

1987 Coup d' etat IN FIJI

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

TARUN SHARMA

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CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN AND
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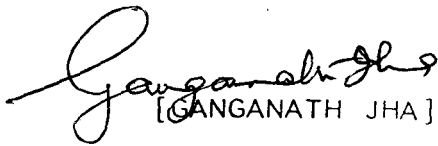


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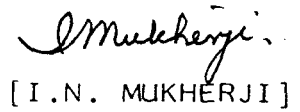
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "1987 Coup d' etat in Fiji" submitted by Mr. Tarun Sharma in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is his own work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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TO MY PARENTS
AND AUNTY

PREFACE

Fiji has been in the international headlines since the staging of the military coup d' etat of 14 May 1987. Strategically located in the Centre of the South Pacific, Fiji is the only country to be placed under military authoritarianism. The racial hatred is sponsored and accentuated against the people of Indian origin and the country is faced with a civil unrest ever since the military became its rulers. The coup d' etat has caused wideranging implications in the socio-economic spheres and the "Pacific way of life". In the present dissertation, an attempt is made to study the causes and consequences of the coup.

Divided into Seven Chapters, this dissertation has explained the developments leading to the coup and objectives of the coup leaders. The first chapter has given an introduction of the socio-economic background of Fijian history and politics. The second chapter is devoted to analyse the ethnic situation. Hence Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijian population, their life style and the various grounds of their friction are narrated. The third chapter deals with party politics and the process of politicization in Fiji. The fourth chapter is devoted to explain the phenomenon of the two coups in 1987. The fifth chapter has analyzed the implications of the coup in the sphere of socio-economic situation. The sixth chapter has tried to recollect the reactions of the international community, i.e., Britain, The United States, India, Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Forum towards the clamping of military rule in Fiji. The last chapter has concluding observations. The coup has certainly limited the scope of rapid development and nation building in Fiji.

Whatever I have been able to do on the work has become is due less to my lone credit than to many by whom my arduous effort has been shared at more than many instances.

I express my deepest regard to my most revered great guru Dr. Ganganath Jha, whose vision and initiation shown at the first instance and to his unfaltering inspiration, great zeal and untiring expert involvement, the completion of the work is but a manifestation of which, my heartfelt indebtedness is placed on record.

My primordial obligations deserve extension to Prof. Parimal Kumar Das, Pramukh of our department, without his blessings and affectionate support this work could not have seen the light. I also acknowledge my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Manmohini Kaul, who granted me opportunity from time to

time for discussion on various topics. I have heavily drawn from her rich and extensive knowledge of the South Pacific.

I find myself unable to muster words to express my deep sense of gratitude to my respected inmost father and mother. I am indebted for their help, encouragement and inspiration provided to me. A major acknowledgement remains due to respected Arunbhai and Varun my brothers and Garry for their kind cooperation, support and inspiration extended to me.

No formal word of appreciation can be sufficient to thank my wellwishers rather friends, Rajeev (1,2 & 3, i.e. Tony, Babloo & Hunter), Bajrang, Sam, Kamal, Anandji, Anup, Rakesh and Pink for their help, encouragement, understanding and constructive criticism during the course of this study.

I feel duty bound to express my gratitude to Shri A.K. Seth, who took all pains to type the manuscript with utmost care. I am also thankful to the library staff of Central Library, JNU, SIS Library, JNU, I.D.S.A. Library, Sapru House Library and Teenmurti Library for their kind cooperation. Now at last I am also grateful to many others who have helped me in different ways.

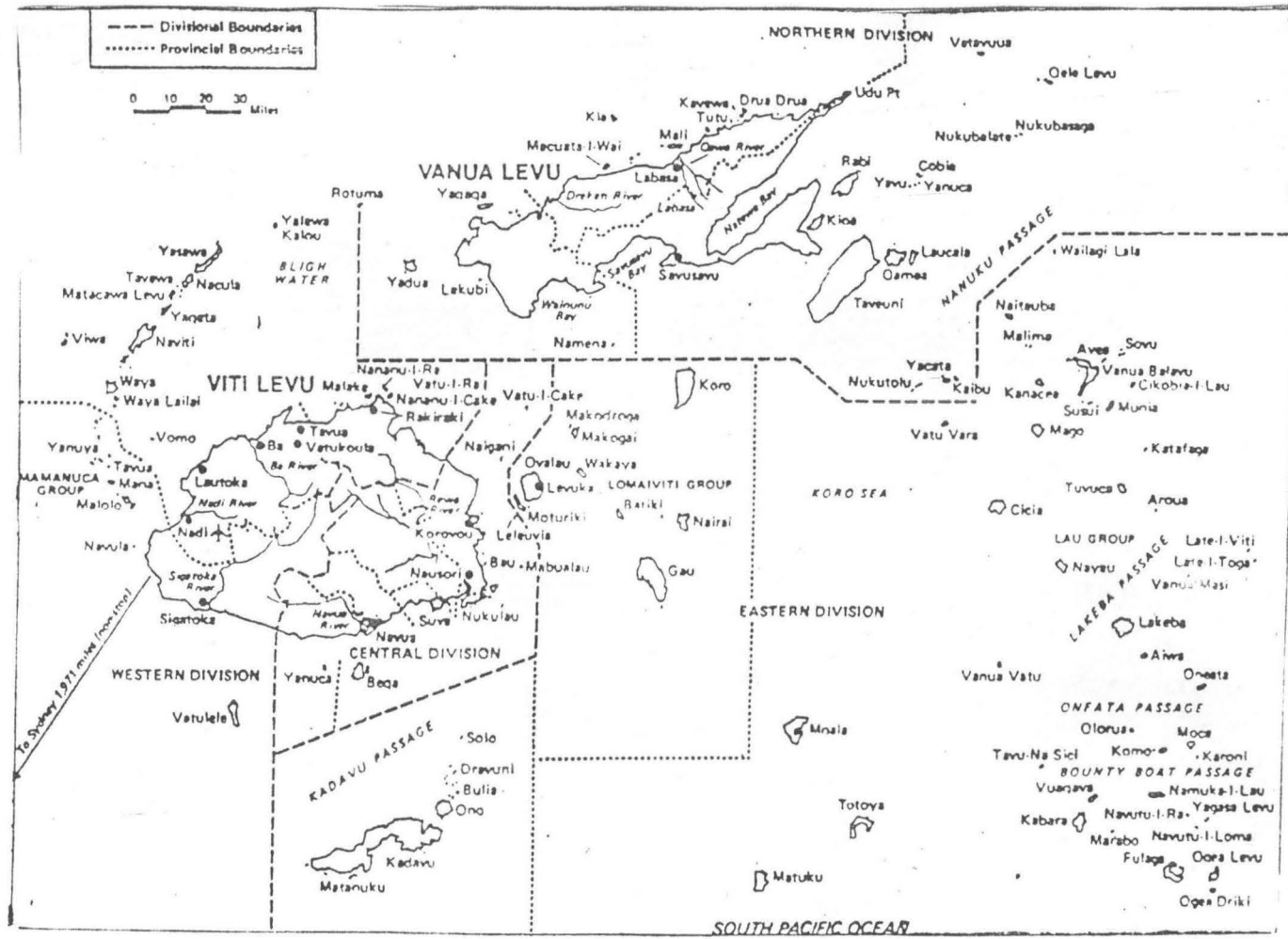
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C O N T E N T S

	<u>Pages</u>
PREFACE	i-ii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1-9
CHAPTER 2 ETHNIC SITUATION	10-32
CHAPTER 3 PARTY POLITICS AND POLITICIZATION IN FIJI	33-59
CHAPTER 4 1987 COUP d'etat	60-71
CHAPTER 5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE COUP	72-92
CHAPTER 6 INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATION OF THE COUP	93-107
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION	108-112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113-119
APPENDIX	

CHAPTER _ I



Fiji : A Political map

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

After 17 years of near continuous rule, the Alliance Party led government in Fiji was defeated in the general elections of April 1987. It was replaced by a coalition of the multiracial Fiji Labour Party and the long divided National Federation Party. It was an unexpected combination, those who criticized and challenged it conveniently forget the existence of its secular appeal and nation building ethos. Instead they were vocal to criticize the predominance of the Indo-Fijian members of parliament in the coalition. Although the new cabinet possessed a better balanced racial Mix than had been the case with Alliance ministries. But fairness could not prove a deterrent in the political events which followed, nor of course did popular feelings. When on 10 AM, Thursday 14th May 1987, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, a third ranking officer of 2600 strong Royal Fijian Military Force (RAFM) and a squad of 10 masked soldiers entered the parliament in Fiji's capital, Suva, and took Dr. Timoci Bavadra's Coalition government hostage, everyone became embroiled in the events for which they were ill prepared.¹

The Military Coup in Fiji was first overthrow of a democratically elected popular government by military means in the entire South Pacific region. It added a new dimension of political vulnerability to South Pacific island micro-states,

¹ Sen., Anikendra Nath., "The American Hand Behind the Fiji Coup", Onlooker, March 1-15, 1988, p. 50,51.

till now non-existent. It shocked the countries in the South Pacific regions as well as the democratic world, as political cultures of pacific micro-states were based on "pacific way of life" giving very thin space to violent political turmoils.² Fiji was supposed to be a model island micro-state in Third World - a developing, prospering, stable and goahead country. It was considered as a key to the preservation of stability in the region.³

The Military Coups and later development had greatly shocked India, as these developments directly affected the ethnic Indian population, constituting 48.6 per cent of total 7,15,000 population of Fiji. The central idea behind the coup was to strip Indo-Fijians from a legitimate share in power and reduce them to second class citizens. Though bulk of the Indians are citizens of Fiji from generations, mostly being the descendants of indentured labours, a bogey of racial contempt and harassment had been launched against them. The Indians, who played important role to bring Fiji into independence, now are being denied their due shares in the government and polity⁴.

The military coup in Fiji had highlighted once again the frail nature of small state security, both internal and external. How easily the democratic edifice in Fiji was

2 Mathew K. George, "Class War in Fiji", The South, July 1987.

3 Ibid

4 Dr. Vidhya Sagar, "Fiji : An Overview" Mother India Children Abroad, Vol.1, No.2, July 1989 (New Delhi) p. 17.

dismantled, government and parliament was hijacked by handful of mercenaries led by not much senior officer of Royal Fiji Military Force (RFMF), is an eloquent testimony of vulnerable nature of political institutions and security apparatus of small states.⁵ The Fiji crisis also revealed the bitter truth that internal dissensions and conflicts could be cleverly manipulated by metropolitan powers and Neo-imperialists, having vested interests and military-strategic stakes in given geo-political region. Fiji, thus joined some other third world countries, like Surinam, Guyana and Malaysia where ethnic tensions accompanied with external entanglements had led to military takeover.

The Coup and hostilities created in post coup period, had been a dangerous harbinger of violent and acrimonious ethnic conflicts. Ethnic divide in Fiji is not anything new, it is institutionalised by constitution and perpetuated in national politics. However violent racial conflicts in Fiji were controlled by a paradoxical[^] mutual understanding for accommodation, conciliation and non-violent resolution of discords. Mutual fears of further conflagration and outside intervention also checked violent expressions of ethnic dissension.⁶

Nevertheless, ethnicity is not the only important factor in Fiji crisis. The present Fijian crisis can not be

5 Amena Mohsin, "Small State Security in the South Pacific" in "Security of Small States" ed., M.A. Hafiz and A.R. Khan (Dacca 1984), p. 143.

6 Brian, H. Farell and Peter E. Murphy, ed., Ethnic attitudes to land in Fiji, (Suva 1979), pp. 2-3.

holistically explained only in racial ethnic categories. By the simplistic variables of indigenous rights of natives, right to control political affairs of their own country, the western analysts and journalists had exposed their bias and prejudice against Indians, giving a partial and lopsided picture of the problem.⁷ This is because perhaps race is most comfortable explanatory tool, it neither challenges nor questions the ideological foundations of such problems; and starts giving a rationale to status quo.⁸

The fact is that whole problem in Fiji started when a kind of multiracialism began to take roots in Fiji. It requires a serious investigative analysis that how in the name of paramountcy of Fijian interests, the feudal hierarchies in Fiji had maintained their hegemonic preponderance over power structures. When challenged by emerging new multiracial social classes in the form of defeat in April general elections, these elements had striken back. The military coup cut short the genuine experience of multiracialism in Fiji and shattered the emerging new plural polity.

However, this is not to deny or reduce the importance of ethnic factor in Fiji, as an undercurrent of racial tension had been the fact of life in Fiji. This racial problem in Fiji was no doubt a legacy of British colonialism, which has cleverly spunned and accentuated the ethnic problems in Fiji's national life. Only thing to be emphasized is that the race

7 Brij V. Lal ed. Policies in Fiji : Studies in Contemporary history, (London, 1986), p. 138.

8 Ibid, p. 138.

can not be taken as a singular explanatory tool. Other socio-economic complexities have to be analysed to avoid deliberate distortions of western kind.

The Fiji archipelago has a total area of approximately 18,333 Square Kilometres made up of 322 islands including volcanic islands, atolls, coral reefs and small islets among which just about 100 are inhabited. The main archipelago lies between latitudes 150o and 220o South and longitudes 175o East and 177o West. The island of Rotuma (44 Square kilometres) and its dependencies were added to the territory in 1881 and are geographically separate. They lie between latitudes 12o and 150o South and longitudes 175o and 180o East. Fiji comprises four main islands, Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kodavu. Viti Levu is biggest island and together with Vanua Leva, account for 87 per cent of the total 18,376 sq. kms of land area. Islands of Fiji vary largely in size ranging for 10,388 sq. kms of Viti Levu to small rocky tolls of only few Sq. kms. The topography of Fiji islands also differs vastly as they comprise almost every type of oceanic islands, high mountains, towering volcanic platforms and low lying tiny coral islets.

The Fijian capital Suva is located 3160 kms north east from Sydney (Australia) and 2120 kms north of Auckland (New Zealand). Temperatures at Suva and at other sea-level stations are high throughout the year but are tempered by the ocean and the territory has all the advantages of a tropical climate without undue extremes of heat. The annual rainfall totals vary according to exposure and the windward areas enjoy

abundant rainfall, well distributed throughout the year. The Leeward (that is north western) sides have well defined wet and dry seasons.

Fiji's population in December 1983 was 677,481. This compares with a population figure of 588,068 in the 1976 census. The average annual growth rate for the past five years has been 1.9 per cent. In 1983 out of the total population these were 399,456 (50.1 of total population) peoples of Indian origin, 304,575 (44.9) Melanesians, 11,344 (1.7) Part Europeans, 8,336 (1.2) Rotumans, 4,651 (0.7) Chinese, 3,184 (0.5) pacific Islanders and 89 (0.1) others.

Fiji's economy is primarily agrarian. About 600,000 acres (243,000 hectares) of land are in agricultural use. This is mostly confined to coastal alluvial flats, major river valleys and deltas. Sugar cane is the principal cash crop, accounting for a large part of Fiji's export earnings.] Total production in 1984 was 4,289,000 tonnes. About one quarter of the population depend directly for their livelihood on Sugar Cane which is grown by nearly 20,000 independent farmers on holdings averaging about 10 acres (4 hectares).] Apart from Sugar Fiji is a producer of rice (27,444 tonnes in 1984); Copra (24,700 tonnes) timber (188,400 m³) and fish (17,570 tonnes).

[There is an advance development of industries in Fiji. Sugar, tourism, coconut oil, fishing and gold are the important fields in which Fijian industries are well

developed. Sugar industry is an important source of employment in Fiji, the total production in 1984 was 379,000 tonnes. Fiji is very popular for its scenic beauty and tourist resort.¹⁰ There were 235,000 visitors in 1984 in Fiji. The annual production in 1984 in coconut oil, Fishing and gold is 16,300 tonnes, 11,578 tonnes and 1509 kg respectively.¹⁰

The major field of imports in 1984 was manufactured goods (US\$ 72.69 million), food (US\$ 63.32 million), machinery and transport equipment (US\$ 61.06 million) fuel (US\$ 47.49 million) miscellaneous manufactured articles (US\$ 40.91 million) and Chemical respectively. The major exports in 1984 was Sugar (US\$ 94 million), molasses (US\$ 5.7 million), Coconut Oil (US\$ 15.78 million), Gold (US\$ 17.54 million), Veneer Sheets (US\$ 2.44 million).¹¹

Summing up the scenario, it can be stated that Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had led the freedom struggle and had become the premier after independence. His leadership and dominance in country's polity began to be increasingly challenged by mid-eighties, particularly after the formation of the Fiji Labour Party in July 1985. Fiji Labour Party was comprised of a group of people who represented a new, if still small, professional, educated, and urbanized ethnic Fijian class prepared to challenge the ascriptive dominance of the Fijian Chiefs. Its leader, Dr. Timoci Bavadra, a medical doctor came from medical practice to public life. He forged a coalition of Fiji Labour

10 Far Eastern Economic Review Year Book, 1986, p. 138.

11 Ibid, p. 140.

Party with National Federation Party and together fought against the dominance of the Alliance Party. Dr. Bavadra's leadership was acceptable to his coalition partners. He disapproved the trend that the Alliance Party had established vis-a-vis the Indo-Fijians. Sir Ratu Mara had astutely forged a policy to establish the dominance of the indigenous Fijians. But Dr. Bavadra disapproved such a policy and advocated change in the existing system. The credibility of Labour Party and National Federation Party coalition was established immediately when it won a majority of seats in the ethnically mixed municipal elections to the Suva City Council. They fought and won the national election in April 1987. But the majority secured was very thin. On a crossracial platform, promising economic justice and a "clean and caring" administration, Dr. Bavadra tried to lead the country and balance the ethnic representation of the two major communities in Fiji.

The new coalition Government headed by an ethnic Fijian, Dr. Timoci Bavadra, had a 14-person cabinet. Each race was represented in proportion to its strength in the country - Seven Indian (including the Deputy Prime Minister, Harish Sharma of the NFP), Six Fijian, and one part-European. Key Fijian Affairs portfolios were allocated to ethnic Fijians. But in the lower house of Parliament there were nineteen Indian (Government) Members of parliament as against just seven Fijians and two part-Europeans). The "Indian dominated" coalition government faced a orchestrated campaign of

destablization; it was this instability, the growing division between the indigeneous Fijians, and the threat to the (Fijian controlled) military, which Rabuka gave as reasons for his coup.

