coloured labour was debated until the final deportation of most of the remaining Islanders in the first years of the Commonwealth Parliament.

The mortality rate among the Islanders was higher than among
Europeans. Estimates varied from place to place, but in Mackay in 1883 Islander deaths from sickness and accidents appear to be about fifty out of every thousand, while an equivalent rate for British settlers was about fifteen to twenty in every thousand.

I would like to quote to you now from a book written by a rather aristocratic Englishman of the period, mentioning the health of the Islanders and afterwards I would like to explain some of the attitudes arising from this. "They are strong sturdy men as a rule, capable of doing a good day's work, but their constitutions seem to be perfectly incapable of standing against any sort of illness. Directly a kanaka gets ill he lies down and apparently very often dies for no reason at all except pure funk and the lack of wish to get well." Now quaint as this may seem to us today, it shows a very basic lack of understanding by the Europeans of the problems of the Islanders in Queensland. They were given a very different kind of food to eat from that which they consumed on their native islands, they were obviously not used to the long and strenuous hours of work and working conditions on the plantations. They had a lack of immunity to what we would think of as very common European diseases, and separation from men of their own island, separation say when they were put into a hospital, left them very scared and very bewildered men. But it is hardly necessary to suggest that they died of pure funk and lack of the wish to get well.

There were many reports in the period from inspectors of Pacific Island labourers on the conditions on the plantations. In one tabled in the Queensland Parliament in 1880, after visiting plantations in the Mackay and Maryborough districts, the inspector had this to say about the quarters.

In this matter I find a considerable difference between the various plantations. Some of them show excellent buildings of wood with iron roofs, well ventilated, floors with wood, with sometimes one, sometimes two rows of "bunks" or sleeping-places raised a couple of feet from the floor, the double bunks being built one over the other. Others again provide wooden buildings (slabs or Hobart Town palings), without any provision for ventilation, with thatched roofs and earthen floors. The sleeping places arranged in one or two tiers, and one or two fires permitted (on the floor, for there are no fireplaces) in each hut. This latter concession is much prized by the labourers, who, indeed, can only be compelled by great pressure to forego the
luxury. The fires serve not only to keep them warm, but help, by the smoke with which they fill the room, to keep the mosquitoes out. Yet another class of building is met with, namely, a good-sized hut some 20 x 12 by 15 feet high, built of "trash" throughout - walls and roofs - which is fastened on to a stout framework of timber erected by the white carpenter on the place, the thatch being put on by the labourers. In this style of hut the floor is of bare earth; bunks are erected in some cases of timber, and in others of bagging on a frame; and it is not uncommon to find two fires on the floor. A doorway, closed by a door made of boards, is provided in one side, of size usual in huts built for white labourers, but beyond this no attempt is made to secure ventilation; consequently, as no escape is provided for smoke, the roof, and for some distance down the walls on the inside, is stained with soot, which becomes deeper with the age of the hut."

Speaking of the food he had this to say,

And here I may be permitted, in justice to the planters of Queensland, to express my entire satisfaction, so far as I have seen, with the quality, and judging from the general appearance of the boys, which I take to be the true criterion, of the quantity supplied them.

A great diversity, however, is found in this matter on the different plantations.

The dietary scale, as you, Sir, are aware, provides that one pound of meat shall be supplied to each labourer every day. In some cases this is given at the midday meal; in others, again, in the evening only, the argument in support of this course being that the meat dinner is too heavy for the boys, particularly in summer-time....The meat supplied is always fresh or so little salted as to be not more than "corned", and by this latter I mean that it has been not more than two or three days in salt....Along with this a ration of sweet potatoes is served out, which helps to make up an ample meal. Rice is made on most the Mackay plantations an important part of the dietary scale, and with molasses, of which there is no stint, for the labourers are at liberty to help themselves from the mill....This generally forms with bread the evening meal, and with a pint of tea seems all that is necessary.

Speaking of the clothing provided he said

I found that the winter clothing had been served out to the Islanders in the majority of cases early in May, and in all before the end of that month. This consists of a pair of moleskin trousers of fair quality, and "blue shirt" of serge which is decidedly good.

The blankets issued, though of fair quality, are coarse in texture, and not so good as I should like to see served out; and I may venture to suggest that the planters be permitted to buy the registered Government blanket at, say, cost price with freight added; such blankets to be marked on receipt with the name of the plantation, and to remain the property of the purchaser. At the expiration of his term of service each Islander should receive from the planter a pair of the common sort of blankets.

I make this suggestion, because there can be no doubt that the
Kanakas frequently traffic away their blankets in the warm season; and - as is found with the aborigines - not infrequently for liquor.

