

Chapter 9

The dilemmas of development

Six decades after Cession the rationale for Britain's trusteeship was still that Fijians needed a lot of time to 'catch up'; the colonial timetable was leisurely and vague. As one Governor had put it: 'No one who has the interest of these islands at heart would unduly hasten the change in a people of whom it is literally true that less than 50 years ago they were only emerging from the Stone Age.'¹ Still, there was no dispute that ultimately Fijians would evolve, and would want to evolve, towards the liberal western ideal of individualistic, democratic man in an essentially capitalist society. Village Fijians probably had a poor grasp of that goal, but as Apolosi's Viti Company showed, they were generally receptive to innovation and programs of improvement.

Enthusiasm for education was another part of that search for the key to a vaguely conceived new level of welfare. As Ro Tuisawau once remarked, 'Education is the most useful thing of all for the present age and for the future'.² The Roman Catholic mission had responded generously to the demand for European teachers with the introduction of several teaching orders of nuns and brothers - by 1910 there were over fifty of these single-minded men and women committed to giving Fijians an education far superior to that the old Wesleyan village system had provided. Catholic policy was to educate boys and girls separately at centralized schools attached to the twenty-one mission stations. 'Our great effort', wrote Bishop Nicholas in 1929, 'is to have ALL our Catholic children in our BOARDING schools, and therefore can do what we like outside of school hours.'³

Members of the religious orders lived in community on mission stations. Physically and socially they were insulated from village life. They seem to have given little professional thought, in those unquestioning decades, to the wider societal impact of the academic curricula and teaching materials they imported from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. Their first concern was the personal and religious formation of individuals whose goodness of life would leaven the communities to which they returned. Their life-long dedication to the task and transparent integrity had a profound impact on many Fijians. What they may have lacked

in cultural sensitivity they often supplied in personal warmth and enthusiasm. Catholic schools received tremendous Fijian and Indian support, with the Marist Brothers schools in Suva generally acknowledged as Fiji's best. (In the latter, Indians were admitted alongside Fijians in the first decade of the century; in 1910 there was a single Indian convert, Xavieris, who confessed his sins regularly - in Fijian.) Catholic schools were also the first to introduce English (at Cawaci in 1892). The Wesleyan Annual Synod of 1899 reluctantly recognized that they would have to introduce some English in their own central school (at Navuloa until 1908) or lose their best pupils to the 'perverts of Rome'.⁴ At the Queen Victoria School (founded by the government in 1906) the chiefs insisted that their sons were to be taught as the sons of Europeans were taught, and that they ought not to waste their time in manual labour - an argument that had found favour with Sir Everard im Thurn: 'After all it is education in the English language that the Fijian mostly needs if he is ever to play the part of an ordinary English subject.'⁵

The thrust for academic education came also from the chiefs in the provincial councils. On their own initiative in 1907 the Lauan chiefs voted £300 from provincial funds to obtain the appointment of an English master, the anthropologist A.M. Hocart, for their school at Lakeba. This school became the model for six government-assisted provincial schools which by the 1930s provided upper primary education for some 500 pupils chosen by the tikina for their rank and ability. The best pupils of the provincial schools went on to the Queen Victoria School.

Having lost the initiative in education, the Wesleyan mission gradually withdrew from the 600 or so village schools nominally under its control and, like the Catholic mission, concentrated its efforts on centralized district schools (34 in 1933). The Wesleyan educational centre at Davuilevu expanded to offer more technical training and teacher training as well as its large theological programs, and nearby the mission purchased the fine property 'Navuso' for £6000 in 1926 for an ambitious agricultural school.

On the whole the Wesleyan missionaries felt that the academic pace-setting of the Catholic schools, signalled by the introduction of Cambridge external exams in 1920, was doing an ultimate disservice to Fiji's youth. They resented how little effort went into supporting traditional

leadership and preparing Fijians for the village life eight out of ten of them would have to lead. Not that Wesleyan schools, any more than their competitors, tried to realize the educational potential of centuries of accumulated wisdom in the skills or arts of graceful and prosperous living in island environments. Implicit in all the schools was a 'hidden curriculum' that taught Fijian children to expect nothing of value from 'the age of darkness' that might be brought to bear on the problems of 'the modern world'. At best, dances and songs might be encouraged for their aesthetic and recreational value, exotic relief from the 'real' business of the schoolroom as prescribed in Cambridge or New South Wales.