The whole political dynamics in Fiji underwent a drastic transformation after the defeat of the Alliance party in the general election. The fear of losing special rights and privileges of Ratus, the reality of losing governmental powers and the possibility of exposure to their misdeeds drove the Alliance party to join hands with the militants and hence the coups were staged in Fiji. The various factors and ramifications of the coups are discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER 2

ETHNIC SITUATION

Diversity is reflected, with a complexed history, in the peculiar demographic composition of Fiji. In 1986, Indians (or Indo-Fijians) constituted 48.6 per cent and indogenous Fijians (sometimes called Melanesians) 46.2 per cent - rest 5.2 per cent being part Europeans, Chinese and Australians, in total population of 7,15,000.¹ In numbers there were 348,704 Indians, 329,305 Fijians and 37,366 were others. The number of male and females in total population were 362,568 and 352,807 respectively.

More than half of Fiji's population live on the island coasts, either in Suva, the capital, or in smaller urban centers. The interior is sparsely populated because of its rough terrain. Indigeneous Fijians are a mixture of polynesian² and Melanesian³ resulting from the original

1 Although Indians are more in numbers, their actual number has declined due to emigration and lower birth rates. Increase in Fijians birth rates further contributed to Indian proportion declining from 50.8 per cent (1981) to 48.6 per cent (1986).

2 Polynesians are an important cultural group of the South Pacific region spread into Hawaii, Cook Islands, Tahiti, both parts of Samoa, Tonga, Society Islands, Marques Islands Tuamotu Archipelago, Leeward Islands, Tubuai Islands and Easter Islands. Parts of the Polynesian cultural groups are also in New Zealand but they are known as Maoris in that country. Encyclopaedia of the United Nations (Philadelphia, 1985) has defined that the pure type polynesians are tall and statuesque, of brown or olive complexion, with wavy brown or black hair. They are variously held to be a branch of the Malay race, an offshoot of an early Asiatic Caucoid race, or a mixed race having a Malanesian as well as a Malay and a Cancasoid strain. The polynesians by nature are cheerful, courageous, gentle and dignified, of keen artistic sense and highly poetical imagination, but are often indolent and formerly were nearly all cannibals. There are some

migrations to the south pacific many centuries ago. The Indian population has grown rapidly from the 60,000 indentured labourers, who were brought from India Between 1879 and 1916 to work in the sugarcane fields. Unlike the native Fijians, who live throughout the country, the Indo-Fijians reside primarily near the urban centers and in the cane-producing areas of the two main islands.⁴ Virtually all indigenous Fijians are Christian, 78 per cent of them Methodist. The Roman Catholics account for about 8.5 per cent of the population, nearly half are part European or Chinese. Other Christian denominations in Fiji are Anglican, seventh-day Adventist, presbyterian,

scholars who believe that the polynesians originated in Southeast Asia whereas some others have said that they went to polynesia from the American continent (Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, The French Pacific Islands : French Polynesian and New Caledonia. (Berkeley, California, 1971). n.8, p.10). Polynesians are conscious of their social values but they are gradually coming under the western influence. The traditional occupation of the polynesians has been fishing and agriculture.

3 Melanesians are spread into the South West Pacific, mainly in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Fiji, and Vanuatu. A vast number of the Melanesians are also in Indonesia. They are generally dark-skinned people with thick beards. They do not possess any written literature but have strong oral traditions and past conventions. (The Guardian Weekly (Manchester), 10 February 1985). They are adherents of village-based communal values which they have preserved to date. Traditional society, through its various customs, has fostered a unique sense of fraternity and solidarity. Virginia Thompson and Adloff have briefly explained the customs and tradition of the Melanesians and observed that members of the same age group-fathers and uncles, children and their cousins-call each other brothers' indiscriminately. The Melanesians are passing through a period of new political and social awakening. They are voicing their concern to have constitutional guarantees to preserve their traditional life style and values. Some of their intellectuals have even extended the idea of forming a "Melanesian Federation of States" (Guardian Weekly, 10 February, 1985).

4 Ibid, p.511.

Mormon, and Christian Brethren, About 80 per cent of the Indo-Fijians are Hindu; the rest are Muslim the official language is English and Bauan, a Fijian Dialect, is spoken by most indigenous Fijians. Hindustani, a mixture of Indian language is spoken by most Indians.⁵

Race and Ethnic Politics in Fiji

Fiji stood out amongst most of the colonial and post-colonial societies as something of a paradox : having been one of the most ethnically divided yet least antagonistic society. Ethnic polarisation had been a central feature of political life and is rooted in divisions of cultures, social relations, and economic interests, but certain institutions and values used to encourage accommodation even amidst confrontation of the kind that elsewhere would have sparked catastrophic violence. However, ethnic and racial politics was institutionalized quite carefully in Fiji during the colonial period. For a deeper understanding of the nature of ethnicity in political system, one has essentially to go back to the colonial period.

The British colonial masters kept Ethnic Indians and Melanesian Fijians separate in different ways ever since the introduction of indentured Indian labour in 1889. Although both had common interests, but colonial masters intentionally pursued a policy to effectively prevent any mutual perception of the communality. Physical separation was achieved by

5 Ibid, p.511.

functional segregation⁶ Indians worked mostly in canefields in Western Vitilevu and Northern Vanua Levu. Native Fijians, no longer required to ensure the success of colonial sugar industry, had remained, for most of the part, tied to their villages. Nevertheless, Fijians were not divorced from the colonial economy, as the very survival of colonial state depended upon the Fijian contribution of taxes and production of cheap foods and export commodities. Thus the sugar industry could operate without its surpluses being substantially drawn upon by the state. Foods produced by Fijians helped in keeping the formal wages low.

The general impression drawn from the study of colonial social organisation and race relations is that the two communities were arranged as a dual-system and the component parts of colonial Fijian Society were unrelated, with very low level of social intermixing. However, the surface appearance may not bear the whole historical truth. As elucidated by Jay Narayan :

"while Fijians and Indians were often economically and socially separated, they were not divorced from each other. Their relationships were often indirect at some common level, both were exploited to serve the needs of colonial state. However, that commonality was rarely permitted expression."⁷

⁶ Countries of the World & Their Leaders Year Book - 1988, Gale Research Company, Book Tower, Detroit, (Michigan 48226) p. 510.

⁷ Jay Narayan; Political Economy of Fiji, (Suva, 1986), p.43.

It needs the reassessment of the British Colonial policy which perpetuated the ethnic racial politics in Fiji. The lofty benevolent, and humanitarian principles used by the British to justify the incorporation of Fiji within their vast empire counted for little in final analysis. Its decision not to employ Fijians in the canefields had less to do with missionary concerns at the exploitation of indigenous labour than with the pressing need to establish a stable environment for the operation of colonial capital.⁸ The recruitment of Fijian labour could have led to destabilisation of Fijian society.

The hollowness of the strategy of benevolent paternalism, a strategy which according to Britishers, "Saved" the Fijians and ensured the survival of Fijians way of life can be judged by a quotation of Sir Arthur Gordon, the architect of colonial policy in Fiji - "I have no sympathy with those whose philanthropy demanded that they should think little of their own race and colour. My sympathy for coloured race is strong; but my sympathy for my own race is stronger."⁹

Thus the Societal structures of Fiji were very carefully handled to ensure their subordination. Thus by integrating Fijians separately into the colonial economy, the British colonialists had been successful in the classic "divide and rule" strategy. The main achievement of this policy in Fiji

8 -----; Colonialism, Development and Independence : The Case of Melanesian Islands In South Pacific : (London : Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 212.

9 Ibid, p.45.

was that small handful of British civil servants could exploit Fiji's peoples without risking any united opposition. This strategy further paid advantageous dividends - it defeated the ambitions of European settlers, by restricting the sale of native land and by encouraging the Australian Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) to monopolize sugar productions. The colonial government was eventually successful in stealing a march over the independent minded settlers. With European Settlers' activities restricted, Fijians locked firmly into their "traditional affairs" under the guidance of a loyal and dependent chiefly class and the growing Indian Community isolated both by law and by the nature of their work, colonial rule was secured.

The different institutional arrangements for governing the Fijians also ensured diverting paths for the two communities. Over the years these two racial groups existed side by side in small island country, generally at peace and without open disharmony, frequently apathetic and usually tolerant. This did not characterise good relations but also not acrimony.

Whereas the Fijians remained satisfied with the statu quo and government control, the political ambitions of Indo-Fijians had found another source of difference. The Indians, with growing political awareness, were demanding for more political opportunities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ahmed Ali : Politics in Fiji : Studies in Contemporary History, ed. Brij. V. Lal (London, 1986), p.9.

The governments' decision to grant the franchise to Indians in 1929 and denial to Fijians also added to Fijian suspicions. While this franchise contributed to politicisation of Indians, and increased their demand for more participation, Fijians deprived of these opportunities continued to be confined in their separate administration in pursuit of customs and tradition. The introduction of the right to vote divided the Indian Community; while without it Fijians, mostly elites, preserved their unity and channelised their political energies to make their position stronger. As observed by Ahmad Ali, the two communities found the essence of their political life flowing in different directions. Thus the gap between two was widened.¹¹

The rapid population growth played very important role in racial politics. The 1911 population census showed that they comprised 28.8 per cent of the colony's population, by 1921 they had reached 38.5 per cent which had risen to 42.85 per cent by 1936. For the same years, the Fijian population had declined proportionally 62.42 per cent, 53.71 per cent to 49.22 per cent. Thus in 1940, Fijians lost the numerical majority. This increased the political anxiety of elites and led to their demands of security of Fijian paramountcy. The demand of Indians for common roll was actually counterproductive.

¹¹ Gillian, K. The Fiji Indians : Challenge to European Dominance (Canberra, Australian National University, 1977), p.24.

The constitution of 1931 introduced the equal representation of each of three major ethnic groups, though this was hardly any step to keep at abeyance racial politics. Another more significant step was the setting up of an improved separate Fijian administration. This broadened the support base of Melanesian and involved them in their responsibility. The Fijian Affairs Board; in fact a committee of the council of chiefs, was the lynchpin of the new organisation.

By the decade of 50's, the racial pluralism became the central theme of the national politics. Each group noticed the disparities among the communities. The 1956 census, which revealed the demographic fact that Indians constituted 49 per cent of Fiji's population to 43 per cent of Fijians multiplied the anxieties of Fijians. Fijian's fear of Indian domination was cleverly utilized by the colonial rulers to try to make their rule long lasting.

In the meantime, Indian Community's persistent demand for greater political role facilitated the strengthening of alliance of European and Fijian interests that began in the 1930s and consolidated by new bonds developed during IInd World War time. By their consistent attacks on colonial regime, Indians opposed the all powerful white bureaucracy.

Fijian hesitation to support any political transformation away from the crown colony system can be comprehended in this background. In the wake of the decolonisation process in post war years, Fijian were not prepared for any change of regime

as they did not want their patrimony and paramountcy to be shared or accommodated with other communities. There were also some important economic changes.

a] The industrial disputes of 1943, 1959 and 1960 increased Fijian fear of political change as that could affect their already weakened status.

b] Indian population increase put pressure on the land. Between 1950s and 1960s, Sugar production increased by more than 90 per cent and better prices made the value of the output double. This way the Indians flourished and were encouraged to crave for more land and leases of longer duration.

c] At the above time economic growth of Fijians had not kept a pace with the Indians. While Indians enjoyed the fruits of cash economy of sugar plantation, the native Fijians languished in the vagaries of subsistence agriculture.

The racial divide between the ethnic Fijians and the Indians is reinforced by the Communal base political parties. In the 1960s Britain introduced a system of communal representation and communal electoral rolls. Universal adult suffrage was granted in 1963, and a majority of the colony's Legislative Council were elected in 1966. The Alliance Party headed by Sir Ratu Kamisese Mara won twentyfive out of the thirtyfour elective seats in 1966 while the National Federation Party (NFP), representing the Indian, won just nine seats. This comprehensive Alliance victory diminished ethnic Fijian fears of an independence based on the existing

electoral arrangements.¹² The Indians, however, wanted a common roll on the grounds of democracy and equality. They objected to a communal roll because of its inherent divisive potential. They believed that only a common roll could lead to Fiji being "one people, one country, one nation". They also pointed out that although at the time the Fiji Indians were in an overall majority, the Indian Community was in fact on a par with the indigenous Fijians in the voting age group; furthermore the "steeply and steadily" falling birth rate among the Indians was likely to close the population gap.¹³ The leaders of the indigenous Fijians, however, rejected the Indian demand that a common roll should precede, not follow, integration between the two communities. They were apprehensive of the inflammatory potential of the common roll if the experiment failed, and loss of their social, economic, and political identity in a "one person, one vote" system if it succeeded. The NFP's campaign for abolition of communal voting and their criticism of chiefs as self-serving collaborators in European hegemony deepened Fijian anxieties. In the 1968 by-elections, continued demonstration of Indians solidarity with NFP, enraged Fijians, some of whom demanded withdrawal of concessions to Indians and deportation of NFP leaders. Thus the party conflicts contributed in aggravation of ethnic tensions.

12 Narton, Robert K. Race and Politics In Fiji, (St. Lucia's University of Queensland Press, 1977), p.36.

13 R.K. Vasil, "Communalism and Constitution - Making in Fiji", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver, B.C.), Spring 1972, p. 27 & 28.

Yet in the year 1968, these two parties came together to demand for abolition of colonial rule and dominion status. Robert Narton had commented in this context :

"Instead of producing the long feared violence, open confrontation had quickly given way to an elite conciliation in which they tried to detach themselves from the pressures of their followers. Thus ethnic confrontations, which are notorious for arousing acrimonious violence elsewhere, remarkably culminated in some form of communication in Fiji, thus contributing significantly to the achievement of accord between two parties.¹⁴

The Independence Struggle in Fiji was Relatively smoother, without the xenophobia and prolonged period of nationalist struggle that characterised decolonisation in Africa. It became independent on 10 October 1970, after about a century of British rule. Preceding Independence, from August 1969 through March 1970, there were intensive negotiations with regard to the constitution of independent Fiji between the representatives of the Alliance Party and the National Federation Party, representing the three main racial groups in the country - the indigeneous Fijians, the Indians, and the Europeans.¹⁵ At first the talks were restricted to the two parties. It was only towards the end of the discussions, late

14 Robert Narton; Race and Politics in Fiji; (Queensland, 1977), pp. 52-53.

15 Vasil, R.K., "Communalism and Constitution-Making in Fiji", Pacific Affairs, (Vancouver, B.C.), Vol.45, no.1, Spring 1972, pp. 21-41.

in January 1970, that the British Government sent Lord Shepherd, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, at the invitation of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the Chief Minister of Fiji and S.M. Koya, the Leader of the Opposition, "to acquaint himself at first hand with the position reached in the talks".¹⁶ A large number of contentions issues were considered during the negotiations, and agreement was possible on all except the one relating to the question of representation in the Parliament of independent Fiji. The final constitution drafted in secrecy between late 69 and early 70s in London was neither subjected to a national referendum nor was it debated at length in parliament as was later in the case of other Pacific micro

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¹⁶ A significant fact that should be noted here is that in Fiji, where the differences between the conflicting positions of the Indians on the one side and the Fijians and the Europeans on the other were much greater than in Malaya (now Malaysia), the British left it very much to the two contending parties to determine the constitution, whereas in Malaya they constituted a non-partisan constitutional commission consisting of well-known jurists from a number of commonwealth countries to make recommendations for a constitution of independent Malaya. The very significant result of this in the case of Malaya was that the recommendations made by the nonpartisan body of experts from outside the country provided the broad frame-work and the fundamental features of the constitution. The recommendations carried great prestige and could, therefore, be altered only marginally. Even though the non-Malaya, like the Indians in Fiji, had little bargaining power vis-a-vis the indigenous Malays, the recommendations of the Commission Strengthened their position to a degree and, on both sides found it difficult to make demands that might be recommendations of the commission. And the significant result was that even though the recommendations were not accepted in full and the constitution was finalised by a working party which included only one representative of the non-Malays, it was not so blatantly one-sided as the constitution of independent Fiji.

states. The leaders of NFP, and Alliance party accepted the constitution as fait accompli. Thus Brij V. Lal observes -

"The constitution was an instrument, so complex that its structure and full implications have barely been understood by people. The so called consensus constitution of independent Fiji thus did not mark any radical departure from the colonial past; on the contrary it entrenched the same racial principles that had governed colonial politics in Fiji."¹⁷

RACIAL POLITICS AND CONSTITUTION

As the Melanesians in Fiji were in numerical minority therefore the constitution was stretched out of the way from Westminster democracy to safe guard the privileged and interests of the indigenous population.¹⁸

Thus the constitution provided a bicameral system based on the Westminster model. Parliament consists of the Upper House or the Senate, and the Lower House or the House of Representatives. Election to the House of Representatives was based on the principle of racial representation. The allocation of seats in the Lower House was as under¹⁹

17 Brij V. Lal, Politics In Fiji : Studies in Contemporary History, (London, The Allen and Unwin, 1986), ed. no. 3, p. 38.

18 Fisk, E.K., The Political Economy of Independent Fiji, (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1970) p 18.

19 As cited by Brij V. Lal, in Politics in Fiji, n.17, p.76.

Group	Communal Seats	National Seats	Total	%	Total Popula- tion (1980)	%
Fijians	12	10	22	42.3	272000	44
Indians	12	10	22	42.3	306500	50
General Elec.	3	5	8	15.4	19000	4

ALLOCATION OF SEATS IN THE LOWER HOUSE

As 27 of the 52 seats in the House of Representatives were communal seats reserved for ethnic candidates to be elected by voters registered on the Communal roll. The remaining 25 seats were national cross-voting seats with ethnic allocations. Candidates for the national seats were required to be ethnic Fijians, Indians and General Electors but all registered voters, irrespective of their ethnic background, were eligible to vote for them in a general election. In that complex system of voting, each voter was having four votes; one for his or her ethnic constituency and one each for the three national seats. Vote splitting does not occur on a significant scale, in fact, electorally thus far, ethnic loyalties appear to supersede all other considerations. Thus the main repercussions of that system was :

- The principle of parity of representation in respect of Indians and Fijians i.e. each were having 42.3 per cent of the seats.