He turned next to medical problems.

On many of the plantations which I visited an arrangement has been made with some professional man, whereby by payment of a certain sum per head of the labourers on the estate he is engaged on summons, to proceed thereto and prescribe for the sick. In ordinary cases one visit with the medicines administered might be found sufficient... [Hospitalisation] is always found to be a difficult matter to carry out, for the South Sea Islander cannot bear being cooped up in a house when he feels himself sick, but prefers to steal away alone to where he can get plenty of water to drink and remain undisturbed.

Now that presents quite a reasonable picture of the Islanders life on the plantations. In contrast we have the report of R.B. Sheridan, who is 1876 was Assistant Immigration Officer at Maryborough.

I have very grave and serious misgivings as to the kind treatment Polynesians employed on plantations, stations, etc., receive from their employers. I am led to this conclusion by the fact that even in the short period since my appointment, three complaints of ill-treatment have been made to me; in two of the instances alluded to, I am quite certain - although I cannot by white witnesses' evidence prove - that Polynesians were whipped on different sugar plantations. I saw the marks of the blows cut through the skin in one instance; therefore I respectfully suggest that some regulations be made for taking the evidence of South Sea Islanders, otherwise many offences against them must remain unpunished.

That there is not any regular system of medical treatment of the Polynesians on the different plantations, nor is the cause of death in every case satisfactorily account for; whilst as to burial, I am led to believe that the interment of a South Sea Islander in nowise differs from the burial of a dog or any other carrion. As I am informed, a hole or grave is made in the most convenient place; the body - as soon as possible after it has ceased to breathe - is rolled in the blanket in which it died, and put in its shallow last resting-place without further care or ceremony.

Sheridan's report prompted quite a deal of mixed opinion and a lot of defamatory allegations were made concerning his report, but I would say there is a great deal of truth in what he said. The operation of the plantation mills was a dangerous one for the Islanders, men not used to machinery and moving parts, and they often came to gruesome ends in the machinery.

Many of the mills had been established ten to fifteen years earlier and their machinery was old-fashioned and out of date. The Melbourne-
Mackay Sugar Company closed down 3 of its 5 mills, one of them which had just been built at the cost of £8,000 and had never crushed, giving ample evidence that economics of scale were beginning to operate in the industry. The prevailing feeling was that unless you operated on a large scale, and concentrated on the most economic use of your resources, you might as well leave the industry. It was the large companies that managed to survive the eighties, while the smaller plantations with old mills, went under in the approaching depression.

The majority of the plantation mills did not employ an engineer or chemist, and the supervision of the whole milling process was left to an unqualified sugar boiler. In the sugar industry rule-of-thumb had to give way to chemistry, economics, engineering and agricultural science if the mills were going to be a financial success, but in the 1880s, few plantation owners heeded this advice. The 1880s was also the age of rail as the transport medium of the future. The planters realised, that if their future railway was put to proper use, it would considerably lessen the transport problems in the sugar industry. By this stage the plantations had mainly adopted the use of tramways, usually drawn by horses and quite often with portable lines. The transport of the cane to the mill was becoming a much easier process.

Summing up the plantation era we can see several major points emerging from it. Sugar cane was grown on very large estates; estates with their own mills; estates run by coloured labour - Pacific Islanders, Javanese, and Singhalese. This cheap labour force was labour extensive, not labour intensive, a very wasteful form of labour. The planters themselves had a very aristocratic lifestyle and in the main had an English background. They were pillars of local organizations and societies and were the most influential political and social figures in North Queensland at the time. But we must turn from the plantations and the planters to the era of the small farmers. It is interesting to try to recreate a picture of life as a small farmer at the end of the last century.

In the early 1880s the majority of the male population was working in agricultural pursuits. They and their families lived in modest
surroundings and, in keeping with the times, had a low degree of education. This lack of education among the small farmers not only meant that they could do little in the way of reading agricultural literature or trying chemical soil analysis to improve the quality of their cane, but also that the modern day researcher has been left with a paucity of records when trying to investigate their way of life. The plantation owners and managers usually were well educated Englishmen, who wrote letters to everyone from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the local newspapers, and are well remembered for their aristocratic lifestyle. Information is as easy to discover about them as it is hard to discover about the average small farmer.

In the 1880s about one-quarter of the small farmers were Australian born, and most others were from Great Britain. The majority of the immigrants were English and in the mother country they had been farm labourers, domestic servants or general labourers, from rural counties like Devon and Somerset. By the 1890s the percentage of the population born in Australia had increased in proportion to those from England and Wales, and the majority of them were from Queensland and New South Wales.