The education of Fijian girls, fitfully attempted by the occasional missionary wife, had not received serious Wesleyan attention until the arrival in 1900 of Mary Ballantine, an ex-prison wardress from Auckland who led a famous little school at Matavelo in Ba. A smaller school at Richmond, Kadavu, and ad hoc efforts elsewhere by the handful of Methodist mission sisters hardly matched the much greater effort of over forty Roman Catholic nuns in thirteen girls schools by 1913. Yet as Catholic schools reached less than one in six of the whole school population, most Fijians girls were left with less education than the little the boys received. In 1920 the Reverend Wesley Amos blamed the '60 years criminal neglect' by the government and his own mission for producing 'a degenerated race of women lacking the capacity almost for virtue'. There were, he claimed, 'thousands of illegitimate marriages and thousands of paltry divorces and thousands of separated homes'.⁶

If this was so, others wondered whether school education was really the answer - to take girls, as the nuns did, and supervise them carefully in their dormitories during term then send them home with a smattering of knowledge and a brace of medals to protect their virtue. In the late 1920s there was a return to Sir George O'Brien's thinking, that a new effort had to be made to reach young mothers in their homes and to help them to rear their children. Child mortality rates were still distressingly high with children under 5 accounting for more than a third of all Fijian deaths.

In 1927 a New Zealand nurse, Mrs Suckling, was appointed as the first full-time child welfare nurse with two Fijian assistants. They began in Tailevu by training a

small women's committee in each village. The committee's task was to assemble the children daily to see that all of them were properly bathed and dressed and fed, and to treat minor ailments with a small stock of medicines. Dr Regina Flood-Keyes Roberts, the wife of the American consul, volunteered in December 1927 to supervise the dozen villages in the Suva-Nausori district, and developed the women's committee system a stage further. She had learned from a similar experiment in Samoa in 1926 and 1927 that unless the entire village became interested in the work and the scheme had the active support of the chiefs, it was doomed to failure.

When Dr Roberts descended on a village she did so in style, having made sure that the Buli came with her and that all would be present for a public weighing of the infants after a general lesson on sanitation and health. She made committee leaders stand to attention to give their reports - the meetings were deliberately formal so that when individual mothers were praised or blamed for the state of their infants they could feel the full weight of community feeling for or against them: 'A practice is made to clap the hands for every child that has gained weight.'⁷

The effects were dramatic. Mothers vied with each other to push those scales ever higher; the condition of the children improved beyond belief. Dr Roberts was probably instrumental in obtaining £2000 from the government for child welfare work in 1928 and another £2000 from CSR. She also made it a fashionable cause amongst the ladies of Suva. Mrs Seymour, wife of the Colonial Secretary, started a baby show. It was to become a regular feature in many provinces. In June 1928 the Methodist mission provided a child welfare worker for Ba, and another Methodist sister, Mrs Ruby Brewer, resigned the same year to be able to work full time in the villages: 'That is my only hope of getting out to these people. In this "I surrender all" . . . as each child dies I know that I am partly responsible for not going out earlier with medicines, etc. I know this is my work.'⁸ The dedication of these overworked women is legendary. One of the sisters, Miss Hettie Hames, is said to have delivered over a thousand babies in Nadroga circuit.

Bishop Nicholas agreed to let nuns do child welfare work in Namosi, the most backward province, but held out little hope of success, recalling the failure of O'Brien's hygiene mission. Père Guinard, who had lived in Namosi for

over thirty years, claimed that nurses were not needed: the problem was nutrition. 'The children are starved', he said; when he came to a village, often bringing food, they swarmed around like a pack of hungry dogs. Parents left their children at home with a few pieces of cold dalo, and returned from their gardens in the evening when the children were too tired to eat.⁹

These problems were overcome in most of the provinces by the kind of social engineering that the child welfare movement consciously or unconsciously employed. By 1937 there were six European nurses and sixteen Fijian nurses on child welfare work, and scores of volunteers often led by the wives of Rokos or DCs. Although child mortality rates did not fall significantly until after World War II, the general cleanliness of children, the incidence of yaws and ringworm and other loathsome conditions was much improved. When Mrs Brewer began her work in Ba in 1929, 440 of 450 children needed treatment. In 1933 she classified only 13 of the 473 children as 'poor' or 'frail' and enclosed photographs to prove it.¹⁰