- The European-led General Elector minority constituting a mere 4 per cent of the national population enjoyed 15 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives. It should be emphasised that the outcome of the five General National Seats was determined by Fijian and Indian votes.

- The three communal seats give the General Electors the enviable position to holding the balance of power in the Fijian parliament, a privilege they have chosen not to exercise since independence. Instead, they have thrown their weight solidly behind the Fijian-dominated Alliance giving it an automatic lead of three communal seats in a general election. In this sense, an important by-product of General Elector over-representation has been the establishment of an ethnic Fijian electoral advantage over its rivals.

The principle of the paramontcy of Fijian interests was explicitly recognised in the senate whose composition was as follows²⁰

Nominees of the Great Council of Chiefs	8
Nominees of the Prime Minister	7
Nominees of the Leader of Opposition	6
Nominee of the Council of Rotuma	1

Total	22

²⁰ Lal, Brij. V., Politics in Fiji, ed. n.3, p.77.

The special representation of the Great Council of Chiefs was of crucial significance. The council nominees enjoyed the power of veto in the senate. No substantive amendment to the constitution affecting citizenship, the composition of the parliament or the judiciary could be approved without the support of at least three-quarters of both the Houses. Similar provisions protected the Fijian Affairs Ordinance, Fijian Development Fund Ordinance, the Native Land Ordinance and the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Ordinance.

More specifically, Brij., V. Lal observed, that the constitution provided that the legislation regarding "Fijian land, custom and customary rights were not be passed by the senate unless it was supported at the final vote thereon in the House by no less than six of the Great Council of Chiefs nominees. Thus the claim to certain prior rights and privileges by the Taukei has been recognised and entrenched in the constitution."²¹

The constitution established a privileged elite of chiefly class enjoying absolute power and control over land rights and land arrangements. None of the arrangements would have been more calculative to maintain for eternity the racial separateness and ethnic tensions than the provisions regarding land rights.

THE RACIAL POLITICS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

On the electoral system, the constitutional arrangement was supposed to be temporary. In the final round of

21 Ibid, p.77.

negotiations in the London conference between the Alliance Party and National Federation Party, an arrangement was reached that the method of election would be used only for the first House of Representatives elected after independence in 1972. It was an interim solution of the deadlock on election system. The conference agreed that at some time after the next general election and before the second election the Prime Minister, after the consultation with the leader of the opposition, should arrange that a Royal Commission should be set up to study and make recommendations for the most appropriate method of election and representation for Fiji and that the terms of reference should be agreed by the Prime Minister with the leader of the opposition.²²

In March 1975 the Governor-General of Fiji appointed Professor Harry Street as Chairman of the Royal Commission which was required to be constituted under the 1970 agreement before the second national elections in the country. Subsequently, Sir William Hart and Professor B. Keith Lucas were appointed as the other two members of the Commission. All three were chosen by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition as provided for in the 1970 agreement.

The terms of reference of the Commission stated that it had been appointed "for the purpose of considering and making recommendations as to the most appropriate method of electing

22 Fiji, Parliament, Report of the Royal Commission, Parliamentary Paper 24 of 1975, p. iii.

members to, and representing the people of Fiji in the House of Representatives."²³

The Alliance presented only a formal written submission to the commission, asserting that it "is unanimous that the present system is the most appropriate electoral system for Fiji's Political problems and the country's political process.²⁴ On the whole it adopted a much more tough and uncompromising position on the issue than it had done in 1970.

The Alliance Party's position had considerably hardened since 1970. In the negotiations between the Alliance and the Federation party prior to Independence, the Alliance leaders had clearly stated that they accepted the principle of common roll as a desirable objective, but the problem with regard to its immediate implementation was that their supporters, especially the Fijian people and their chiefs, would not agree to it and that it was difficult to persuade them through rational argument. However, in 1975, they began to question the very suitability of the common roll to the multiracial society of Fiji. In their submission to the Commission the Alliance leaders asserted that there were indigenous Fijians "Who see the desire and agitation for change in the present system by some non-indigenous whose motivation leans towards greater political power as an attempt to gain political dominance in Fiji"²⁵ and that any change in the electoral

²³ Ibid, p. ii.

²⁴ Alliance Party's Submission to the Royal Electoral Commission, (Suva), 8 August 1975, p.10.

²⁵ Alliance Party's Submissions to the Royal Commission, n.34, p.3.

system which deprived the indigenous Fijians of the security of representation that was assured to them under the existing arrangements would automatically lead to an intensification of the agitation under the banner of "Fiji is for Fijians" that already existed.²⁶ And in their view, such an intensified agitation could easily lead to violence and have a disastrous impact on race relations in the country, which they had been able to establish on a reasonable and constructive basis during their stewardship of the Government since 1970.

The National Federation Party, on the other hand, made a much more lengthy written submission, and its representatives spent a whole day in discussions with the Commission. In its submission it presented two extremely significant new ideas - the system of proportional representation and the concept of a Government of National Unity and Concorde. Some of the other main points made in its submission were, firstly, it maintained that the Fijian interests were fully protected by the constitution and that it was not necessary to maintain an undemocratic system of elections to achieve the objective.²⁷ Secondly, the party asserted that it had accepted the system of parliamentary representation introduced in 1970 only as an "interim" arrangement to operate with regard to the first General Election after Independence ' as "the penultimate step in the direction of a fully representative and popular

²⁶ Ibid, p.4.

²⁷ National Federation Party, Submission to the Royal Commission on Fiji's Electoral System, (Suva), 5 August, 1975, p.9.

democracy" - and that the 1970 agreement also had clearly stipulated as much. It emphasized that the 1970 agreement had viewed the Royal Commission as the instrument to establish fully the fundamental principles of democracy and representative government in the country.

Thirdly, the party reiterated its opposition to elections based on communal and cross-voting (national) rolls.²⁸ It asserted that communal rolls were a barrier to ethnic integration and a threat to the unity of the nation. They perpetuated separate communal identities and inevitably led to communal confrontation and conflict. They also seriously impaired the successful working of democratic institutions. Under the system elected representatives of an ethnic or religious group could not afford to subordinate the interests of their supporters to those of the nation as a whole. Fourthly, it asserted that the facts as they were made it obvious that it was the Indians who should be fearful of the indigeneous Fijians rather than otherwise. In its view, the Fijians had established their political paramountcy through the constitution. They almost exclusively manned and controlled the armed forces of the country.²⁹ The Government of the country before 1987 elections was largely in the hands of the Fijians : the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were both Fijians. Of the fourteen members of the

²⁸ National Federation Party, Submission to the Royal Commission on Fiji's Electoral System, n.41, pp. 10-15.

²⁹ There were only thirty-six Indians in the entire Fiji military force in 1975.

cabinet, no less than eight were Fijians; three Europeans, and only three Indians. Of the twelve permanent Secretaries to the Government of Fiji (Civil Service heads of Government Departments), five each were Fijians and Europeans, and only two were Indians. Furthermore, most of the land in the country was owned by the Fijians even though they produced only a small fraction of the national wealth from it.

The party maintained that in view of these facts the Indian Community in Fiji was extremely worried over its future. There was widespread frustration among the Indians, and large numbers of them, especially those with education and useful skills, were leaving for "safer" destinations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. It asserted that "the only way this process can be reversed is by giving the people a stake in the Society and the recognition that they are citizens of equal worth. The political system and processes must reflect their acceptance as the people of this land with equal rights and privileges."³⁰

Finally, the party emphasized that it was only a common electoral roll in a fragmented society such as Fiji that could bring together the diverse racial groups in the common task of nation-building and improving the lot of their people. Communal roll resulted in the opposite.

Royal Commission recognised the widespread communal fears among Fijians of Indian domination and unfair representation.

³⁰ National Federation Party, Submissions to the Royal Commission on Fiji's Electoral System, n.41, p.26.

It expressed the view that although fears of these kinds often had very little or no racial basis. The myths and prejudices were planted and carefully cultivated in the minds of masses and too deeply embedded in their psychologies to be ignored. The Royal Commission emphasized on racial harmony, which could be promoted by an avowed race relations policy supported by a positive and sustained education system. It rejected the demands of increase in communal representation. Only for Rotumans, additional seat was recommended.

The commission condemned the existing system of election in Fiji, commonly known as "first-past-the-post" or "Relative Majority System", as an unfair and inexact system".³¹ Though attractive in simplicity, this system had resulted in exaggerated representation of majority parties at the expense of minorities. "It distorted the results. It was not a system which we could recommend for Fiji."³² The Commission maintained that Fiji required a system which was fair and equitable and which at the same time did not encourage or perpetuate racialism or racial politics. It recommended proportional representation with the system of single transferable vote as the one satisfying the above mentioned requirements.

The Commission supported the NFP view to a very great extent in its recommendation that all racial qualification for the national seats should be abolished and suggested voting by

31 Report of the Royal Commission, no.31, p.11, Quoted by Lal, Brij. V. Politics in Fiji, ed. n.3, p.42.

32 Ibid, p.43.

"Single transferable Vote System" the essential characteristic of which was that the share of seats won by any party would reflect the share of votes won.³³

However, there were sharp differences between Government and opposition about the status of the Commissions recommendations. The opposition argued that the Government is committed to accept them on moral grounds since this was the basis of the joint agreement reached in 1970. On the contrary, the Alliance Party rejected the recommendations, on the ground that they were not binding and that in any event constitution was a permanent arrangement. It was constitutionally not an invalid position, but was in variance with the agreement reached by the then Prime Minister Ratu Mara in 13th Plenary Session of the London Constitutional Conference.

Mara has shifted his stand mainly because the interim arrangement had preserved his party's advantage as the elections in 1972 clearly demonstrated. The analysis of structural power dynamics had showed that Alliance Party had been used to symbolise Fijian domination in Political sphere through its three fold racial associations; the Fijian association, the general electors association and the Indian alliance. The Alliance Government's altered position marked the end of the honeymoon period' between the leaders of the two parties.

33 Ibid, p.48.

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER 3

PARTY POLITICS AND POLITICIZATION IN FIJI

PARTY POLITICS IN FIJI

The competitive party politics has reigned supreme in Fiji since independence and even before. The Alliance party headed by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara - a New Zealand and Oxford educated High Chief from the Lau Group and the National Federation Party remain the dominant political parties, though they have been joined by two splinter Fijian parties : the Fijian Nationalist Party and the Western United Front.

Since 1966 the Alliance Party was winning consistently at the polls except for its temporary defeat at the April 1977 elections and in 1987 elections. The experience of government, uninterrupted leadership at the top and the crucial support of the Indian and European business sector, had all given the party an edge over its rivals. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had been at the helm of party's leadership since its inception, and though voices of dissent were heard from within the Alliance, no overt threat emerged to his leadership. Indeed at critical times in the Alliance's fortune, such as in the 1982 elections, it had been his stature that had ensured success and even victory for the party. Today, although in contrast to other leaders, Fijian and Indian, he still walks tall, the aura of invincibility that surrounded him in the immediate aftermath of independence seems to have weakened. The corrosive effects of ethnic politics and persistent criticism of his policies and style, from both Fijians and Indians, may

have tarnished his earliest lusture. On the international stage, however, his reputation remains high.¹

The basic, communality-federated structure of the party has remained intact. The Alliance is marginally more multiracial than its rivals, though since independence, its chain on Indian votes has declined significantly. The Fijian Association is the backbone of the Alliance, and Fijian solidarity behind the party at the polls has been the most important factor in its electoral victories. The loyal support of the General Electors, despite their sometimes bitter disagreements over candidate selection at election time, has helped to consolidate the party's dominance at the polls.

The weakest spoke in the Alliance wheel has been the Indian Alliance. Its credibility has been seriously damaged by its consistent failure to attract significant numbers of Indian voters to its ranks and by the departure from the party of its founding members.² Vijay Singh, a former Alliance Attorney General, left the party in 1979, when he was dismissed from the Cabinet after weeks of controversy and speculation about the extent of his involvement in the now famous Flour Mills of Fiji court case. He joined the NFP in 1982. Mr. M.T. Khan, another former Alliance Cabinet Minister, was not reinstated in the Cabinet after being unsuccessfully tried for corruption. He too joined the NFP and was a

1 Taylor, M. (ed.). Fiji : Future Imperfect (Sydeney, Allen and Unwin, 1989), p.14.

2 Brij, V. Lal, Politics In Fiji : Studies In Contemporary History, n.3, p.91.

candidate until his untimely death just before the election in 1982. The climax of Indian desertions from the Alliance came with the resignation in 1982 of James Shankar Singh, President of the Indian Alliance, on the grounds of "irreconcilable differences" with Mara.³ Failure to win the party ticket, personality clashes, and a feeling of relative insignificance in the internal affairs were all reasons for the desertions. Most of them also argued that the Alliance had abandoned its genuinely multiracial philosophy of the early 1970s and had taken a distinctly pro-Fijian stance.

The departure of the Indian Alliance old guard on the eve of the 1982 general elections was to some extent compensated for by two new sources of support in the Indian Community. The Indian Business Community, primarily Gujaratis, allied itself more closely with the Alliance and the Fijian elites through joint commercial ventures. The Alliance promised 'Business As Usual': the Gujarati Businessmen could not ask for better. The other major source of support came from the Muslims. The leadership of the Fiji Muslim League, the national umbrella organisation of the religious minority, has long been with the Alliance. In 1982, many of its ordinary members switched parties, alienated from the NFP as a result of the bitter 1977 elections. Perhaps more significant than the disenchantment with the NFP was the fact of religious revival and a reaffirmation of a distinct Muslim identity within the Indian community. The demand for Muslim separation has a long

3 The Fiji Times, 11 January 1982.

history,⁴ but in the 1980s, it reached new heights. In a survey carried out in late 1979, two third of the Muslims indicated a desire for separate political representation in parliament. On the question of linguistic preference, 62 per cent gave Urdu as their first choice, 27 per cent Arabic, 8 per cent Fijian and a party 3 per cent desired Hindustani, the Indian Lingua franca.⁵ They therefore moved away from the NFP, perceived as a Hindu party, to the Alliance, encouraged by its cordial and accommodating attitude. But these changes did not seriously alter the basic party structure; the communally federated structure remained. The dominance of high chiefs at the top gave the Alliance an aura of legitimacy as well as stability, enabling the use of traditional avenues to reconcile and resolve internal differences.

In contrast to consolidated oneman leadership of Mara in the Alliance Party, the NFP had a turbulent and fragile leadership pattern. It had been plagued by a continuous history of internal struggle for leadership that had seriously eroded its creditibility as alternative government. The Indian constituency of NFP itself was a source of problem for NFP, as it was deeply divided along religious, cultural and regional lines. A more important factor had been the party's largely self-seeking leadership which rested almost exclusively in, what Ahmed Ali says, "a gaggle of squabbling lawyers,

4 Ahmed Ali, Emergence of Muslim Separation in Fiji' Plural Societies 8, 1, 1979, pp. 57-69.

5 Ahmed Ali, Plantation to Politics, p.150.

unwilling to devote more attention to party matter."6 Personality clashes rather than informed political differences have been the main cause of the interminable infighting.

Mr. S.M. Koya, took over the leadership of the party after A.D. Patel's death in 1969, and remained as the leader until 1976. He again became leader in 1984 after Jai Ram Reddy resigned from parliament over a dispute with the Speaker of the House. The mantle of leadership never rested comfortably on Koya's shoulders. Koya's cordial relations with Mara in the immediate aftermath of independence, which soured after 1975, provided ample ammunition to his opponents within the party. Simmering tensions among the different factions came to a head during the 1976 ALTO debate in parliament. Two senior party functionaries, K.C. Ramrakha and Mrs. Irene Jai Narayan, and eight others defied Koya and voted with the Alliance to get the Bill passed. The differences were expeditiously patched up for the April 1977 elections, which the NFP won with the carefully crafted, though publicly disavowed, support of the Fijian Nationalist Party officially committed to the deportation of the Indian Community. Stunned by its narrow victory (26 seats out of 52), and unable to reconcile its internal differences about leadership, the NFP fumed for a solution for four days, at the end of which the governor general, exercising his deliberate judgement', appointed Ratu Mara to form government. Koya's pathetic demonstrations that Mara and the Alliance had conspired to prevent an Indo-Fijian

from becoming prime minister sounded unconvincing in the face of the NFP's own ineptitude, disarray and squabbling leadership.⁷

The elections of April 1977 split the NFP into two bitterly opposed groups which later crystallised into the Dove faction led by Mr. Koya, and the Flower faction led by Ramrakha and Narayan.⁸ At the September elections, with few policy differences to go on, the two factions turned upon each other with unprecedented pettiness in a campaign remembered in the Indian Community for the cynical manipulation of cultural and religious symbols and affinities of the Indian voter. Fielding parallel candidates in several constituencies, the NFP handed the election to the alliance on a platter. The Alliance won the election with an unprecedented 36 seats.

The Flower faction won 13 seats (58.2 per cent of Indian Communal votes) and the Dove 3 (41.8 per cent). Mr. Koya lost his Lautoka Seat and his position as the Leader of the Opposition to Mr. Jai Ram Reddy.

Reddy was the Leader of the Opposition from 1977 to 1984. In many respects, his experience in office paralleled Koya's. There was a short period of cooperation with Ratu Mara and his government (1977 - late 1979), followed by a period of bitter relations (1980-84) that resulted in an almost total breakdown of communication between Mara and Reddy. The latter's rise in national and NFP politics was meteoric. A New Zealand trained

⁷ Ibid, p.94.