Many small farmers were lured into sugar production in the boom years of the early eighties. Under the 1876 Land Act, a number of small farmers, often former employees of the planters, had taken up homestead selections in the surrounding district. They originally concentrated on growing maize, English and sweet potatoes, arrowroot, tobacco, wine grapes and tropical fruit. The maize, potatoes and arrowroot were often sold locally to the plantations as food for the Islanders, or otherwise in the township or in the south. However, when the farmers turned to cane cultivation, they found that they were seriously dependent on the plantation owner's goodwill in having their cane milled. The large grower-millers usually refused to enter into definite contracts with the small producers, just fitting the small man's cane in after their own had been given priority. The aloof aristocratic attitudes of many of the planters did little to endear them to the small farmers, and some considered that the small cane farmers would not last in the industry. It was this type of uncooperative attitude that eventually drove the small farmers to look
to the government and co-operative central mills for their future.

The dissatisfaction of small farmers all over Queensland, in having
to depend on the good graces of plantation owners for their livelihoods
finally came to a head in Mackay. In rebellion, a group of small farmers
decided to build their own mill, and asked the Queensland government -
then led by Sir S.W. Griffith, to help finance it.

Griffith accepted their proposal that his government should provide
the capital for the purchase of a mill, and the farmers provided security
in return in the form of the deeds to their land. When they had managed
to pay back the loan money, control of the mill returned to all of them
cooperatively and of the farm land to each of them individually. Thus
in 1885, the pattern was set for the modern day Central Mill - small
farming conditions.

Griffith's action had several motivations.
1. In the same year, 1885, Griffith had legislation passed that in the
next few years would exclude further migration of Pacific Island labourers
into Queensland. This would have been uppermost in his mind in giving
the small farmers ideas a trial.
2. Griffith, and his contemporaries had a vision for the future of
Queensland; a vision of a Queensland peopled by small farmers, yeoman
farmers in the liberal tradition, men of small capital means, farming
their own land with the aid of their families and not labouring for
others.
3. In the previous year 1884, land legislation had been passed to
facilitate the settlement of small farmers as opposed to the big homestead
purchases of the past.

So with the exclusion of Pacific Island labour, with Griffiths ideal
of the self sufficient yeoman farmer, and with accompanying land legislation,
the ideas proposed to him for central mill legislation, seemed very success­
fully to fit the circumstances of the 1880s. Not that Queensland's
central mill legislation was terribly adventurous and innovatory, as it
had been adopted by West Indian colonies and other sugar producing areas
overseas. Basically the central mill pattern meant that instead of
plantations owned by one man or by a company, controlling large areas of
land and crushing their cane in their own mill, the central mills were financed by the government and owned by the small farmers themselves, each man and his family farming some 40-100 acres.

The first central mill legislation was passed in 1885 and the first two mills to be built under this legislation were at Mackay, North Eton and Racecourse. The legislation was to have been the answer to the farmers' problems but for every problem solved, the legislation created another. What is easy to legislate for as a principle is not necessarily easy to implement as a practical farming and milling endeavour.

The cost of the first central mills was out of all proportion to the amount of cane which was undertaken to be grown by the farmers. The mills were scandalously managed. Often no records were kept and other rather haphazard business techniques were applied. Another major point was that no allowance had been made to build tramways to get the farmers' cane to the mills, and these tramways were necessary for the economic operation of the mills. Tramways had been introduced onto the plantation estates and should have been integral parts of the central mill plan, but unfortunately no funds were allowed for them.

These were some of the problems confronted by the farmers under the first central mill act. Many of the problems of the 1885 Act were sorted out in the 1893 Act, the next important central milling legislation in Queensland. In 1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act marked a new era in the industry. It had not been sought by farmers already engaged in the production of sugar, to bolster up a tottering industry as had the 1885 Central Mill Legislation. There had been a return to prosperity by the 1890s and the Act enabled those, debarred for various reasons, to embark in an agricultural industry which was now on the way to success.