The child welfare movement was successful because it was the kind of development that the people could 'make their own'.¹¹ Women's committees and guilds expanded their function to become an enjoyable and permanent part of the life of village women, undoubtedly boosting their self-esteem and disseminating much useful knowledge of public health, nutrition, child care and crafts. The movement was also an extension of a long colonial tradition of initiating a small corps of villagers - Native Medical Practitioners, obstetric nurses, provincial scribes, constables and others - into useful skills of immediate relevance, and either employing them locally or posting them to various parts of the group as servants of the Fijian Administration.

There was no incentive to force through more drastic institutional reforms of village life against certain opposition from Ratu Sukuna and others; the most government felt it should do for rural development was to encourage specific initiatives that seemed to promote a more healthy society, one where Fijians would take 'a serious part in the battle of life'.¹²

To salve the progressive conscience, some Fijians were encouraged to take advantage of a provision written into the Communal Services Regulation (1912 edition) by which

the Governor could grant exemption from communal services to an individual wanting to take up commercial agriculture or some business activity. The applicant had to apply through his district council for the galala exemption, as it was called, and pay in advance a fee of £2 10s. He had to be able to show evidence of his enterprise. There was no provision for credit of any kind, loans or technical advice, nor any guarantee that after a year's exemption the privilege would not be revoked. When it was easy to leave a village for wage employment there was not much to encourage a man to undertake the effort and risks of commercial agriculture. Until 1929 perhaps a hundred applications were granted each year, just sufficient for the government to be able to reassure itself and the Colonial Office that it was making efforts 'through a process of education and training, to create in the native an incentive to energy, and to grant him more individual liberty'.¹³

Unimpressed with galala exemptions, the 1920 Council of Chiefs had requested that provinces should be allowed, if they wished, to revert to the payment of taxes in kind, the only scheme that had ever succeeded in ensuring that Fijians would be substantial producers while retaining the full value of their produce and the benefits of a cash income, yet without having to be dependent on European employers. The Colonial Secretary opposed the resolution 'on general grounds' as a 'retrospective step involving difficulty' - presumably to current employers of Fijian labour, though the argument he advanced was pitched to the vaguer certainties of the liberal ethos: 'The basis of the inertness of the Fijian is, to my mind, due to . . . an overburden of communalism, and the difficulty of individual Fijians to assert and maintain individualism.' The Acting Receiver General picked up the tune, protesting that the resolution was 'a negation of the recognition of the Fijian as an individual - it insists in an unmistakable manner upon the perpetuation of the communal system. This is retrogression . . . he should develop sufficiently to be able to live and support himself and his dependents as units of the community European civilisation has evolved . . .'.¹⁴

Such thinking was hopelessly out of tune with village realities. Fijian authorities were not hostile, though, to individual farmers who wanted some temporary relief from their obligations to raise money for some reason. Taniela J. Batiudolu of Lomaiviti, for example, successfully

applied in 1918 to manage full time a plantation where he employed nineteen indentured Fijian labourers and seven Indians to care for 8000 yams, 6000 yaqona, 4000 bananas, 1000 coconut trees and other food crops. He had run his own store since 1915 and owned a 5 ton boat. Later his exemption was cancelled by his own request because he had accepted the post of turaga ni koro in his village and wished 'to devote one year to improving his people'. The request was not necessarily as altruistic as it sounds. Undoubtedly he had built his success with the cooperation and help of kinsmen as well as employees, and had a debt of gratitude to repay.¹⁵ In rural Fiji no man could literally 'go it alone', unless he wished to be a social outcast.