⁸ Ahmad Ali, Plantation to Politics, Chapters 6-7 for internal struggles in the NFP caused by the land issue.

lawyer, he was appointed to the senate by Koya in 1974. He first stood for election in April 1977 and became NFP leader five months later. His first major achievement was to bring about reconciliation between the two warring factions of the party. Although tensions between him and Koya remained, Reddy was able to bring about a semblance of party unity that had seemed an evanescent dream in 1977. But unity was achieved on Reddy's terms; many former Doves were shunted to the periphery of party affairs in the process of candidate selection for the 1982 election in which his own supporters gained the majority. The unsuccessful Doves crossed over to the Alliance and became a painful thorn in the NFP's side by keeping alive lingering doubts about the strength of party unity.⁹

Under Reddy's leadership, the platform of the party was broadened in an effort to increase its appeal to non - Indian voters as well as to enable former Indian Alliance officials to join the party with little loss of political credibility. Mr. Reddy explained his political philosophy in an interview with the Fiji Times in these terms : "I am not a great believer in any "isms" our political creeds have to be relevant to our needs. We have a community already divided on racial lines. We do not want to add to this by introducing yet another division, a class warfare. I do favour a pragmatic, middle of the road approach to our problems."¹⁰ Consistent with this approach,

9 Among the prominent Doves who defected to the Alliance were Surendra Prasad, Kaur Battan Singh and Raojibhai Patel. All of them stood against the NFP candidates in the 1982 elections.

Reddy advocated new economic platforms that were markedly at variance with the NFPs earlier proclamations. Under Koya, the NFP had embraced a populist posture. Thus in 1972, Koya spoke of nationalising vital industries, creating a welfare state, providing compulsory and free education, and other such policies.¹¹ Although by 1977, some of the earlier rhetorical excesses had been discarded, Koya still advocated nationalisation when necessary, and promised to Legislate against monopolies and cartels and other organizations which indulge in unfair practices.¹²

Reddy, on the other hand, rejected such policies and openly embraced the capitalist philosophy of development. In its Manifesto for the 1982 general elections, the NFP proclaimed: The NFP/WUF coalition subscribes to the economic philosophy of competitive free enterprise' because the "allocation of resources based on private initiative and effort produce the best economic results.¹³ Under its administration, the NFP promised, "the role of government will be restricted to public administration, provision of social services, maintenance of law and order and the construction of the necessary infrastructure to assist the private sector investment." And foreign investors would be "assured of their right to the repatriation of their capital and profits". The manifesto laid to rest whatever fears the Fiji business

11 The Fiji Times. 12 April, 1972.

12 Brij, V. Lal, Politics in Fiji : Studies In Contemporary History, n.3, .82.

13 Ibid, p.84.

community had about the NFP being a left of the centre' party. In an effort to win a large constituency, Reddy cut the NFP's cord with its past. In the end, the NFP became a shadow of the Alliance, competing with it to win the approval and support of the business class of Fiji.

The ultimate hurdle for Reddy was the dismal support for the NFP among the Fijians. The party had made various attempts in the past to get more Fijians into its fold, but with minimal success. The first experiment had been the merger of the Fijian National Democratic Party with the - then Federation party, thus leading to the creation of the National Federation Party. In 1970, the NFP embarked on the ill-fated Operation Taukei¹⁴ though, it was able to attract a mere 2.4 per cent of Fijian Communal votes in the 1972 elections, a figure which subsequently declined even further. Mr. Reddy, aware of the need to attract more Fijians to increase the NFP's appeal as an alternative government, had told his party as early as 1974 that without a multiracial base, the NFP was doomed to remain a "permanent opposition"¹⁵ His softening of the NFP's earlier confrontationist posture was, in part, a device to attain this end. Not surprisingly, therefore, he formed an electoral coalition with a splinter Fijian party, the Western United Front, in 1982. But for reasons even the coalition failed to realise the goal of broadening the party's ethnic base. The net, perhaps unintended, result of Reddy's

14 Taukei is a Fijian word that means "Landowner".

15 K.L. Gillion, The Fiji Indians Challenge to European Dominance, Canberra.

pragmatic endeavours was to cut the NFP loose from its traditional ideological moorings and to fashion it to some extent in the image of Alliance. Ideologically at least the Alliance now faced no opposition in the country.

Party politics dominated by the Alliance and the NFP and dedicated publicly to the promotion of multiracialism and political coexistence, was challenged in the April 1977 general elections by the Fijian Nationalist Party.¹⁶ Embracing emerging Fijian ethnonationalism, the party rejected both multiracialism and political coexistence and instead espoused the cause of 'Fiji for Fijians'. 1977 was not the first time, of course, that such a platform had been embraced by a political party. In 1972 Villame Savu's Fijian Independent Party had espoused similar causes, wanting the Fijians alone to decide the destiny of their land'.¹⁷ The founder of the Fijian Nationalist Party, former Alliance Assistant Minister Sakiasi Butadroka, first came to national prominence in October 1975, when he moved a motion in parliament demanding the repatriation of Fiji Indians, a sentiment that was widely shared by some racist elements in Fijian society. Butadroka launched the FNP with certain propagandist motives which included demands for the Fijian Political economic paramountcy, reservation of most of the posts of political authority for Fijians, and more opportunities to Fijians to enter into

16 Ahmed Ali, Plantation to Politics: Studies on the Indians, Suva, 1980, p. 176.

17 Ibid, p. 186.

business. A more sinister demand was that all lands sold to Indian should be returned to Fijians.

Butadroka's message, delivered in emotional tones attracted mostly rural, illiterate and underprivileged urban Fijian voters. In 1977 elections FNP played a crucial role in Alliance defeat as it made in road in alliance support base. However, Butadroka and his FNP had maintained a low profile and shifted its extremist stance. While maintaining a "Fiji for Fijians" ideology, the party adopted a less racially slanted position in 1982 elections. It was routed in 1982 election, obtaining only 7.7 per cent of total Fijian Communal votes. However, it did become a balancing factor in Fijian politics as far as Fijian votes were concerned.

A new trend of growth of regional party emerged and substantiated in the form of Western United Front which was founded on the grievances of the Western Fijians. Its main aim was to promote the particular interests of Western Fijians, who were alleged to have been neglected by the Alliance Government. Western Fijians have had long complaint of regional discrimination and step-brotherly treatment.¹⁸ In the 1960s and early 1970s, several attempts were made to re-assert a distinct western identity, but the separatist tendencies were contained through traditional reconciliation ceremonies.¹⁹ The Western United Front (WUF) was probably the

18 Race and regionalism in Fiji and the Pacific and India: some generally held misconceptions. Paper presented by Ganesh Chand at a Seminar in New School of Social Sciences, New York, 1989.

19 Ibid, p.4.

most ambitious attempt to articulate western grievances in some coherent political fashion. The guiding force behind the formation of the WUF was Ratu Osea Govidi, who had won his Nadroga-Navosa Fijian Communal Seat twice in 1977. Although a high Chief with Western education, his popularity rested more on his defiant stand on the issue of contracts for pine harvesting. In fact, it was the pine issue which galvanised the Western Fijian and led to the formation of the Western United Front.

The new party was launched in traditional Fijian style on 17 July 1981 in the presence of 20 ranking Western chiefs. Ratu Osea Gavidi, elected president, outlined the goals of the party :

- Protect and encourage the unity of Western Fijians.
- Protect the interests of landowners and to defend their rights to develop their resources according to their aspirations.
- Seek changes in the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and Rural Development to improve the lives of Western Fijians.
- Improve educational facilities of Western Fijian and provide them opportunities in Commercial and Industrial enterprises.²⁰

The WUF had a specific regional focus and a distinct regional constituency. To become an effective national force, it needed to be more broadly based. Cooperation with the

²⁰ Lal, Brij. V. Politics in Fiji : Studies in Contemporary History, (London) 1986, p.121.

Alliance was obviously out; Mara had castigated the party a day after its launching as a disruptive force which preached ridiculous political ideologies'.²¹ An attempt was made to form a progressive front with the FNP but was abandoned after an irate Butadroka reportedly assaulted Solomone Momoivalu, an Alliance Minister of State, for accusing him of practising voodooism to attract Fijian voters. Gavidia then turned to the NFP in early 1981 because it was the most prominent political party opposed to the Alliance'. Their coalition materialised on 11 January 1982. But the coalition could not make much headway in 1982 elections Gavidia narrowly lost his seat (47.9 per cent of the votes) to the Alliance (50.5 per cent). The WUF received a mere 7 per cent of the total Fijian communal votes.²²

There were three reasons for the WUF's dismal performance in 1982 election. Firstly, Gavidia's poor campaign strategy that frequently took him away from his constituency, giving the impression that he took his own supporters for granted. Secondly, coalition with a predominantly Indian-based party produced harmful results in an atmosphere of tense ethnic polarisation. The third major factor was the Alliance's concerted attempts to win back the vital Nadroga - Navosa Fijian communal seat.

²¹ Lal, Brij V., Politics in Fiji : Studies in Contemporary History, (London, The Allen and Unwin, 1986).

²² Lal, Brij V., The Fiji General Election of 1982", Journal of Pacific History Summer 1982.

The coalition ended for all practical purposes with the campaign. This was not altogether surprising given that it had failed to articulate an alternative vision of Fiji's future that went beyond seeking narrow political advantages over its rivals.

In its basic aspects - the persistence of ethnicity as a major factor in Fijian electoral politics, the emphasis on the style rather than the substantive issues of development, the 1982 elections differed little from the previous three. There was one significant exception to this trend, however, the allegation for the first time, of the involvement of foreign forces and nations in Fiji's electoral process. This was the major issue in the last half of the campaign. It set into motion a train of events which led to ethnic tensions not seen in Fiji since the bi-elections of 1968. The allegations of foreign involvement in the 1982 elections led to the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the various allegations.

An unfortunate consequence of the Royal Commission hearings was the rejuvenation of the embers of ethnic tensions generated in the campaign, and the hardening of attitude on both sides of the house. One manifestation of this was the partisan appointment and conduct of the House Speaker Tomasi Vakatora that led to periodic clashes with the opposition and eventually to Reddy's resignation from Parliament. Koya returned to parliament as the new leader of the Opposition. A

cycle was complete the politics of old had once returned to the force.

Emergence of Fiji Labour Party

Post 1982 election period in Fiji had witnessed several important and far-reaching developments. Most significant among them had been the emergence and growth of the Fiji Labour Party. It had the capacity to emerge as a formidable political organisation having a potent class-based political force cutting across ethnic loyalties.

A veteran Fijian observer, Satendra Nandan, in an article in "Fiji Times", has said that the trade union backed political party was hailed in general among Fijians, as historically inevitable development and most significant political event since independence.²³

The FLP has its origins in a variety of discontents that came across during the tenure of the Alliance government that came to power in 1982. Some of these of course were not generated by the Alliance, but are consequential on its failure to deal with them adequately.

First there is a problem of unemployment and underemployment. Even though Indians have effectively practised birth control for at least two decades, the ten acre cane or rice holding cannot provide work and a living for more than four persons. The surplus members of the homestead try to find work in the neighboring towns almost always with little success since most Indian small-to-medium businesses are

23 Satendra Nandan, Fiji Times, (Suva) 17th July.

family affairs. The larger corporate firms have vacancies only for those with established clerical skills at very least and these are available in abundance. Again, young Fijians, seeking respite from the irksome authority of their village Ratus, and confident that the decline in chiefly authority is of an order where he cannot force them to return, drift to towns mainly to Suva - and find themselves in the same disadvantaged situation as Indian drifters from their homesteads. There was a pool of enforcedly idle youth ripe for mischief, and this has been reflected in a progressive decline in law and order particularly in the streets of Fijian cities and towns.²⁴

The Educational policies favouring Fijian entrants to the university of the South Pacific (USP) and trying to use newly qualified but only marginally employable young teachers at cut rates have also produced a reserve of malcontents, who are ready listeners for demagogues airing half-digested principles of social and economic equality.²⁵

However, most serious of all is the discontent of the employed but poorly paid bulk of the Fijian work force of all races with a wage freeze imposed in November 1984, without any corresponding freeze on prices. The fact that there was a growing foreign debt and a fall in the growth rate of the economy to one per cent that may have necessitated such action to keep inflation down and preserve the value of the Fijian

24 Narayan, Jay, The Political Economy of Fiji, (Suva, The South Pacific Review Press, 1986), p.46.

25 Ibid, p.48.

dollar is cold comfort to those who are at the receiving end of the restrictive measures. K.S. Ramchandran pointed out :

"Decline of Sugar production coupled with fall of its international prices was a severe setback for Fijian Economy. Growth rate in 1985 had dropped to mearge 1 per cent from earlier growth rate of 7.8 per cent in 1984."²⁶

Further, when there is an obvious and growing gap between the rich and the poor as evidenced by the highly visible lifestyles of the former, it is very easy to give credence to rumours of corruption in high places and the use of political position for personal gain.

The rationale of the wage freeze was given as an essential step to discipline economy. This wage freeze was vehemently opposed by Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC). It criticized government for the unilateral manner in which it had acted, effectively abrogating the consultative requirement with the tripartite forum (composed of FTUC, Fiji Employees association and government) for reaching common understanding on vital economic issues.

The trade union saw the wage freeze as a sign of concerted effort to suppress their movement by the government. It was widely seen as a collusion between the political elite and the business class to keep the wages down. FTUC threatened a nation wide strike to protest the wage freeze but the government's adamant stand and threat to declare emergency and

²⁶ K.S. Ramchandran, An overview of Fijian Economy, Financial Express, (New Delhi), 15th June 1987.

use troops to man essential services forced them to seek other avenues to air their grievances. FTUC held an economic summit in May 1985 to explain the people its opposition to wage freeze. The idea of launching a political party, backed by labour unions was already mooted by trade union leader James Raman in an anti-wage freeze rally in Laukota on November 4, 1984. At an executive meeting of the Fiji Trade Union Congress (FTUC) on 15th December 1984, Mahendra Sukhdeo, General Secretary of the National Union of Municipal Workers, moved a resolution that a Fiji labour party should be launched. Six months later, on 6th July 1985 the successful motion became a reality and as Akosita Tamanisau Comments :

"The Alliance Government found itself face-to-face with a political party where it was vulnerable but never seriously been challenged earlier."²⁷

Fiji Labour Party was founded on 6th July 1985 to provide an effective political alternative to the Fiji's electorates, who were fed up with the politics of race and ethnicity as conducted by chosen elites. The general Fijian masses were disenchanted with Alliance policies and tactics, and also equally disillusioned by NFP's debacles and its discontent at the top. The internal squabbles and discords in FNP, mostly the disagreements emerging not from substantive issues of policies or ideology, but on personality and styles had led to

27 Robert T. Robertson & Akosita Tamanisau, Fiji : The Shattered Coups, (Camberra, 1988), p.24.

a sharply divided ineffective opposition, that had disenchanted many of its Indo-Fijian supporters.

Within a short period of time, the new Fiji labour party proved outstandingly popular. Its success in local body elections and popular support in December 1985 parliamentary election established it as a party with great future. Dr. Timoci Bavadra, leader of FLP and an idealistic but determined tyro in politics had defined the goals of his party as to reeducate people of Fiji to think in terms of issues, rather than the misguided appeal of racial sentiments and prejudices as by main political parties.

FLP and NFP Coalition

The Political Scenerio in Fiji underwent a great tradition after 1985 most outstanding of them being the finalization of the FLP-NFP coalition. This unforeseen alliance came into existene after the realization of commonality of political strategies and issues. The FLP leaders like Mahendra Chaudhary and Dutt had some secret talks with NFP leaders which finally resulted in the formation of coalition between the two parties in Decemebr 1986.

Until 1986, there was not any such prediction by most of the political analysts. Vijay Naidu, in a paper presented to FTUC meeting had observed, "Any deal with the NFP Smacks of opportunism and is not ideologically sound. It would compromise many parts of the Labour platform."²⁸ Now the

²⁸ Vijay Naidu, Fiji Labour Party : A Report (Paper presented in FTUC workshop on political options for labour movements), 1986.

question arises why did the FLP joined with a party which Dr. Bavadra once claimed, represented the interests of a handful of self serving people?

The answer lies in the emergence of new political consciousness among younger and better educated urbanized Indians and Fijians. This compelled both the parties to come together against the corrupt and unpopular regime of Alliance party. The FLP was fighting for a number of specific issues - wage freeze, poverty, crimes and increasing marginalization of common Fijians. These issues has been never before debated so frankly and with such preference by any opposition party. However, soon the Alliance Government counter attacked and suddenly it became very apparent to Fiji labour party that if the Alliance stayed in the power after 1987 there might be a total suppression of labour movement in Fiji. To survive, a coalition with the NFP was necessary. "Both the parties realized that the emerging urban cross section of the middle class may be rapidly disinclined to vote automatically for a party (Alliance party) geared to preserve power, privileges and opportunities as natural inheritance for the sons and daughters of traditional chiefs", said Robert Keith Reid.²⁹

In the view of Leaders of NFP, Harish Sharma and Jai Ram Reddy the formation of coalition was to be the irresistible solution to the wearisome divisions which plagued their party. Similarly the FLP leaders were equally sure that they had

²⁹ Robert Keith Reid, "Fiji under the Gun", Island business, (Suva), June 1987, p. 17.

ingredients, capable of guaranteeing their political future and enabling them to be victorious in elections.

1987 Elections

Prime Minister Ratu Mara announced the parliamentary elections, though due in August, to be held in advance in April so that it would leave little time for the Labour and NFP to consolidate an electoral understanding. But that did not deter Dr. Bavadra from forming a coalition, called the coalition party. The April elections, like the earlier elections, were fought keenly with racial undertones, played up specially by the Alliance. Ratu Mara's Alliance Party stood for conservatism, Melanesian land right, chieftainly privilege, the monarchy and close relations with the west, particularly with the United States and Australia. On the other hand, the coalition party of Bavadra stood for lower taxes, help for the unemployed and a new deal for rural workers. It had also hinted at nationalising foreign holdings, many of them Australian. The coalitions pronouncements on foreign relations were much more radical : a ban on nuclear ship visits, support for West Irian people's independence movement in Indonesia, exploring the possibility for a fishing deal with the Soviet Union and membership of the nonaligned movement.³⁰

It was on foreign policy issues that the traditional friends like the United States, Britain and Australia did not feel comfortable with the Labour party's stand.