In the 1890s, with the assurance of a limited continuation of Pacific Island labour, the advent of the 1885 and 1893 central mill legislation, and the easier land laws pertaining to small agricultural farms, many small crop farmers ventured back to sugar and many white immigrant labourers looked for a future in cane. Most of the cane farms varied from fifty to one hundred or so acres, the smaller selections under the Land Act being mostly market gardens or small crop farms. Many cane
farmers initially took only a small parcel of land, but subsequently
added to it by leasing adjoining blocks. As an example I'll take the
first farmer to lease land from C.S.R. at Homebush in Mackay. In 1894
he had selected 150 acres of freehold land, all suitable for sugar
growing. He had previously been head ploughman on Homebush estate,
and as the first Homebush farmer he had the pick of the land. He and
his family lived in a two-room weather-board and iron house with a
corrugated iron roof, and a detached kitchen built of wood slabs and an
iron roof. He also had a four stall stable, a chaff house and a dray
shed, Kanaka quarters, and had completed and installed a twenty foot
bricked well. He had several horses and a number of cattle, and had
managed to partly fence his stockyard and put fencing around his entire
property. With the help of his sons, one white labourer and four Islanders,
he had taken twenty-two tons to the acre off twenty-one acres the previous
year, and in 1894-5 had received twenty-three tons to the acre off ratoon
cane. His cane was cut green as was the usual policy in that period,
not burnt, and from it he expected to harvest a total of 900 tons. After
ploughing out fifteen acres of old cane he intended to plant some twenty-
five more that year.

Not all the small farms in the 1890s were as new as this. Another
owned by a man at the north side of Mackay had some 410 acres of freehold,
of which 310 had been scrub, but he had subsequently cleared all but
thirty-five of these. This man was one of the longest established small
farmers on the north side of the Pioneer River and had grown his first
cane crop over twenty years previously. Originally he had sent his cane
to Miclere Mill, then to Foulden, and latterly to Farleigh which was only
about one mile away. Although in the past he had grown up to 180 acres,
in 1894-5 he had taken off only sixty acres, and was in the process of
planting some fifteen acres more. He was noted as an experimental
farmer, and introduced many varieties of cane on his land, trying to
obtain richer sugar yielding canes, but not necessarily heavier varieties.
Over the previous seven years he had averaged twenty tons of stick cane
to the acre from his plant and ratoon cane. On the cane farm he employed
six white men and twelve Islanders, and engaged in a butchery business
as an auxiliary enterprise. His home was constructed of weather-board and palm, ceiled, with a verandah and a detached kitchen.

The newer farmers were not so well established as these, and for the first few years many selectors lived in one or two room palm trunk and thatched roof houses. For most, the early years meant back-breaking work clearing away the scrub from their land and getting paddocks ploughed and ready for planting. Often they were not able to have their land ready for cane for two to three years after they first moved onto the selection, and they existed with the help of the house's vegetable garden, and by doing odd jobs as contract labourers.

Today we have only to look at the thickest areas of scrub vegetation within the sugar regions to realize that it was a tremendous task for someone to move onto a selection of so many dozens of acres, to clear it and get it ready to plant the first crop, with only hand labour available.

One of the major complaints received by the 1897 Royal Commission on Land Settlement, was over the continuous residence clause in the Land Act. Some small farmers had to leave their selections to work as labourers on neighbouring farms and plantations. At crushing time they were often away from their selections for up to three months at a time, and this meant that single men in particular could not comply with the residence conditions of their leases.

Thinking again of the Pacific Islanders, but in a later period than the plantation era that we discussed them in earlier, the labour question still bedevilled the sugar industry. When the Pacific Island Labourers Extension Act was passed in 1892, those in the industry realised that it was only a short term relief. The rise of labour and the coming of Federation meant that during the 1890s Queensland's labour problem became part of an Australia-wide controversy, and was no longer just the concern of those in the State. The concept of a White Australia conflicted with the wishes of the majority of the sugar growers, as it had yet to be proven that the north's sugar industry could survive without coloured labour.

While the sugar production of the various districts increased dramatically in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the
supply of non-white labour did not increase proportionally. The number of Islanders was reasonably stable from 1881 to 1891, the two census years of the period, but showed sign of decrease by the end of the century. Some attempt was made to compensate the loss by use of Indian, Singhalese, Chinese, Malay and Japanese labour, mainly on the plantations, but the numbers available in no way matched the increased production.

Opinion on the importation of Islanders varied just as much in the 1890s as it had in the preceding decades. Michael Davitt, an Irish politician who visited Queensland, said that the economic necessity of the Islanders to the industry was farcical, and their retention on any grounds was "a piece of disgusting capitalistic hypocrisy."

It is interesting to note the extent to which the small farmers were just as dependent on non-white labour for their existence as the plantation owners. Usually when one thinks of Pacific island labourers, they are equated with the plantations. It is enlightening to realise just how important they were to the small farmers. In the 1890s, the small farmers in Mackay employed over 1,200 labourers: only 500 were white, the majority being Pacific Islanders. The plantations together employed just over 1,800 labourers, 540 being white and over 1,000 Pacific Islanders, and approximately 200-300 Chinese, Malays, Japanese and Javanese. Although the plantations were the largest employers in the district, the small farmers could not have continued without their 'Kanaka' labour.