Fiji's commercial economy was not kind to small producers. Opportunity had actually diminished since Thurston's time. Without a government marketing organization, farmers depended on local traders. In copra provinces Chinese and other storekeepers encouraged Fijians to marketi (mortgage) articles for up to a third of their value with only one to three weeks to redeem their property. Payments might be made with nuts (three to a penny was the rate in 1927) and the balance made up by working for the storekeeper at low wages. Traders also took liens on growing nuts - a pernicious credit system that took advantage of easy-going villagers.¹⁶

When Ratu Sukuna became District Commissioner of Lau he tried strenuously to break the hand-to-mouth habits of people cutting small lots of copra and selling locally at deflated prices for grossly inflated trade goods. In 1934 yaqona bought in Suva for 2d sold in Lakeba for 6d; canvas shoes, 3s 6d in Suva, were 6s 6d; black sulus rose from 2s each to 6s:

The native told all this will politely agree that the remedy is to sell and buy in Suva. If the initiative is left to him, nothing further will happen, for the average native prefers the certainty of the bird in the hand, bony and tough though it may obviously be, to better nourished ones so far away.

A direct consequence of the low produce prices obtained locally was that to meet the payment of provincial rates, the native tax, and the educational expenses of their children, the men had to leave their wives and children in the care of others to go and labour on plantations or, in

the 1930s, the gold mines of Vatukoula and Yanawai - 'and for this Fijians will be counted virtuous; their industry will be on men's lips as a sign of Fijian progress'.¹⁷

Ratu Sukuna's response was to reorganize the communal cutting of copra as had been done in his father's day. In 1934 he made the village the unit of tax assessment in Lau and Lomaiviti, investing the true chief of the village with the obligation to meet the quota, and relieving the Buli of the duty of hounding individuals:

The payment of the tax is now a family affair . . . it is the Tribal chief that should conscript resources, make the biggest contribution, and organise the necessary labour. And the wise Buli works through his Tribal chiefs. Communal copra cutting . . . raises no conflict of interests in the native mind and so calls for no coercion unless official supervision by the Buli be so regarded.¹⁸

Those who were landless cut copra on the lands of others. The copra was collected and transported to Suva for sale by auction where, as in the old days, the larger lots realized higher prices. The tabu on selling nuts prior to tax-making halved the business of local traders, who in most cases were customers of Burns Philp at Levuka. The manager there, A.J. Acton, protested to the government that the tabu had 'paralysed' trade: storekeepers would go out of business. Ratu Sukuna replied that storekeepers who bought from Burns Philp at a profit to the firm and then sold to the people at an inflated profit to themselves were providing a service of dubious value. Thurston's arguments had been the same.¹⁹

Communal copra cutting was tried also in Macuata, Cakaudrove and Kadavu with little success, suggesting that the vital ingredient in Lau and Lomaiviti was the personal inspiration of Ratu Sukuna himself and, in Lomaiviti, his younger brother, Ratu Tiale W.T. Vuiyasawa (Native Assistant to the Provincial Commissioner). Despite record low copra prices, the scheme reduced Lau's arrears in rates from £2913 in 1935 to £800 in 1936; the otherwise universal problem of tax defaulters was no longer found in Lau. For all this H.W. Jack, the Director of Agriculture, regarded the scheme as 'iniquitous' and 'unfair to the individual who is anxious to better himself'.²⁰

Nothing Ratu Sukuna could say, or demonstrate empirically, would convince men like Jack that in every Fijian there was not an ego enslaved. In vain Ratu Sukuna showed the particular land problems of individuals his scheme had overcome and appealed to the capacity of existing village communities to surmount their own problems. The colonial officials judged on a priori grounds. If Burns Philp profits were down, there had been an unnatural manipulation of the marketplace; if the chiefs were encouraging the pooling of slender resources that all might jointly prosper, then individuality had been choked.

Nevertheless Jack did take the point that a government marketing organization would eliminate profits made by middlemen - £10,000 in 1936 from Fijian bananas, he estimated, where £2000 would have provided the department with a fleet of punts and boats to do the same job. His small, enthusiastic staff was successfully experimenting with export consignments of Fijian crops and saw no reason for not expanding its marketing activities. Jack used the example of a Tailevu man who had rejected a trader's offer of 3s per bag of sweet potatoes in 1936. He then persuaded the department to ship them to New Zealand on his behalf, and realized 10s 2d net per bag: 'The average Fijian has no idea of business, no organization to dispose of his produce co-operatively, and his experience of middlemen is such that he regards most offers made to him with suspicion. Hence he has no incentive to produce the crops for which markets are undoubtedly available within limits.' The bulk of the 15,000 tons of Fijian copra produced each year went through small traders, mainly Chinese, at a low price. It was depressing on Viti Levu to see many individuals spending days bringing down a few bags of maize or yagona to hawk around a market centre when for a commission of 2 or 3 per cent the department could transport the market produce in larger lots at a much higher price. The Colonial Secretary, Juxon Barton, rejected even these proposals as 'a form of state socialism' that would do 'nothing but harm to the future of an already lethargic race'.²¹