³⁰ The Roy, Fiji Today : The Politics of Frustration, Round Table (London), January 1988, p.52.

The election campaign got under way in March 1987. The Labour party had committed itself for burying the politics of race, ethnicity, fear and hatred. It rejected the racial explanation of developmental problems like poverty, unemployment and declining standards of life. Labour party and afterwards, the coalition came out with a brilliant programme and policy framework, that had quite radical potential.

The coalition launched a very systematic, well organised and consistent campaign. It promised a "clean and responsible government", to ask to all political leaders to declare their assets. It also pledged to extend the powers of the Ombudsmen to deal with corruption amongst politicians and public office holders, to introduce a leadership code, abolish the Official Secrets Act and to give freedom of information to people.³¹

In utter desperation the Alliance Party played one card that had worked well in the past-the racial card. Fearful of young urban Fijians drifting to coalition, Alliance recklessly played the racial card to its fullest in whole of its campaign. The Alliance's strategies concentrated on the propaganda that without an Alliance government, Fijian land rights would be jeopardized. Some of their leaders started propagating that FLP wished to destroy the chiefly system. The party also emphasised on its capacity to provide stable and durable government.³²

31 Ibid, p.54.

32 Ibid, pp.54-55

There were some allegations of mis-management and corruption on the Alliance during its election campaign by opposition party. As the governing party, the Alliance drew upon greater resources and facilities even than the coalition plugged its message at every opportunity and stuck to campaign based on issues and not race.

When a swing to the coalition became discernible within the Indians and General elections communities, the Alliance started adopting communal and racial tactics more and more. Even the opinion polls resulted in their nervousness and they started accusing FLP-NFP as pro-Soviet and pro-Libyan Communist nexus, bound to deprive Fijians from their land rights by nationalization. On the other hand coalition was inspired by opinion polls and came into confidence, and announced its decision to appoint a commission of inquiry to look into the Alliance's past actions and corruptions by highly placed persons.

On 5 April 1987 voting began. The Sun predicted an Alliance victory because it could transport more voters to the polls.³³ But in fact the Alliance was wary of helping voters who might not vote for them, as happened in the 1985 Suva City Council election, party sheds outside booths often created tension. Many voters passed through Alliance sheds, ate their food, drank their yaqona (Kava) and voted against the party.³⁴

33 Sun, 4th April 1987, pp. 6-7.

34 Sun, 5th April 1987, p. 2.

The FNP openly encouraged its supporters to use Alliance facilities.

Violence was more worrying. In one incident coalition supporters were warned by a gang not to attend a coalition meeting; in another, coalition supporters travelling to labasa were stoned. In Suva and Lautoka coalition workers were assaulted.³⁵

In the eve of 11th April, the counting of votes began at the Vieuto Primary School. Hundreds of people gathered outside in anticipation of an early result. On 12th the results were announced and the seats fell into an all too familiar communal pattern. The FLP-NFP combination emerged victorious, winning total of 28 seats, 19 of which were represented by Indians, 7 by Fijians and 2 by General electors. Alliance had secured 24 seats.

There was a wide spread multiracial consciousness after the coalition's victory in the elections. Later on 12th April, Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilan invited Dr. Timoci Bavadra to form a government. Later on 14th April, Dr. Bavadra announced a 14 member cabinet composed of 7 Indians (including Jai Ram Reddy), 6 Fijians and one general elector. Another Fijian was appointed in the following week to bring the cabinet to 15 and complete the balance.

The coalition represented a cross section of society which had rarely gained access to parliament before Dr.

³⁵ Robert Keith Reid, "Fiji Under the Gun", Island business (Suva), June 1987, p. 18

Bavadra could do little to alter the racial mix of those elected, he earnestly attempted a balanced cabinet. The Mathew K. George Says, the cabinet had never been so balanced. The previous Alliance cabinet possessed only two Indians, three general electors and an overwhelming eleven Fijians.³⁶ Dr. Bavadra, the first commoner to rule Fiji, was confident that the election marked a dramatic change in the country's fortunes. He told journalist David Robie "It will be a chance to install an efficient, responsive government in place of one that has been arrogant and corrupt through its two decade rule".³⁷ Lots of progressive measures were introduced in the first two weeks of Bavadra Government.

However, isolated incidents of violence occurred during the coalition's first week in office. They faced serious challenge from violent demonstrations organised by Alliance party or its proxy - the Taukei movement. The series of disturbances, designed to destabilize the new government led to April 24 demonstrators, in which more than 5,500 people gathered in Suva to participate in largest protest demonstration ever held in Fiji. During the course of demonstration, a petition was presented to Governor General, demanding constitutional changes to protect Melanesian majority in the Government.³⁸

36 Mathew K. George, "Class War in Fiji", The South, July 1987.

37 NZ Sunday Times, 19 April 1987.

38 Mathew K. George, "Class War in Fiji", The South, July 1987.

In the mean time the new chauvinist Fijian movement, known as Taukei came in existence under the leadership of Apisai Tora and Taviela Veilata (an Alliane MP), both were former ministers in Ratu Mara's cabinet. The leaders initiated evil campaigns expressing apprehensions that Fijians would be rendered landless by the coalition government. Tora was very aggressive and violent when he addressed a rally of Fijians at Viseisei. "Upon us is imposed a new colonialism not from outside, but from within our own country by those who arrived here with no rights and were given rights by us, the Taukeis".³⁹

In real sense, after 17 years in power, Alliance members were angered by their defeat and focussed their rage over Indian Community. In the mean time, Mara's conspicuous silence provided necessary vacuum in which the Fijian association and the Taukei movement could operate. Some of the Taukei leaders like Tora, and Tuineda declared a new campaign of Civil disobedience against the present government.

The coalition government believed that it could control everything, it tried to curb the funding of the Taukei movement. With the Taukei Movement appearing to falter, Bavadra turned his attention to parliamentary matters, and conciliate and demonstrate goodwill towards the opposition, by appointing an alliance MP, Tonganivalu as the speaker of the house. The Alliane put pressure on him to refuse the post. An

³⁹ Quoted in a report published in The Sun (Suva) 21st April 1987.

Alliance spokesman, Ahmad Ali, himself accepted that Alliane was unofficially backing the Taukei movement.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Robertson, Robert T. and Akosita, Tamanisan, Fiji : The Shattered Coups, (Sydney, Pluto Press, 1988), p.65.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER 4

1987 COUP d' etat

At 10 am, Thursday, May 14th, Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, 38, a third ranking military officer stormed into the chamber of the House of Representatives where the members were beginning their fourth day of debate on the contents of the address of Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau delivered on Monday. Lt. Col. Rabuka was dressed in civilian clothes, but behind him were to soldiers in battledress and sinisterly adorned with gas masks. They were carrying M-26 automatic rifles and outside the Government buildings two lorries carrying armed troops stood waiting. (1)

"This is a military takeover, stay down and remain clam" declared Rabuka. Then his men led away the four week old government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra outside the parliament making them captives in the barracks of Nabua. Within four hours, all telephones, telex and Fax services were suspended. FM 96 reporter Sam Thompson was first to broadcast the news of the coup. Rabuka gave in Radio Fiji a statement in which he claimed that he had overthrown the government to prevent further disturbances and bloodshed. He justified his coup as a pre-emptive act to thwart the anarchy and disorder (2)

Rabuka declared that constitution henceforth is suspended. A council (interim council) was formed, most of the

1 Sen, Anikendra Nath, 'The American Hand Behind the Fiji Coup', Onlooker, March 1-15 1988, p.51.

2 Alley, Roderic, "Military Coup in Fiji", Round Table, vol.30, October 1987, p.36.

members of which were the ex-minister's in Alliance Cabinet including Ratu Mara, and as chairman of Council had Lt. Col. Rabuka, the only military representative. Ratu Sir Ganilau, the Governor General refused to recognise the unlawful military government and declared a state of emergency, urging civil servants and military to show allegiance to Head of the State. However, this declaration had little effect and Governor General remained Confined in the Government House.

Brigadier Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Commander-in-Chief of RFMF, since 1980, who was in Australia at the time of coup, stated his continuous support for the constitution, his abhorance of the coup and disregard to claim that he had been dismissed from the post. Eleven of the country's supreme court judges issued a statement, holding the military coup as illegal, and asked for the restoration of Dr. Bavadra's government. Rabuka had also to face some resistance and opposition from the Indo-Fijian community. A Civil disobedience movement was also launched. Trade unions and employees association also demanded restoration of Bavdra's government.³

The queen had advised Governor General to continue his refusal to recognise the military government. She had asked Ganilau to stand firm against the rebels who had seized the

3 Reid, Roberts. K., "Fiji Under the Gun", Island Business, (Suva) June, 1987, p.8.

power. On 19th May, Rabuka again met the Governor General to persuade him, but he refused to bow down.⁴

i] Great Council of Fijian Chiefs Meeting

On May 19th, a special meeting of the Great Council of (Fijian) Chiefs opened at the Suva Civic Centre, which was surrounded by armed troops. The meeting had no agenda but it was soon learnt that a debate on future constitutional arrangements and the chiefs' attitude to the military regime had begun. The majority of chiefs and their representatives clearly favoured the coup. Now Brigadier Rabuka indicated that the council of Chiefs would continue to back his position.

ii] Governor General's Position

Meanwhile under pressure from several different forces the Governor General of Fiji Ratu Sir Ganilau finally announced compromise. He assumed executive power which was earlier usurped by the leaders of the coup. Ultimately he agreed to instal one army backed interim council as caretaker government.

On the advice of the Chief Justice Ganilau promised to pardon those who took part in the coup. He also decided to dissolve the recently elected parliament and directed to hold fresh elections. He stated that a high priority of the council of advisors will be setup to enquire into the efficacy and general acceptance of 1970 constitution, and to suggest such modifications as may meet the expectations and very soon the

⁴ The Governor General's position was endorsed by the Commonwealth Secretary General Mr. S. Ramphal, and by the governments of India, Australia and New Zealand.

high power council of advisors was set up with the name of constitutional review and advisory committee.⁵

The deposed Prime Minister Dr. Bavadra was offered a birth in the council presumably to assuage the ruffled feelings of Indo-Fijians. Instant international outrage and initial internal oppositions gave rise to hope that the armed forces could be cajoled into returning to the barracks, but these disquieting developments shared that impasse and reluctance to legitimize the military government, was over, and military junta had come to stay in political arena.

iii] Anti-Indian Violence

While the proceedings of constitutional provisions to legitimize the usurped regime was going on, several incidents of violence against Indian ethnic community had taken place. In Suva, Melanesian youths, mostly belonging to Taukei movement rampaged all through Suva, attacking members of the Indian Community and destroying their properties. In worst racial violence to have occurred in Fiji after the coup over 50 people were injured, which continued sporadically unchecked despite appeals for the restoration of calm and tolerance.⁶

Soilders had raided the houses of the members of the deposed Bavadra Government. Close surveillance was maintained on even members of Indian High Commission.,

There had been several incidents of soliders carrying away goods from shops by producing so-called order papers from

⁵ Robertson, Robert T and Akosita, Tamanisan, Fiji : The Shattered Coups, (Sydney, Pluto Press, 1988), p.67.

⁶ Ibid, p.72

their commanding officers from the shops owned by Indians. Thus military coup destroyed the sense of security among Indians. Several members of Indian Community started disposing of their property and migrating to Australia, New Zealand and the US.

iv] Protests and Military Suppression

The impression created by the Governor General's appointment of an advisory council was, according to Robert Keith Reid : That the country had stepped back from the brink of the abyss of racial strife and ruin.⁷ It was disclosed by Ratu Ganilau that an 8-member subcommittee of the advisory council would review the constitution and make recommendations to the Governor General. So that required changes in constitution could be made before next general elections.

However, soon after the release from detention alongwith rest of his colleagues, Dr. Bavadra began to protest. He categorically stated that Governor General's actions were 'treason'. He pointed out at the composition of advisory council, most of the members maintained close links with the Alliance party. He referred to join the council, along with Dr. Harish Sharma.

He declared to undertake a programme of civil disobedience including mass rallies, strikes and non-cooperation to the government. The Advisory Council announced that under the terms of the emergency, which was to remain in

⁷ Robert Keith Reid, "Fiji Under the Gun", Island Business, (Suva), June, 1987, p.14.

force until constitution had been reviewed and fresh general elections had been called, all strikes and demonstrations were prohibited. It ordered all business premises and shops to trade normally. Notwithstanding these prohibitions, strikes brought much of the western areas of Viti Levu to a standstill. The Western region, main power base of the Coalition, contained the bulk of country's sugar crop which had been due for harvesting at the time of coup. The strike was supported by almost all the cane growers of region, and they refused to cut the canes. These cane cutters were attacked, it was estimated that atleast 3,000 tonnes of uncut sugarcane was burnt in a series of arson attacks.

On June 25th the emergency regulations were extended to empower the government to order the seizure of property, crops and vehicles in accordance with the nation's economic interests. However, industrial action by cane cutters and sugar mill owners continued. On June 31st the State owned Fiji's Sugar Corporation announced that it had closed all the country's sugar refineries in retaliation to the supply disruptions. Many of the mill workers suspended until the end of July when it was suggested that the corporations would assess the viability of assumption of sugarcane processing activities in the light of changing attitude of the labour.

Apart from flexing their economic muscles, Fiji Indians had sought to protect their rights by mobilising international

support for an early return of the civilian rule. However, the outcome of their efforts was meagre.⁸

Brigadier Rabuka had vowed not to rest until the Fiji's 1970 constitution was altered to guarantee Fijians a preponderant political majority over Indians. His acts of suppressions were designed to pressurize the Indian population to accept the fait accompli without demur. That is why he started taking resort to militarisation with only 2,600 soldiers (half of whom were posted in UNPKF at Sinai and Lebanon).

v] Militarisation

Soon Rabuka realised that his military grip was quite slender. More soldiers were needed to achieve total military control. Soon a recruitment campaign was launched, and the unemployed youths seeking to escape from the monotony of village life, volunteered themselves for military training. Rabuka had plans to expand armed forces to 6000, which would attain internal security, particularly in the areas which were vulnerable to industrial unrest. No doubt, the primary objective of massive expansion drive was to crush any possible direct action of Indo-Fijians in sugar provinces.

Events that Led to the Indo Military Coup

In the month after the May coup the size of the Army was doubled, and the new regime incurred heavy expenditure in maintaining its military presence in the islands. The economic

⁸ Quoted in B. Crosette, The fortune of Fiji Indians, Times of India, (New Delhi), 4th November 1987.

cost of the coup were found to be even greater.⁹ Sugar and Tourism are the two pillars of Fiji's economy : tourism came to an abrupt halt. Over 60 per cent of the country's export earning was dependent on Tourism, which was most adversely affected by the military coup. It was reported that 80 per cent of advance bookings were cancelled after the coup. The rate of tourism arrivals dropped very fast mostly after Suva riots and attempted hijacking of New Zealand's plane at Nadi airport. Hotel turnovers were down to 25.5 per cent. Indian cane-cutters refused to harvest the sugar crop. Eventually the Government managed to negotiate the start of the cane-cutting. Nevertheless, within a month of the coup the Government was announcing massive across the board pay cuts of 15 to 20 per cent in the public service. By June 1987 foreign reserves fell by more than half. On 29th June 1987 the Government devalued the Fijian dollar by 17.75 per cent. Subsequently it devalued it further. Leaders of the Fiji Indians warned that, attempts to turn them into third - class citizens would convert Fiji into a third-class economy with the departure of the Indians and their professional and entrepreneurial skills.

Two months after the event, when the economic, political, and social costs of the coup became clearer, a Back-to-Early-May movement was formed. Dramatic progress was achieved in a

9 Robert Keith Reid, "Close to Economic Ruin" Far Eastern Economic Review (Hongkong), 16th July 1987. p. 70; and David Robie "Republic Respect Caste Rall Over Reeling Fiji Economy", Dominion Sunday Times, 2 August, 1987.

signature campaign to petition the Governor-General for a Government of national unity, with any constitutional changes to receive the endorsement of such a Government as well as popular approval in a referendum. The Governor General cautiously began to speak out against republican options, and to reassure the Fiji Indians that their future was not going to be affected. He doubted that extremist calls for a form of apartheid to be enshrined in the constitution would prevail, and warned of international ostracism if they did.¹⁰

By late September 1987 the Governor-General realised that he had to recognize the representative role of the ousted Prime Minister Bavadra and his colleagues. He had attempted to lay a constitutional cloak over the ousting of an elected Government. However, having thrown in his lot with the coup and, in particular, having committed himself to support the indigenous people against majority rule and race-blind equality, he had to rest his authority on an alignment with the traditional power in Fiji. Although Rabuka had sought for a modus vivendi with the Crown's representative, in the long run there was no way in which monarchy could be used to give his Government a constitutional veneer. Without the cooperation of Bavadra and his colleagues, no amendment to the constitution could have any semblance of legal validity: with the cooperation of Bavadra it was not possible to ensure the

¹⁰ Bruce Stannard, "I Must Stay Neutral, Says Ratu Penaia Ganilau", Fiji Times, 3 August 1987.

entrenchment of indigenous Fijian hegemony and chiefly leadership.

On 22 September 1987, after five rounds of negotiations, the Governor-General persuaded Alliance Party politicians, headed by Ratu Mara, to join Bavadra in a new "power-sharing" caretaker council of state with the Governor-General as Chairman. He appointed a new Constitution Review Committee consisting of three representatives from each side and an independent foreign chairman to examine alternatives to the Westminster model of democracy for Fiji and ensure the creation of "a framework for a multiracial society in which the rights and interests of all the communities are safeguarded"¹¹ In return for this concession made by the Governor General Bavadra agreed to withdraw a Supreme Court suit challenging the legality of the post-coup actions of the Governor-General.