It is very rare to find a neutral observer of the position among the partisan opinions of the sugar growers, the politicians, and others with a definite interest in the industry. Dr. Walter Maxwell, in his report to the Commonwealth Parliament, gave the first real analysis of the relative costs of employing white labour instead of Islanders. Dr. Maxwell, Director of Sugar Experimentation in Hawaii, had been invited by the Queensland Government to report on the problems of the industry. He later returned to Australia to become the first Director of Bureau of Sugar Experimentation Stations.

Apart from the more obvious monetary cost Maxwell tried to assess the actual and relative economic values of both types of labour. He took
into account each group's skill or competence to perform the work, their personal endurance of the work, their stability in attendance, and the rate of the wage in relation to their performance of the work. The Islanders he found, worked longer hours, lost fewer days through sickness in spite of a higher sickness rate in their first year in the colony, and cost only half as much to employ as the white labourers. They could be relied on to work regularly, and were not as transient and unpredictable as the white labour. These figures have been challenged by more recent researchers but I think they show a reasonable indication of the value of Pacific Island labour. Though this labour at the end of the century was no longer as cheap as it had been in the past, the employer still received a greater value for his money in employing Islanders as opposed to Europeans.

Other forms of coloured labour were also on their way out. The attempts to use Malays, Japanese, and Javanese were not continued, and their numbers declined alongside those of the Islanders. Some Aborigines had been employed in the cane fields during the 1870s and 1880s but no attempt was made to utilize them as an alternative labour force in the 1890s when the numbers of the imported Asiatic and Pacific Island labourers began to decline.

Early opinions that even the strongest white men could only endure a few years working under the tropical sun before "their premature decay and physical wreck", were voiced with great gusto by the advocates of continued importation of cheap coloured labour. But now, over a century and many healthy generations later, the possibility of white men working in the tropics seems beyond doubt. Providing that the white small farmer adapted himself to his surroundings, as regards diet and sensible clothing, there never was any reason why he could not work in the fields. But in the period when coloured labour was being phased out of the sugar industry, white labourers could get more lucrative employment in the mining industry, and many of them disliked taking on the same work as Pacific Islanders and Asians. When they did take jobs as field workers it was usually only until they could afford to take up their own selection, or as a stop-gap measure until their own farms could fully support them.
The Islanders were barred from all types of work but tropical agriculture, and could not usually purchase land. Their contracts, either for one or three years, meant that they were permanently available for the work, and if any among them had the ambitions of the white labourers to own their own farms, the law forbade them. The purely economic reasons why both the small farmers and the planters in Mackay wanted to keep their cheap labour was obvious.

Many of the small farmers who grieved the loss of cheap labour were operating on a larger scale than was necessary. In trying to produce as much as possible from their land, they had to employ extra labour. The initial clearing of the land did need extra hands, but after that, most small farmers with the help of their sons, and employing contract cane cutters in the crushing, could make an adequate living. The farmers had to adjust the amount of cane they produced to the amount of labour at their disposal.

Between the age of cheap black labour, and the age of agricultural machinery after the 1920s, cane farmers managed to continue this small scale farming. But in 1900, when small farmers had been just as much weaned on cheap labour as had the plantation owners, they were finding it difficult to adjust to the inevitable. Under the Commonwealth Government, with an embargo on foreign sugar and a bounty system on Australian "white" sugar, and the fading allurements of the northern mining fields, the transition away from Pacific and Asian labour to that provided by Europeans, became feasible.

Thus we have in mind a picture of the transition from the plantation and its associated way of life, to the small farm. The small farmers had only limited acreages and sent their cane to co-operative mills, using labour intensive white labour usually from their own family. This yeoman class had earlier held low social importance alongside the Planters, but they increasingly became the leaders of the various districts in the twentieth century.

In the past historical analysis of the Queensland sugar industry, the major structural and technological changes that faced sugar production in the last two decades of the nineteenth century have not been emphasized.
Rather, the change from plantations to central mills has been presented as being caused by the withdrawal of 'Kanaka' labour and the competition received from the government-subsidized European sugar beet. The place of Pacific Islanders in creating an economically viable industry in the first two decades of sugar production in Queensland, can never be over-emphasized. But it does not necessarily follow that their removal was the most important reason for the transformation of the industry in the 1880s and 1890s.

The Queensland change from plantation agriculture to the small farmer central milling system was in line with international developments in milling technology and scientific analysis, and the adoption of economies of scale in all facets of sugar production. Large plantations with extensive labour forces and out-dated mill machinery could no longer operate economically. Only labour intensive small farmers, with the help of their families, and as part-owners of technically advanced mills, were able to make a satisfactory living out of sugar production.