Most of the Fijian farmers the Agriculture Department wanted to help were exempted men, galala, whose numbers began to increase after 1933 when the commutation fee was lowered to 10s and provision made for individuals to take out a licence to farm a piece of communal land. In the Waidina River in 1938 there were 39 of them who each

supplied some 600 cases of bananas to the buyers, and elsewhere there were about another 650 who were experimenting with the new way of life.²²

Many of the latter were protégés of the Reverend Arthur D. Lelean, the Wesleyan apostle of individualism. Lelean, nephew of the earlier missionary C.O. Lelean, was a powerful, energetic man with a reputation amongst Fijians (and later amongst Australians at Ballarat, Victoria) for peculiar psychic powers of divination. Constantly in trouble with mission superiors on account of his secretive ways and habit of recycling vakamisioneri collections back into his own development schemes, Lelean was the maverick of the Methodist mission, universally liked by the Fijians he helped, but regarded as eccentric and unbalanced by Europeans - not least because he had close ties with Apolosi's followers through a former mission teacher, Patemo Vai, one of Apolosi's lieutenants. Nevertheless Governor Fletcher asked Lelean to persuade Fijians to grow cane, and he took up the cause with true missionary zeal. For Lelean was passionately committed to making the Fijians an economic force in the colony.²³

Fletcher had appealed to the CSR managers in Fiji to help Fijians make the 'changeover from the communal to the individualistic mode of life': 'I see no reason why, with sympathetic guidance, the Fijian should not make as good a peasant proprietor as the Indian.' The Ba manager, G.H. Allen, was sympathetic, for the Company was uneasy about its near total dependence on its 4000 Indian sub-tenants and 4500 small growers. In Bulu tikina, Ba, seven towns opened up 50 acres for cane and others followed suit, especially in Nadroga. By 1933 the Company had 411 Fijian growers supplying cane from their own mataqali lands.²⁴

The Company also began experimenting in 1930 with Fijian tenants on its own estates. At Toko estate, Tavua, and Varoka, Ba, 500 acres were made available on exactly the same basis as to Indians - that is, 10 acre individual plots, with CSR field officers giving close supervision and training in the use of implements and horses: 'The scheme aims at making the Fijian self-supporting and developing the individual.'²⁵ A third project was begun at Navakai, Nadi, with 235 acres set aside for twenty-two Fijian tenants, twelve of whom had come from Nadroga. By 1933 one had been replaced but all were doing well; then in 1934 the whole of Nadi went football mad - there were

twenty-four teams using the one ground - and some of the farmers became unsettled with their solitary workdays while the carnival spirit prevailed. They wondered whether in the search for freedom they had not found another bondage. In 1935 the scheme collapsed - only two men worked well, the majority not at all. Ten of the Nadroga men walked out on a standing crop. Elsewhere the Company's efforts had also failed except at Varoka where eight Fijian tenants worked well under the more sympathetic leadership of one Victor Clarke. Fijians seemed to do better as free labourers on the Company estates where they were provided with housing, land for planting root crops, and 1s 9d a day on an easy-come easy-go basis.

In the Rewa delta there were on the average about a hundred Fijian cane growers in the 1930s, a great number of whom paid Indians to do the work and assigned them up to half the crops: 'An amazing amount of jugglery goes on . . .' Even though the Methodist agriculture school at Navuso produced a few genuine cane farmers, the Nausori mill manager was inclined to dismiss the Fijian effort on the Rewa as negligible. They were too easily discouraged by the bad weather that finally led to the abandonment of cane growing in that area.²⁶

In Ra province Fijians had little unleased land close to the tramlines and there were only twenty-one cane farmers on 67 acres in 1939. In Macuata (Labasa) the Fijian contribution was minimal, but in Nadroga poor resources made cane an attractive proposition. Every village that had suitable land was growing cane by 1931 - some 1000 acres in all, but generally in small patches and of poor quality. Nadroga cane farmers were generally villagers using their own land and still living within the constraints of the provincial program of work.