By negotiating a caretaker Government which included the ousted Ministers, the Governor-General broke the implicit understanding of May 1987 : he could retain his office, assume executive power, and guide the country back to parliamentary democracy only if he accepted a permanent ouster of the coalition Government and presided over a "parliamentary democracy" in which the dominance of the indigenous Fijians under traditional Fijian leadership was assured. Once he

¹¹ Otago Daily Times, 23 September 1987. Quoted by Ramesh Thakur and Antony Wood in 'Paradise Regained or Paradise Defiled? Fiji under Military Rule'. International Studies 26, 1 (1989) Sage Publications New Delhi, p. 38.

signalled search for a bipartisan and biracial basis for constitutional change, he could no longer hold the support of his traditionalist constituency or the tolerance of the military.

The Second Coup

Rabuka had consistently stated that he would resume full control if the objectives of his coup were not met. On 25 September at 4 pm he swung into action and staged his second military coup.

Rabuka's second coup was more efficient in operation. The newspaper office of The Sun and Fiji Times were immediately closed. Radio FM 96 was shut down, and curfew was imposed.

The Governor General was isolated and virtually house arrested. Bavadra and other coalition leaders were imprisoned and Justice Rooney of Supreme Court was placed underhouse arrest. Journalists, academics, lawyers, trade unionists and organizers of BTEMM were sent to jail.

Implications of the Second Coup

The reimposition of military rule in Fiji just hours before a compromise bipartisan civilian government was to be installed was a tragic blow, wrote George Smith in 'Telegraph'¹² By usurping power through second coup d'etat in Suva in less than 5 months, Rabuka arrogantly sought to scuttle the efforts of Governor General for national reconciliation between native Fijians and ethnic Indians. It

¹² George Smith, "Why Rabuka is courting disaster" Telegraph (London), 29th September, 1987.

was also a step to neutralise British pressures, exercised through Ganilau, not to declare Fiji a Republic.

Ratu Ganilau refused to accept the offer of presidency under a new constitution. The Chief justice of Fiji indicated that the judiciary would consider itself dismissed if Ratu Ganilau was forced out of office. Ultimately the declaration of Lt. Col. Rabuka to sweep aside the constitution, abolishing the post of Governor General and declaring Fiji a republic came as a bolt from the blue. This decision did not only sever the 113 years old links with the British monarchy, wrote Stephen Taylor, but opened the possibility of paradise island to be condemned to the kind of worst internecine communal conflicts, from which it was plucked more than a century ago.¹³

Rabuka, who was running Fiji with military mechanisms as the head of a self-appointed military council, named a 19-member interim government on October 7. The so-called Civilian government dominated by pro-Rabuka Melanesian leaders thus ensured the political supremacy of the military dictator. After two years of the first military coup, Fiji is reeling under the dictatorial authoritarian military rule of Col. Rabuka under the name of Civilian Government.

13 Stephen Taylor, n.16.

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER 5

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE COUP

In 1984 the head of the Fiji Employment and Development Mission uncontentiously observed that "there can be little doubt that there are very few countries in the developing world today that enjoy Fiji's combination of relative prosperity, social harmony and freedom from repression."¹ Gross national product per head stood at US\$ 1,790 in 1980 - compared with an average of US\$ 1,500 for middle income developing countries.² Despite the numerical dominance and commercial pre-eminence of a culturally distinct Indo-Fijian population, there had been virtually no racial violence. And there had been political stability under a complex, though recognisable form of parliamentary democracy which, apart from a very brief interlude in 1977, generated continuous rule by the largely Fijian Alliance Party. But after the two coups in 1987, the socio-economic scenario deteriorated rapidly. Here an attempt is made to explain them briefly.

Social Effects of the Coup

The social effects of the coup placed constraints on the actions of coup leaders, among the more obvious being the rise in poverty, escalating crime, and political detentions.

Poverty

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- 1 Fiji Employment and Development Mission, Final Report to the Government of Fiji, Parliamentary Paper No. 66, Government Printer, Suva, 1984.
 - 2 Pacific Economic Bulletin, National Centre for Development Studies, Canberra, July 1986, p. 1.

Draught, the collapse in employment opportunities, wage cuts and devaluation rapidly increased the number of poors in Fiji, with some items increasing even 40 per cent. The officially inflation rate stood at 6 per cent, it was 4 per cent more than in April 1987.³ The worst hit were those on the fringes of poverty single income families plagued by ill health and dependent on odd jobs or domestic work. Such employment ended when middle-income families lightened their belts after wage cuts were proposed. The poor were left to subsist on poor diets of roti, rice and cassava, and with nowhere to turn for assistance. The Department of Social Welfare provided no relief, and voluntary organisations - unable to raise funds during the crisis or to collect their normal government grants - were unable to meet the needs of those who now flocked to their doors. The Fijian Council of Churches faced 10 new cases of destitution each day, St.Vincent de Paul reported 304 families seeking help in addition to their regular 82 families, and the Bayly Clinic which normally assisted 500 destitutes quickly found itself providing temporary food rations to 200 extra destitutes.⁴

Many parents were suddenly unable to pay school and examination fees. The Ministry of Education launched an appeal and by the end of August collected nearly US\$ 42,000 for the examination fees of 1,550 students. But the problem of school

3 Fiji Times, 5 August, 1987, p.2; Sun, 13 August 1987, p.3.

4 Fiji Times, 28 June 1987, p.2, Fiji Times, 6 September 1987, p. 7.

fees remained unresolved. Fees contributed 20 per cent of the salaries of grant-in-aid teachers and met other school commitments. By september between 40 and 60 per cent of secondary school fees remained unpaid and grant-in-aid teachers faced salary reductions. Often parents withdrew their children, in some cases sending them out to sell peanuts and thus contribute in a small way to declining family incomes. For the 14 per cent of secondary school Children forced to drop out, home life became increasingly precarious. Basic necessities were cut back; electricity, water rates, rents and mortgages had long since ceased to be paid. Even for those with family members still in work, the proposed 25 per cent pay cut loomed as a threat to their security.

CRIME

Equally disturbing was the massive rise in crime. Police commissioner boasted in early June that the new "security" forces had forced the crime rate down. The daily record of robberies and assaults suggested otherwise. Between mid May and mid June the crime rate doubled. In July it rose further. Arson also increased. At Nabon 247 fires engulfed pine forsts in the two and a half months which followed the coup, compared with only 12 in the preceding period.⁵ The Crime wave followed three distinct patterns, the first involving gangs of youths terrorizing families and destroying property. Riots occurred at Vacilevu near Bau (22 MAy), Kinoya (23 May), Wainibokasi (19 June). The looting of shops and homes comprised a second form.

5 Sun, 23 August, p. 1

Daily accounts of losses over US\$ 10,000 filled the newspapers.⁶ In one instance 15 youths raided a store in broad daylight and stole over US\$ 150,000 in jewelery. In court they claimed incitement by the Taukei Movement. On another occasion thieves dressed as army personnel stripped a home of US\$ 8,000 in items. The army advised citizens to check military identity cards before admitting anyone claiming to be soldiers. But in real army raids citizens who did so usually got a "short and rude shift".⁷

Physical violence marked the third type of crime. In late May a 23 year old man was beaten unconscious at the Nasova barracks and lay in a coma for two weeks. Eventually he was sent to New Zealand for treatment. In mid June a Savusavu Shopkeeper was beaten up and his shop wrecked. One week later a shop attendant in Toorak nearly lost his foot when he was attacked with a cane knife during a robbery. On 20 July a 10 year old school girl had her arm partially severed by a cane knife-wielding assailant outside her Nadera School. A similar fate struck a Raiwai taxi driver in mid August. A few days later a Lautoka shopkeeper was stabbed to death during a robbery.

Later on Rabuka attempted to appease the growing public outrage. In late July he approached known criminal elements and threatened them with military relations.⁸ It made little

6 S. Tarte, "Report on Recent Political Developments in Fiji", Mimeo, University of South Pacific, Suva, 1987.

7 Fiji Times, 18 August 1987, p.e

8 Fiji Times, 28 July 1987, p.3.

difference. In fact public outrage was focussed equally on the military's well publicized abuse of public emergency regulations.

Detentions

The army held that "due to the current conditions everyone is suspect until proven otherwise",⁹ and until the end of August arrests and detentions occurred with increasing frequency. These served two functions, to harass political opponents and to feed the army's paranoia of revolt. However many arrests served no specific purpose.

Political detentions were commonly used to frustrate opposition initiatives or to warn particular individuals that they should maintain a lower profile. Thus the arrests of union officials in June, Datt's detention before the coalition sat on the CRC, and coalition spokesperson Richard Naidu's arrests on three occasions in July and early August. On the last occasion, the military claimed Naidu's arrest had established a link between the coalition and moderate Fijians who opposed the coup. Harresment seemed a more plausible motive. Certainly the detention of Australian Rosemary Gillespie in mid August on the orders of "a short plump Fijian man" who later turned out to be none other than the Adviser on Justice. Alipate Qetaki, appeared designed to enact retribution on the person responsible for leaking the Carroll Report in 1982.¹⁰

9 Fiji Times, 30 June, 1987, p.6.

10 Sun, 19 August 1987, p.1.

In Gillespie's case the military claimed it thwarted a conspiracy. Indeed allegations that suspects were planning armed revolt became a major justification for harassment during June and July. In late June former Labour candidates were detained and accused of forming a Kadavu Republican Army. In same month American farmer Carl Peterson was harassed for allegedly organizing a "rebellion" army at Koroqaqa in Baulenu. Peterson had helped neighbours defend themselves during two riots in the area. On his second arrest in July he suffered black eyes and a broken rib when soldiers assaulted him. An Australian who visited Baulevu to marry a local girl was seized as Peterson's "backup". An outspoken agricultural officer at Koronivia Research Station was also linked with Petersen and arrested.

Such arrests did little for the army's credibility. Journalists dubbed them "Don Quixotes [lumbering] over the landscape, tilting at windmills"¹¹ In continuation to this military detentions there were more bizarre incidents followed. Two former police Chiefs - Raman and Deo Sharma - were detained for allegedly holding anti-coup meetings with Nadroga villagers.

Fiji's season of madness brought sharp rebuke from the church. "Everytime we shrug when we hear of another midnight raid, the cries of terrorized women and children", Methodist Communication Secretary Rev. Akuila Yabaki declared, "somewhere in Fiji another potential Barbie is getting a start

¹¹ Fiji Times, 28 June 1987, p.6.

in life".¹² But the madness persisted for as long as fear or uncertainty could be utilized against those who dared challenge the new authorities. Thus Fijians were a special target. Amelia Rokotuivuna was detained by USP security guards and lectured on how to be a "true Fijian". Steven Ratuva received a similar lecture from Lieutenant Colonel Pio Wong, and after a number of brief detentions, the army tried another tack. A military delegation brought a meal to Ratuva's house one morning.

The focus on dissident Fijians did not derive from a concern for their welfare. The military noted the growth in forces of opposition and were worried. They expected Indian opposition, but not dissent from among Fijians, or for that matter the Judiciary, the church and the business community. Against this new threat, the army began to prepare itself.

Apart from the above developments in Fiji, a severe brain drain is under way among professional people, ranging from doctors and lawyers to teachers and those with management expertise. Almost all are Indian and they have decided their future lies elsewhere, mainly in Australia, New Zealand or Canada.

The area worst hit is medicine, where hospital attention has been curtailed because of lack of skilled staff, causing the virtual elimination of elective surgery. While these problems are real and disturbing enough, there are some pluses

12 Fiji Times, 18 June, 1987, p.6.

on the home front, quite apart from the return of general community stability and orderliness.

The threat to peace posed by militant Taukei movement seems to be under control even if it has not been completely extinguished.

The Economic Crisis After the First Coup

In the weeks following the first coup, Fiji's economy was hit hard by the flight of financial and human capital, a virtual cessation of foreign investment, a collapse of tourism, and a halt to the sugar harvest. The balance of payment crisis so induced, and revealed in the foreign reserves, necessitated draconian economic policy measures which added to the unavoidable, but unequally shared, hardship.

With investor confidence evaporating and expectations of a devaluation of the Fijian dollar developing virtually overnight, resident business and individuals shifts funds offshore and adopted a wait-and-see policy. Their worst fears realised, numbers of skilled Indo-Fijians left or made plans to leave. Potential foreign investors put planned projects on hold pending a "satisfactory" political outcome : only five of 35 Australian business projects developed pre-coup were going ahead.¹³ And further official bilateral aid had halted. Visitor arrivals, which had reached a record high by the end of April and were running at nearly 700 per day in the first two weeks of May, fell to 400 per day in the week following

13 Sudney Morning Herald, 29 September 1987.

the coup. Then after the attempted hijacking of an Air New Zealand plane at Nadi Airport on 19 May and the Suva riot on 20 May, there was a further fall to 105 per day. Visitor arrivals totalling 18,323 in May and June were down 49 per cent on the same period in 1986, and some duty-free dealers closed.¹⁴ At \$ 15.1 million, total hotel turnover in the June quarter was down 25.5 per cent on the same quarter in 1986.¹⁵ In the sugar-sector, Indo-Fijian growers, uncertain of the future and supportive of the ousted Bavadra government, were boycotting the harvest of a crop already affected by drought.

Inevitably, given the roles and multiplier effects of tourism and sugar, the general level of economic activity fell, raising the level of under-employment and unemployment, and pressure on government finances with Revenue falling, and military expenditure increasing to an unknown extent as the army moved towards doubling its size, the governments operating balance had moved from a \$ 13 million surplus at the end of March to a \$ 13 million deficit at the end of June, threatening a blowout in the annual overall deficit from a before-coup estimate of \$ 77 million to \$ 100 million.¹⁶ The prospects of financing the growing deficit from overseas borrowing were nil, since international financial markets had taken the same wait-and-see position as investors in the

14 Reserve Bank of Fiji, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1987.

15 Current Economic Statistics, Government Printer, Suva, October, 1987.

16 Reserve Bank of Fiji, 1987, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva.

region. Borrowing from the Fiji public was not an effective option because of capital flight and the consequent tightening of domestic credit - as evidenced by the fact that a mere 10 per cent of post-coup bond issues by the Fiji Electricity Authority and the Reserve Bank were taken up.¹⁷ This left cutting expenditure as the only responsible and effective fiscal action for the de facto government to take, for borrowing from the Reserve Bank itself - printing money - to fund expenditures was bound to worsen the balance of payments in an open economy. But on this point the military men and their supporters needed educating, while it took time to negotiate and implement cuts in non-military spending (particularly in wages and salaries). So Reserve Bank credit outstanding climbed from less than \$ 5 million in April to nearly \$ 70 million in early August, approaching the legal limit of \$ 95 million (equal to 30 per cent of average annual government revenue in 1983-85), and exacerbating the severe pressure of foreign reserves.

Gross foreign exchange reserves dropped from an early May level of \$ 177.3 million to \$ 119.7 million at the end of June, and reserves net of IMF borrowing were fallen similarly to under \$ 110 million. Had this downward trend continued, Fiji would have exhausted available supplies within four months. The Reserve Bank was therefore compelled to devalue the currency, impose exchange controls, and adopt restrictive monetary measures. As from 29 June a Fiji dollar was worth

17 Fiji Times, 10 September 1987.

17.75 per cent less in terms of foreign currencies (this discouraging capital flight and import expenditure) or conversely was 17.75 per cent cheaper to buy (thus encouraging exports and tourism). The Reserve Bank already had increased its minimum lending rate from 8 to 9 per cent in accordance with the fall in cash reserves caused by the worsening balance of payments situation. Early in August it reinforced this move by increasing the commercial banks' statutory reserve deposit ratio from 5 to 6 per cent.¹⁸

These policies were successful in temporarily arresting, and then slowing the rate of the decline in foreign reserves; and were aided by initiatives in the tourist industry. Operation Bounceback offered potential visitors airfares from Australia and New Zealand and total accommodation at 60 per cent of normal rates. The number picked up, so that by late August the expected total for 1987 was 225,000 compared with a before-coup forecast of 287,000. In the sugar industry, harvesting of the cane crop commenced in August in response to a plea from Dr. Bavadra; but forecast sugar production was down from 480,000 to 350,000 tonnes as a result of the late start and the continuation of the drought which was turning out to be the worst since 1942.

The fact remained that the trend in foreign reserves was still downwards in early September, and would have been worse but for Reserve Bank prevention of some "very large" capital

¹⁸ Reserve Bank of Fiji, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1987.

outflows. A further tightening of credit conditions was indicated by the introduction of credit rationing by the Fiji Development Bank from the first of the month, and by an expected \$ 32 million shortfall in meeting the usual September-December statutory Bodies' Borrowing Requirement. And while sugar receipts were concentrated in the latter half of the calendar year, there was no sign of any pick-up in investment. Asian Development and World Bank loans of \$ 10 million and \$ 23.4 million, respectively, were going ahead, but as exceptions to the rule. Indeed, investor confidence was further shaken by the 4 September Taukei assault of Dr. Bavadra's spokesman in the Suva Travelodge bar, an assault tacitely condoned by the de facto authorities and therefore especially likely to intensify feelings of insecurity. On the same day, the secretary of the Public Service Commission announced a civil service pay cut of 15 per cent backdated to 21 August :

Because of the deteriorating state of the economy the government is compelled to take immediate steps to introduce further cost cutting measures --- Unless such measures are implemented forthwith, all Governmental activity will in the near future be rendered impossible on account of shortage of funds --- The personnel Emolument Vote--- makes up almost 54 per cent of our Operating Budget. A 50 per cent cut with effect from 6.8.87 would balance the budget but this was considered undesirable --- An immediate 15 per cent cut whilst

relatively small was considered more acceptable for the time being although Government would still have a large deficit of \$ 17.84 million in its Operating budget by the end of the year for which it has to find finance.¹⁹

Thus in economic jargon, restrictive monetary and fiscal policies were to assist in the restoration of external financial stability at a low level of economic activity. This meant that the price of the coup to be paid in 1987 - beyond the arbitrary arrests, harassment and so on - was a sudden and substantial deterioration in general economic and social conditions. For visitors holidaying in the environmental bubble of a tourist resort things may have appeared "normal". But residents knew otherwise. The Reserve Bank reported that "a substantial proportion of the labour force has been affected by shorter working hours and/or paycuts, and redundancies".²⁰ After five years of decline which had continued in January-May, the rate of inflation - driven by a rise in the price of foodstuffs which accounted for around 16 per cent of Fiji's imports - had reversed direction and was on its way to an annual 1987 rate of 5.7 per cent. This meant a drop in living standards for employed middle income civil servants of around 20 per cent in real terms, and a larger drop for the unemployed and the already destitute of both

19 Fiji Times, 4 September 1987.

20 Reserve bank of Fiji, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1987.

major ethnic groups, for the one urban household in ten falling below the poverty line.²¹

The village-based Fijians had lost jobs in hotels, and landless Indo-Fijians cane cutters had gone further into debt alongside tenant farmers. The improvement in domestic currency prices of export goods made possible by devaluation was partially offset by cost rises: the price for cane increased from \$ 25.50 to \$ 36 per tonne, but tight government finances caused the removal of a subsidy on fertiliser prices which were 80 per cent up on pre-coup levels. Additionally, of course, there was the general decline in the quantity and quality of services in both private and public sectors as a result of financial stringency and the acceleration of the brain drain.

Emigration of skilled and experienced Indo-Fijians increased significantly from the late 1960s, once the transition to political independence and a communal voting system had begun in earnest. An approximate average of 1800 left each year in the period 1971-84, and in the 1980s constituted 83 per cent of all emigrants. Unimpeded in their departure by any government restrictions, most of those leaving have been young, frequently in a professional, managerial or technical occupation, and North America - or Australasia - bound. One rough estimate suggested that one in every six skilled Indo-Fijians working in Fiji in the early

21 Fiji Employment and Development Mission, Final Report to the Government of Fiji, Government Printer, Suva, 1984, p. 216.

1970s was working in Canada at the end of the decade.²² In the three months after the first coup, the flow took on the dimensions of an exodus : the Fiji Sugar Corporation lost 12 senior managers and 35 skilled tradesmen; one major accounting firm lost 14 qualified staff; lawyers, doctors, dentists, teachers, technicians, engineers and other professionals were leaving, including staff at the University of the South Pacific, and in early September pasport applications were running at 175 per day Post and Telegraphs, which had seen its trucks commandeered by the military, faced the depatation of Seven senior engineers and 36 middle managers. Similar fates befell other government departments. The Reserve Bank itself lost four of its 88 staff. Overall, in the two months of August and September, 936 citizens left Fiji, of whom 767 wre Indo-Fijians, 59 were Fijians, and 110 were from other ethnic groups.²³

For those Indo-Fijians remaining in the bureaucracy there was bound to be a loss of motivation at precisely the time when the need for economic recovery demanded a greater work effort. And if any of them drew confidence in mid-September from the prospect of a bipartisan government, it was shortlived. On 25 September, the second coup made it perfectly plain that emigration would be the only way for Into-Fijians

22 J. Connell, "Population Growth and Emigration : Maintaining a balance" in M. Taylor (ed.), Fiji Future Imperfect, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 23-24.

23 Reserve Bank of Fiji, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1987.

to match economic success with what they regarded as acceptable political rights.

After the Second Coup - A Deepening Economic Crisis

The Second coup immediately intensified the economic reversals caused by the first coup. If any local and overseas investor confidence remained in September, it was shattered. Indo-Fijians, who were to lose any meaningful political rights, were asked to believe their property rights would be protected by a Colonel who in the same breath removed the right for Hindus to picnic or play sport on the Christian Sabbath. Australian business projects reportedly worth \$ 200 million, and including a tourist resort, were shelved; and a six month moratorium was placed on new investment.²⁴ Potential tourists were still being offered travel at a (lower) discount after 1 October, and were assured by the Pacific Asia Travel Association that Fiji was safer than most tourist destinations. However, the Australian government advised against a Fiji holiday and the Business Insurance Council of Australia was not prepared to write travel insurance for Fiji, and though some were not deterred, there were cancellations²⁵ The level of economic activity declined further, with obvious implications for employment - as evidenced by a 55 per cent fall in the turnover of Burns Philp (South Seas) in the week after the second coup, and a subsequent 28 per cent fall in its staff.²⁶ The Indo-Fijian search for the exit because even

24 Australian, 8 October, 1987.

25 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 September 1987.

26 Australian, 8 October, 1987.

more desperate, with October departures of 768 doubling the September figure.²⁷ The balance of payments and associated liquidity crisis worsened; and on 7 October, after a week in which it had seen foreign reserves fall by \$ 30 million (or 23 per cent), the Reserve Bank was forced into a second defensive devaluation of the Fiji dollar - by 15.25 per cent.²⁸ While the military continued to absorb foreign exchange and burden the government budget, further civil service pay cuts were mooted; and pressure increased for more credit-creation by the Reserve Bank.

In response to the military's repression of domestic trade union activity, and in the context of Fiji's expulsion from the Commonwealth in mid-October, the Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) announced that in addition to the reimposition of maritime trade bans lifted in July, a ban was to be imposed on air travel to Fiji from 1 November - unless trade union rights were restored in the interim. Given that in 1986 Fiji obtained one-third of its imports and one-third of its tourists from Australia, the effect of cutting Australian traffic by itself promised to be devastating. But the air ban potentially affected not only Qantas and Air Pacific, but also Canadian Pacific, the last airline connecting with Canada and the United States - which together supplied 36 per cent of visitors in 1986. Forecasts of tourist arrivals and receipts

27 Reserve Bank of Fiji 1987, Quarterly Review and News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1987.

28 Reserve Bank of Fiji, 1987, op. cit.

revised downwards after the first coup suddenly seemed grossly over-optimistic.

Aside from the expressed outrage of the western democracies and expulsion from the Commonwealth, the European Parliament condemned the creation of a "racist dictatorship" and called on the European Commission to suspend purchases of Fijian sugar,²⁹ a recommendation which, though unlikely to be acted upon because of British and French opposition, would cripple the Fiji economy since two-thirds of its Sugar is sold to the European Community at three times the world market price. The government of New Zealand already had decided not to renew a \$ 10 million contract to purchase Fiji Sugar at above market prices, thus eliminating approximately 7 per cent of the established sugar export market.

One month after the second coup, and just days after economic crisis is only short term.³⁰ the Fiji economy was apparently moving from crisis to catastrophe at a pace which international sanctions threatened to accelerate. Galvanised into action by this prospect, the 50 per cent Taukei "Military Government of the Republic of Fiji" repealed the decree that had abolished trade union rights, thereby persuading the ACTU to call off the air travel ban on 29 October. A few days later, Austrian and New Zealand maritime bans were lifted. Perhaps encouraged by this response, Colonel Robuka soon made other changes desined to increase the chances of restoring

29 Sydney Morning Hearld, 17 October 1987.

30 Sydney Morning Harld, 8 October 1987.

international government recognition and investor confidence : The Fiji Times was permitted to resume publication on 6 November; a Six-week curfew was lifted on 12 November; new Supreme Court judges were sworn in.

For under the military government, Fijianization of key civil service and statutory body positions had proceeded with scant regard for the managerial consequences,³¹ while the Indo-Fijian brain drain and low morale continued, and government actions and policy statements showed a lack of purpose and consistency partly reflected in the inability to bring down an expected budget for 1988.³²

Later on the military-Alliance government tried to restore Fiji's international credibility and manage its economic recovery, while working towards the introduction of a constitution ensuring permanent Fijian rule. Given the strategic and political interests of Australia in particular, and the fact that government - installed-by-gun was commonplace in the Third World, the former last promised to be substantially easier than the latter. The lowest cane : raw sugar ratio since 1968 saw sugar output exceed September expectations and reach 401,100 tonnes for 1987. The associated seasonal surge in sugar export receipts eased the pressure on foreign reserves, contributing \$ 40.3 million of the \$ 60.8 million increase between end-September and end-December, the

31 J. Garrett, "The coups in Fiji : A Preliminary Social Analysis", Catalyst, December 1987.

32 S. Tarte, Report on Recent Political Developments in Fiji", Mimeo, University of South Pacific, Suva, 1987.

rest being the revaluation effect of the second devaluation. But this was a seasonal phenomenon, and sensible economic management required its monetary impact to be neutralised in order to avoid an unsustainable expansion in import spending : Accordingly, the Reserve Bank sold public sector securities, thus maintaining in the December quarter the tight credit conditions of the September quarter which had seen commercial interest rates around 13.7 per cent. Significantly, commercial lending was below the average level of the September quarter, which had been set as a ceiling level by the Reserve Bank in October. Also, tourist arrivals for 1987 fell below post-coup expectations to 190,000 - 26 per cent down on the 1986 level - so that, even with the revaluation effects of a 33 per cent devaluation of the currency, foreign reserves were \$ 5 million lower at year's end compared with 1986. The flight of human capital continued through December, bringing total departures of Fiji citizens since 1 August to 2,561 of whom 2,126 were Indo-Fijians heading mainly for the open doors of Canada. Amongst them, no doubt, was a significant proportion of the 600 indo-Fijians who had left the civil service; while domestically, data on Fiji National Provident Fund special payments to workers laid off between July and November suggested 1,600 members had joined the ranks of the unemployed.³³

33 Pacific Islands Monthly, February 1988 and Reserve Bank of Fiji, News Review, Government Printer, Suva, 1988.

To conclude, clearly, facilitating and managing economic recovery was to be a slow, difficult process, even granting political stability. But on this score 1987 ended with little comfort for those placing their faith in the military Alliance government.

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER 6

INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATION OF THE COUP

Reactions of foreign governments to the coup in Fiji reflected their understanding of the Fijian situation and in particular its cause. The Fiji contradiction confounded some observers and initially produced speculation of US involvement. There were speculations from several quarters that US had been involved through covert intervention by secret intelligence agency, CIA in general in the Fijian Military Coup.¹ Before analysing the US complicity in Fijian affair it is important to discuss the US motivations and objectives in Fiji.

American interest in Fiji was not an isolated affair but accompanied by renewed pressure after a changed geostrategic climate in the South Pacific. With a larger number of elections due in the South Pacific (Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Kiribati and Vanuatu) in 1987 pressure on the US was intensified. US had a growing realization that pursuit of US strategic goals was getting increasingly difficult. A new generation of Pacific island leaders with more venturesome ideas for charting their directions of foreign as well as domestic policies was emerging and striving to come to power. Most of them believed that US had taken more from them than it had given. They had a feeling that US had harnested regional fisheries, benefitted from the facility to

¹ Roy, W.T., 'The Fijian Coup - Causes and Consequences', Pacific Defence Reporter, vol. xiv, no.1, July 1987.

its navel vessels and enjoyed their support in international forums without contributing significantly to the region's economic development. So, US needed very badly some preemptive measures against this growing antipathy to its status and powers.

US had very keen interest to maintain status quo in Fiji and frustrate any radical transformations in its internal politics. The US had for years been cultivating Ratu Mara as a faithful ally, having a marked anti-Soviet foreign policy.

Fiji's identification with the US interests was not new. A long history existed of Fiji's Alliance Government's close military ties with the US and its foreign policy objectives. Robert T. Robertson Says :

"Problem faced by the US to disassociate itself from the coup, was the general knowledge that they were actively involved in shaping the destiny of Fiji to satisfy their geostrategic aims"²

Mara's foreign policy had a special pro-US bias from the very beginning. For example, even after being a member of S.P.F. it did not go to the assistance of Vanuavatu in 1980 when the US Phoenix corporation and Frency Settlers financed secessionist revolt in Santo.³ Nevertheless, as military ties with US increased, disquiet arose as to its implications. The

2 Robert. T. Robertson and A. Taminsau, FIJI : The Shattered Coups, (Sydney, 1987), p. 26.

3 US Involvement in the Fiji Coup : Wellington Confidential, No.36
- June 1987. Wellington.

government had not initiated public debates on foreign policy choices and total abandonment of nonalignment.

The Alliance Party under the leadership of Mara had maintained a close secret links with US. In 1982 general election, US consultancy firm "Business International" was hired to design an electoral strategy for his party. Anti-Soviet hysteria was used for election propoganda. There were accusations that NFP had been financed by Soviet Union and received 1 million dollars for that.⁴ US agents were alleged to have masterminded Alliance counter attacks against NFP in 1982.

In past 1980 period, Fiji and US had come closer in security understanding. Mara was given important say in US's CINPAC Headquarter's policies and was appointed to the standing committee of the Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), the US version of SPF secretariat. In the same year Fiji lifted its ban on the visits of US nuclear ships.

US offered Fiji 3 million dollars per annum aid under its weapons standardization programme and eventually concluded an annual aid programme worth 2.5 million dollars.⁵ To administer the bilateral aid, an office was established under William Paupe, who was an employee of USAID and served in US as part of CIA programme. Military links of Fiji with US were

4 Hailey, John, The Genesis of The Fiji Republic : Its Origin And

Implications', World Review, vol 27, no.7, March 1988.

5 Sen, Anikendra Nath, The American Hand Behind the Fiji Coup',

ONLOOKER, March 1-15, 1988.

consolidated through US International Military Education and Training Programme and Pacific Army Management Seminars (PAM). Col. Sitiveni Rabuka attended several of PAM seminar in Manila in 1981.

More critically Fiji labour party had a very sound foreign policy stand, sometimes in total contrast to Alliance's foreign policy. Dr. Bavadra had, during his campaign, asserted that he would follow a strong anti-nuclear line and establish close links with the NAM. The labour movement in Fiji was a formidable challenge to US policy goals in the South Pacific. To counter the anti-nuclear sentiments in the Pacific Trade Union Forum (PTUF), a regional consortium of left and liberal trade unions in which the Fiji labour movement was most prominent US started financing AAFLI (Asian - American Free Labour Institute) which had definite CIA connections. The coalition leaders during election campaign focussed on all these issues. In one of very few foreign policy statements, the labour party leader Krishna Dutta declared:

"Banning all US nuclear ships display in a more concrete way Fiji's displeasure at US actions in the South Pacific - in particular US's refusal to sign the Rarotonga Treaty and its disregard of democratic principles".⁶

Richard A. Herr has further illustrated that it appeared that Labour party has included within its policy platform a

6 Quoted by Robert Keith Reid - Island business, (June 1987).

pledge to move Fiji out of its Western alignment. At the same time, potential was there to consolidate its ties with the Soviet Union.⁷

The US Complicity

Most of the Western governments saw the coup as an internal affair, and either accepted without reservation the issue of Fijian paramountcy. Robuka presented or at least considered it more justifiable than alternatives which might give weight to neocolonial initiatives. In the other hand much publicity has been given to the possibility of overseas involvement in the coup to 14th May. As yet no hard evidence exists, though there is a body of well documented circumstantial evidence that the United States in particular knew of, or acquiesced in, the possibility of an attempt to overthrow the newly elected Coalition government. In the week following the announcement of the election results, rumours were rife in Suva of U.S. efforts to destabilise the new government. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that the American Embassy in Suva took the hitherto unprecedented step of issuing a public statement on 23 April to refute these rumours. Amongst other things the statement included a formal denial of U.S. involvement in efforts to destabilise the new government.⁸

These rumours were based on the obvious American concern at the coalition's proposals to shift Fiji away from its close

7 Richard A. Herr, "What is happening in our neighbourhood" Island Business, (June 1987).

8 Fiji Sun, 24 April 1987.

ties with the United States, and move towards non-alignment. The coalition had also proposed to ban all nuclear armed and nuclear powered ships from Fijian ports. If this policy were implemented it would seriously undermine U.S. strategic interests in the South Pacific, interests which were already jeopardised by the anti-nuclear policies adopted in New Zealand.

These moves also threatened the close ties, the U.S. military had been developing with the RFMF. Fijian troops were employed on U.S. sponsored peace-keeping operations in the Sinai, a series of joint training programmes had been instituted, and under the weapon standardization programme the U.S. was expected to contribute over US\$ 500,000 to purchase M16 automatic rifles and other weaponry. A team of U.S. navy planners had visited Fiji in 1986 to assess the possibilities of establishing naval facilities. Rabuka himself had close ties with U.S. military personal, having worked alongside U.S. forces in the Siani, and attended U.S. sponsored training courses including one of the prestigious Pacific Armies Management Seminars.

Evidence of high-level U. S. involvement is seen in the fact that Vernon Walters, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, met Colonel Rabuka in Suva a week before the Coup. Walters had a well-documented career of involvement in

attempts to remove governments of Third World nations unsympathetic to U.S. interests.⁹

Furthermore, ten days after the May coup, Ratu Mara announced in a meeting of the council of Chiefs that U.S. secretary of State George Schultz had given an assurance of support for the post-coup constitutional arrangements made by Colonel Rabuka. Schultz had supposedly commented that America was "on stand-by to help if needed".¹⁰

The State Department firmly denied all U.S. involvement in the coups, and has been highly critical of what they refer to as "widespread disinformation effort".¹¹ The U.S. sensitivities motivated the release of a detailed statement which attempts to refute a wide range of allegations and explain the circumstantial evidence. In conclusion, informed observers suggest that the U.S. appears not to have been directly involved in preparations for the coup, but that instead U.S. officials in Suva made little attempt to discourage such preparations. They can thus be seen to have

9 Covert Action Information Bulletin, no.26, Summer 1986, pp.3-8.

10 Fiji Times, 26th May 1987.

11 Fiji Times, 14 November 1987. The statement was issued through

the US consulate in Sydney. It specifically made mention of

allegations in the Sydney Morning Heralds, the Pacific Islands

Monthly of October 1987, and the New Zealand newsletter Wellington Confidential of June 1987. All these publications had

carried detailed reports that publicised possible United States

involvement in the coup.

been culpable by omission of creating a climate conducive to a coup attempt.

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

The reactions of foreign governments to the coup reflected their own understanding of the Fiji situation and in particular the reasons and causes behind it. It is interesting to have a critical account of the responses of foreign government, and the factors influencing their reaction.

Great Britains Neutrality

Military coups in Commonwealth countries are usually a great problem for Great Britain. It is usually a cause of queen's dilemma of being the constitutional head of these countries, a responsibility without power. However, Fiji appeared to have been the exception to the rule. Here Queen had ben able to exert pressure and exercise influence of much greater scale because of the considerable reverence British monarchy enjoy from the Fijian chiefs and tribal community.