However a large proportion of Fijian cane farmers in the 1930s - there were 686 of them by 1938, 134 on CSR estates - undoubtedly were seeking something of a new life-style and were probably influenced by the constant exhortations of government officials, company officers and Lelean to become 'individualists' and embrace the dignity of labour. Generally CSR was discouraged by the results of its efforts. Depressing stories could be told of the history of pieces of land as they changed hands. The Lautoka Manager sent the extreme example to Sydney of 30 acres of land called 'Naikorokoro' which under direct Company management produced 1135 tons in 1929. In the

hands of three Indians the yield fell to 324 tons by 1932. The following year the property reverted to its 112 Fijian owners including 40 able-bodied men. They produced 178 tons in their first year and about 70 in the second, with most of the land reverting to bush. CSR officials argued that virtues such as punctuality, essential to the milling operations, were notoriously lacking in Fijians though in other respects, such as the handling of machinery, they had shown great natural aptitude. In other words, certain cultural problems seemed insuperable. The Provincial Commissioner of Nadi expressed the Company's frustration when he wrote of the ailing Navakai scheme: 'It is degrading and ignominious that we should all have to wait on the Fijian's pleasure while he works spasmodically and irregularly. Every time we are promised that the estate "will be clean next time".' The Company estimated that it lost £800 a year by allowing Fijians rather than Indians to run the estate.²⁷

In July 1936, G.H. Allen urged the Company to strike at the roots of the Fijian problem by taking in boys and training them in a disciplined environment for the skills and habits of regularity and discipline they would need as cane farmers. The General Manager, Sir Philip Goldfinch, disapproved of the details of Allen's militaristic approach (uniforms, bands, platoons, NCOs and a chiefly 'Adjutant') but sanctioned a training farm on Drasa estate near Lautoka. 'The keynote', he demanded, 'should be simplicity, work, cleanliness, religious advantages, clean living - and a certain amount of sport'. He rejected the suggestion of the Education Department that cultural and theoretical training should be included. Drasa was to be strictly relevant and practical.²⁸

And so it was for the community of eighty lads under a Fijian Supervisor and European Field Officer who took over Drasa in 1938 and worked from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. learning every aspect of cane farming by running the estate. The Company kept them in food, clothing and pocket money and gave them on graduation a lump sum of 5s for every working week in the hope they would be able to establish themselves. Unfortunately the boys went home at an age when they were too young to have a say in anything. Their families invariably commandeered the capital for the welcome-home ceremonies, so the Company had to try and place the graduates on its own estates. Only a minority of Drasa graduates remained on the land, though many of them applied their work habits to white-collar jobs. CSR, the

cynics said, trained the best waiters in Fiji.²⁹

By World War II then, Fijians had been given many chances to become cane farmers and several hundred individuals had successfully laid the basis for a renewed Fijian presence in the sugar industry. Many more hundreds of Fijians preferred easier ways of earning money. A man could earn 3s 6d a day on the wharves at Lautoka and Suva. Discovery of gold near Vatukoula led to the opening of the Emperor and Loloma gold mines in the mid 1930s, and they employed nearly 2000 Fijians by the end of the decade. At the third annual general meeting of Emperor Mines Limited in Melbourne, in 1938, E.G. Theodore noted that while Fijians had no strong necessity to earn wages and could return to their village at any time, they were happy in the larger community of the mining settlement provided they had adequate housing and food. As workers they were easy to teach and supervise, and showed common sense. They were completely unorganized industrially: 'We are very happily situated', he told the shareholders, though occasionally provincial rivalries caused fights between the men. On 9-10 February 1936 a few hundred men from Ra and Tailevu were involved in several fights and the Tailevu men and their families fled the field. Theodore was advised to watch that Rewa and Verata were balanced against Bau. Parochialism, it³⁰ seems, was exportable anywhere Fijians lived in groups.