When Lt. Col. Rebuka launched his coup, the first thing he tried was to attain the approval of the Queen. At first it seemed that he might succeed, for Sir Penaia Ganilau did swear in him as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. But soon afterwards Governor-General announced that he had been advised by the Chief Justice that this was illegal and refused to swear in Rabuka's other nominees as ministers.

Then came a personal message of encouragement to Sir Penaia Ganilau from the queen for his stand and his actions as custodian of the constitution. During the impasse that

followed, Col. Rabuka threatened to turn Fiji into a republic and the Great Council of Fijian Chiefs approved the idea.

Later on Ratu Ganilau appointed a ten member council of ministers, which was an amalgamation of the military regime's ministers. Ultimately after 25 September's second coup the linkage with Great Britain was severed.

Neighbouring Perception

In the wide expanse of the South Pacific, New Zealand and Australia are in the role of frontline states¹², their ties with Fiji and paternalistic interest in the South Pacific dating back to the time when they were the only regional countries within the British Empire under self-government. Despite discomforts in the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) relationship, New Zealand in particular has established itself as the intelligence source and agent for the West in the South Pacific, and it has been an important transmitter of information of post-coup events in Fiji for the region's major Power, viz, the United States.¹³ Unlike Australia, with its Southeast Asian neighbours in the near north, and its trade and security interests in the Indian Ocean, New Zealand has found an identity as a purely South Pacific Country, with a unique role in its own perception - deriving from the racial affinity of its indigenous Maori

12 Hailay, John., The Genesis of the Fiji Republic : Its Origins

And Implications, World Review, vol 27, no 7, MARCH 1988.

13 Statement by Sir Wallace Rowling at a Public meeting. Dunedin, 28

April 1988.

people to the other polynesian peoples of the pacific. Also, in spite of its modest endowment by international economic and political standards, it is a country of influence and affluence in the region.

For New Zealand, the issue in Fiji was a South pacific one in which it was cast in a leading role. On affairs in its own region, it was an advice giver, not an advice-receiver. Other countries recognized its right to be an advice giver. Immediately after the coup, New Zealand seemed briefly to be teetering on the brink of a neocolonial intervention. The coercive diplomacy characteristic of the empire has, however, been replaced by the responsive diplomacy of the post-colonial era. When news of the coup first reached Wellington, along with the advice that the coup leader intended to hold a conference to explain his move, the Government of New Zealand instructed its High Commissioner to attend no meeting other than the one convened by the Governor - General. From the start it acted on the assumption that even in the absence of his Ministers, the Governor-General constituted a constitutional authority; and having once put its faith in the Governor-General it never wavered thereafter.

New Zealand moved into a two fold position. It held (a) that non-recognition of an illegal regime could coexist with continued dealings with that regime through the fiction of dealing only with the Governor General; and (b) that if the Governor General was a constitutional authority in the post-coup period, the offices of Prime Minister and Ministers of

the Crown, which he had declared vacant, must be regarded as vacant, by its adherence to such an expansive view of the role of the Governor-General and to such a qualified view of the rights of a parliamentary majority, it accepted in effect that if, supported by armed force, a Governor-General should dismiss Parliament and the elected Government and proclaim that he now personally exercised executive power, then a Constitutional authority continued to function - unless of course courts were permitted to declare otherwise.¹⁴

For the Labour Party Government of Australia too both legalism and realism pointed to accepting that the Governor-General of Fiji was its former and legitimate ruler. For better or for worse, outside countries had to maintain links with whatever regime was in power in Suva. Strident criticism would achieve nothing constructive. It could only imperial future relations. Cautious diplomacy could on the other hand ameliorate the effects of military rule and perhaps, eventually, guide the country back towards some form of parliamentary democracy.

Constitutional monarchy in Fiji was detached from constitutional democracy, and constitutional monarchists outside Fiji upheld that detachment as being within the powers of the Governor-General. As long as Sir Penaia Ganilau retained his Governor-Generalship, New Zealand and Australia

¹⁴ Thakur, Ramesh and Wood, Antony, Paradise Regained or Paradise Defiled? " Fiji Under Military Rule", International Studies,

26,1(1989) Sage Publication, New Delhi.

would follow a strategy of appeasement. That is, they would accept things as they were, for the time being at least - for fear of worse. It was with murmurs of approval from New Zealand in particular that the Governor-General of Fiji saved his own office by renouncing overthrown democracy¹⁵, and the subsequent endorsement by the Queen received the explicit public support of the Government of New Zealand.

Nevertheless, following the coup in May 1987, Australia and New Zealand decided not to extend aid to Fiji or to allow tourists (de facto) to that country. Their trade unions imposed a ban on trade with Fiji. Rabuka had his professional military training not only in Australia and India,¹⁶ but it was something of an embarrassment that he had received much of

15 Even though elections had just been held in April and produced a clear verdict, Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared on 26th May 1987 that : "if there were a new election in Fiji on the basis of the existing constitution... that would be acceptable to this Government". Australian Foreign Affairs Record (Canberra), May 1987, p.270.

16 Rabuka attended the Indian Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, Tamil Nadu, in 1979 and wrote a thesis on the role of the military in the countries of the Third World as an interventionist force in a post-coup period. Dean and Ritona, n.1, p.28. The year in India demonstrated to Rabuka the close military links between India and the USSR. The fear of Russian and the Libyan influence percolating into Fiji under the coalition Government was apparently another motive behind the coup. Ibid., pp. 46-48. Later Rabuka attended the Australian Joint Services' Staff College in Canberra.

his military training in New Zealand.¹⁷ After the coup, New Zealand, which had traditionally trained most of Fiji's officers, terminated a training course that had been organised for fourteen Fijians. Prime Minister Bob Hawke of Australia, in a formal news release on 21 May 1987, stated that : "given the delicately balanced communal relationships in Fiji, the protection and preservatin into the future of democratic process is indispensable to all the people of Fiji". The Government of Australia announced a freeze on all new aid activities and suspension of a range of defence cooperation activities, such as the training of Fijian defence personnel in Australia. It had considered imposition of more stringent sanctions on Fiji as Acting Foreign Minister Gareth Evans explained in parliament on 26th May 1987, but had decided against it from a feeling that they would not be effective and could hurt the wrong groups of Fijians. After the first coup it decided not to initiate any new aid projects and, after the second, suspended even the existing aid. It recalled its defence cooperation advisers in Fiji, put on hold in May, in September; it also recalled its High Commissioner for consultations in October.

The South Pacific Forum Stand

The reaction of South Pacific Forum members, the small island countries of South-West pacific had been luckewarm and

17 Some of the Sixty hand-picked men trained for the coup had also received training at the New Zealand Special Air Services (SAS) Unit, Ibid, p.42.

reserved. Only Vanuatu's Walter Lini denounced the coup in strongest terms. Other South Pacific Forum (SPF) leaders reacted to the spectre of foreign intervention.¹⁸ PNG's foreign minister Ted Diro declared political developments in Fiji "a matter for the people of Fiji to resolve for themselves". Deputy opposition leader Father John Mamis condemned his response as cowardly and inadequate.¹⁹ Certainly it encouraged Rabuka to consider that the weight of Pacific island opinion was behind him. He was probably correct. When Melanesian leaders met Rabuka on 21 May, they urged Australia and New Zealand not to succumb to reckless military adventurism, Vanuatu, still angered at Australia's paranoia over Libya, declared Australian neocolonialism the gravest threat to regional security and accused the two metropolitan powers of bias towards Western interests.²⁰

One week after the coup the Western Samoan government demanded "sympathy for the agony of the Fiji people grappling with a fundamental problem in their society". It did not specify the problem as either the racial divide or political greed but concluded that "the wisdom and tolerance shown by the traditional leadership would stand Fiji in good stead"²¹ On the same day Fiji's council of Chiefs forced Ganilau to accept the Coup's objectives.

18 Australian, 16th May 1987.

19 IB, 25 May 1987, p.3

20 Fiji Times, (Suva) 29 May 1987, p.8.

21 Ibid, 22 May 1987, p.9.

In May 1987 SPF heads of government met in Apia for their annual gathering. Hawke asked that an Eminent persons Group be sent to Fiji to investigate and advise on the situation. Some members states regarded this as "interference" and reacted angrily when Hawke telexed Fiji. But later on Ganilau rejected the idea much to the relief of most SPF leaders. PNG's Wingti condemned Australia for helping the deposed government ministers. When Baba and Datt arrived to press for a peace keeping force and the restoration of the Bavadra government, the Forum told them they were "mere option representatives" and requested them to leave.²²

Popular democracy is not the norm in the region, Lange conceded, "All citizens are equal but those who came first are more equal."²³ Lange helped to edit the Forum's statement on Fiji to meet Wingti's approval. It expressed concern at the event and stressed the need for reconciliation.

Pacific island leaders interpreted the coup only as racial conflict. They did not accept Indians as the equals of pacific islanders. In 1987 three pacific leaders had refused to attend a lome convention conference in Suva when they heard that Siddiq Koya was Fiji's Prime Minister elect only when Mara became leader of a minority government did they arrive. Ten years later attitudes remained the same.²⁴

22 IB, July 1987, p.10.

23 New Zealand Listener, 20 June 1987, pp. 10-11.

24 R. Crocombe, "Options for the Pacific Largest Ethnic Group"

in Pacific Indians, IPS, USP, Suva, 1981, p.212.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Before coming to the concluding part of the study it is essential to give a kind of post-script of the Fijian situation in the light of further developments. It is more than three years since the coup of 14 May 1987, that Fiji is still moving from deepening racial crisis to total catastrophe. With eroding concerns of international public opinion and lack of effective actions and also with covert support by imperialist powers, the military dictatorship under leadership of now Maj. Gen. Rabuka has deeply entrenched itself into the Fijian system. The Fiji today, under an effective military regime with a facade of civilian rule is going down in the familiar third world path of authoritarianism, suppressions of human rights and political victimisations. The legitimization and stabilization of Rabuka phenomenon has left very little hope of return of multiracialism and secular democracy in Fiji.

In Fiji, normalcy seems as elusive as ever. The prospects for stable political rule in Fiji are not bright. Ratu Mara and Ratu Ganilau, the only high chiefs of national stature in politics, are well advanced in age. With their passing from the scene, the chiefs might find themselves squabbling for power on one front while fending off challenges from commoners on another. It can be said that the declared objective of the coup and military regime of indigenous people's desire to run their own affairs, is nothing but a farce. It simply means return of the political power to the handful of chiefs, in

particular the chiefs of eastern region. This has been precisely the intentions of proposed new constitution which provides for disprportional representation to Fijians, as well as increased role of the "Great Council of Fijian Chiefs". The concept of 'indegenous rights' is being abused by selfish ruling elites in Fiji.

The Fijian economy is in jeopardy and the local currency has been devalued, inflation is rising, and there is little new investment. The business climate is uncertain, many business enterprises have been closed, others are having to cut costs by reducing wages, and laying off employees.

The common Fijian mostly the rural-urban, lower and middle classes, are also paying the price of the coup in the form of substantial deterioration in general economic and social condition. There is a discernible drop in living standards of salarised middle class because of rising prices. The collapse of tourist industry and set back to sugar industry has led to the growth of unemployment and impoverishment for common Fijians. This oppressive and exploitative system has demonstrated that racial bogey has been an effective tool in the hands of elites to control the destinities of people, and keep them under subjugation.

The Indo-Fijian population in Fiji is constantly being pushed aside, alienated of basic political rights. They are passing through a nightmarish experience. They have come to realize that Fiji is not going to be same again. The policies of race is being recklessly used by the ruling regime to

perpetuate its domination. A new type of 'apartheid' has become a reality in Fiji. The demand for restoration of democracy has become a far cry, and Fijian citizens in general are compelled to learn to live with the military dictatorship.

A closer study of the events after the second coup on September 25, 1987 reveals that some new and quite dangerous tendencies have emerged in Fijian national politics, that in long term may lead to devastation of the social fabric of the country. The grim consequences of these developments are being felt in everyday life.

An alarming development after the coup has been the acceleration in the rate of exodus of Indo Fijians from Fiji. The Fijianisation of administration and politics has severely jolted the confidence of Indo-Fijians in their future security. Unimpeded in their departure by any government restrictions, most of those leaving have been young and competent. They have significantly contributed to the country's professional, managerial and technical spheres. Over 2000 Indians had emigrated in the first four months after the first coup and at the end of 1988 their number swelled to more than 12000. This braindrain of skilled manpower - a much needed human resource for national development - is leading to general decline in quality of services in both public as well as private sectors.

To some extent, it is also an indictment of upper strata of Indo-Fijian population. It is unfortunate that a large part of Indian population is not showing much determination or will

to fight for their legitimate political rights. Instead, an interesting syndrome of viewing the coup as an opportunity to fulfil their urge for upward mobility the richer countries like USA, Australia and Canada has emerged among such Indo-Fijians. What is more paradoxical is that most of them are least inclined to return to India.

The inevitable shift to Fijian political supremacy is also being added by the internal divisions and intrigues within Indo-Fijian community. The divisions existing in India are reflected there in Fiji also. For example the Hindu-Muslim divide. There is also a rift between commercial classes (mostly Gujaratis and Punjabis, the later migrants) and cane farmers of the Western Fiji (The descendants of indentured labourers from UP and Bihar). It seems that the business community is no longer interested in political rights and is showing no will to rub shoulders with their own brothers for a fight against dictatorship.

Most important of these is Rabuka's use of Christian religion to justify and rationalize his nefarious designs. This is in total contradiction to the tradition of liberal religious ethos in Fiji. In his much published biography "No Other Way", Rabuka has expressed his intentions to convert the Hindus (Whom he chooses to call 'Heathens') into Christianity. The irony of the situation is that even Fiji's Christian church has been trapped in the Rabuka's ethno-centric parochial religious appeals. His earlier actions, like promulgation of the 'Sunday Decree', had attacked the free

exercise of religious freedom by the non-Christian population in Fiji. The Hindu are being openly persecuted. This kind of religious communalism has given Fijian racialism a new obnoxious dimension that may inflict irreparable injuries to the Fijian society of future. There is a need of concerted action, at the part of international democratic forum and human rights groups to launch a campaign against racialization and militarization of Fijian System and massive violation of human political and religous rights of the Fijian people.

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APPENDIX

The List of the Council of Ministers after the Coup as
Announced on 25 May 1987.

Col. Sitiveni Rabuka*	Home Affairs and Armed Forces
+Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara	Foreign Affairs & Civil Aviation
Mr William Cruickshank	Public Services
Ratu Josua Toganivalu	Fijian Affairs
Ratu Joshua Cavalevu	Agriculture and Fisheries
+Ratu Sir Josaia Tavaiaqia	Forestry
+Mr Livai Nasilivata	Co-operatives and Consumer Affairs
Mr Savenaca Siwatibau	Finance and Economic Planning
+Dr Apenisa Kuruisaqila	Health and Social Welfare
Col. Paul Manueli	Posts and Telecommunications
Mr. Villime Gonelevu	Public Works and Road Transport
+Mr Felipe Bole	Education, Youth and Sport
Rev Tomasi Raikivi	Information
Mr Mumtaz Ali	Trade, Industry and Tourism
Mr Jone Veisamasama	Rural Development, Rehabilitation and Housing
Mr Alipate Qetaki	Justice and Crown Law Officer

*It was announced on May 29 that Lt. Col. Rabuka had been promoted to the rank of full colonel and had been confirmed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Fijian Armed Forces.
+Member of Ratu Mara's Government prior to General Election.

Appendix II

Text of the communique on Fiji issued in Apia, Western Samoa, on 30 May, at the completion of the 18th South Pacific Forum:

The 18th South Pacific Forum was held in Apia, Western Samoa from 29-30 May 1987. The Forum was attended by Heads of Government of Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Western Samoa, while Vanuatu was represented by the Deputy Prime Minister and Tonga was represented by its Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence. The Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Hon Va'ai Kolone chaired the meeting.

The Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Marshall Islands were welcomed as full members of the South Pacific Forum.

Heads of Government noted and endorsed the expression by the Chairman in his opening statement of the deep concern and anguish which they felt over recent events involving the overthrow of the elected government in Fiji. Recognising the complexity of the problems in Fiji they fully shared the hopes expressed by the Chairman, reflecting as they did the same hopes expressed by the Governor-General of Fiji, for a peaceful and satisfactory solution to the current problems. They associated themselves with his expression of willingness to provide whatever help they might be able to lend.

It was agreed that the Chairman would convey to the Governor-General of Fiji, the Forum's willingness to help and to request the Governor-General to indicate to the forum the forms of assistance he considered most appropriate.

As one form of such help, after detailed informal discussion and contact with Fiji in the course of the meeting, Heads of Government decided that, should the Governor-General of Fiji indicate that such a Forum initiative would be constructive and of assistance, the Forum would send a mission to Fiji. The mission would be led by the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands and the Director of SPEC. Should the Governor-General of Fiji deem such a course of action desirable the mission would hold discussions with all parties in Fiji with a view to attempting to facilitate processes leading to a resolution of current problems.

Should the Governor-General of Fiji respond with a request for assistance additional to that contingently provided by the Forum or different therefrom, then the Chairman shall have the responsibility to communicate that request to Heads of Government and the Director will co-ordinate the response.

Heads of Government noted the increasingly complex environment in which the Forum was meeting and accordingly gave particular attention to how it might react most effectively, as the paramount regional organisation, to the challenges now before it and those still to come.

It considered there was urgent need to strengthen the Forum and spec in regard to the recognition accorded to both institutions by other governments and organisations. After seventeen years the South Pacific Forum had developed as the paramount political institution in the South Pacific and steps would be taken to consolidate its positions. The Forum as part of its response to these needs decided to establish a committee on regional institutional arrangements which would, among other things, look at ways to increase international recognition of the Forum and examine the concept of a single regional organisation and develop ways to strengthen the Forum and its Secretariat (SPEC)

SOURCE: Australian Foreign Affairs Record (Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra, Australia). Vol. 58, No.6, June 1987.

551