A smaller gold mine on Vanua Levu at Mt Kasi, Yanawai, provided employment for a constantly changing workforce of about two hundred men. To a much greater extent than on Viti Levu, the men of the outer provinces preferred to work for short periods, to pay their taxes and often to raise money for a community project such as a church or school. The turnover at Mt Kasi was full 30 per cent each month.

Other new developments came from within the Fijian Administration itself. Most of them were instigated by the local born Provincial Commissioner of Colo North and Colo East, Stuart Reay. Remembered by Fijians as an intimidating, resourceful man, Reay toured his provinces with immense amounts of luggage, including his personal food supply, fodder for his horses, and a sanitary 'thunderbox'. He delighted in outraging local custom by draping his horse with whatever plant was sacred to the women. In Nadrau it was the baka vine. As villagers related it forty years later, he once rode up trailing baka with an insolent grin, so as soon as he was seated for the

welcoming ceremonies the women gathered in an adjoining house to set up a continuous howl of outrage and grief. 'When will they ever stop?' Reay asked his provincial constable, with feigned ignorance. 'Sir, they won't stop; you have done a fearful thing (ka rerevaki).' Finally a delegate came from the women to demand that Reay attend their 'court' before he opened his own. Reay went along for the sake of his ears and found himself arraigned before a lady 'magistrate' and her sister-in-arms as the 'interpreter'. 'O sa kila li ni tabu na baka? You [using the singular form with calculated disrespect] know, do you not, of the baka tabu?' Reay maintained the silence of consent - or bemused contempt - and was sentenced to furnish the village with twelve cows within a week. They were duly delivered at a cost of £2 each, drawn on the provincial funds.

Reay's otherwise undocumented sense of the farcical in his duties, and a liberal reading of his official powers, prompted him to exempt the village of Saumakia in Waima tikina of Colo East 'from the threat of the law and of official control' altogether. He was fed up with endless prosecutions for tax evasion and their complete indifference to his moral exhortations and overused threats, he said, and challenged them to manage their own affairs from the beginning of January 1933. Leadership reverted to the natural leaders of the villages. The experiment was a success. The people planted bananas and made a lot of money, and in 1934 their village was one of the best kept in Colo East. ³¹

Could the model be transferred? Reay chose the Tavua people, as they were chronically short of food, sodden with yaqona, and resentful of authority. In March 1934 he took them to task: 'Why should it be necessary for the Government to force you to maintain dry roofs over your heads and to cultivate your gardens? If we washed our hands of you and left you to your own devices would you let your houses fall about your ears and abandon your gardens so you starved?' The Tui Tavua was so provoked that he challenged Reay to let them alone for a while and see the results. Reay accepted. Immediately in a fine speech the Tui announced that the lali drum would be sounded at dawn the following day and every day thereafter for the various mataqali to begin work. Waste land was to be cleared for cane, yaqona was tabu for the young men, and jaunts with taxi drivers tabu for the young women. Reay left the village feeling he had done his best day's work in years.

Within three weeks Tavualevu was a village transformed. A new teacher's house had been built in two days whereas his predecessor's had taken three weeks and fifteen prosecutions. The tabu was effective, and the Tui completely in control. Even after the first burst of enthusiasm the experiment went well for several months in the eight villages of the Tavua tikina.³²

In January 1935 the experiment was extended to the five villages of Nadrau, one of the districts in Colo North that Lelean had stripped of most of its able-bodied men. The results were disappointing. The Buli and the Tui had to seek restoration of legal controls when they found that their moral authority was insufficient to persuade men to work. By contrast when Nakorovatu, Colo East, was exempted in February of the same year, within three months the village had repaired all its houses, dug a new latrine system and planted 12 acres of bananas. In May the other villages of Waima tikina were given the chance to emulate Saumakia and also the three villages of Lutu tikina. Soloira tikina was included at the beginning of 1936, and Reay wondered whether the solution to half of the problems of administration was not simply to leave the people to themselves wherever traditional leadership was self-sustaining.³³

The need to restore regularly constituted legal authority first became apparent in Tavua where the Buli had only retained his bureaucratic powers to convene the district council or sign lease applications and other documents. The Tui Tavua as hereditary chief wanted to displace the Buli entirely and virtually secede from the Fijian Administration. Then in March 1935 the Tui died and there was trouble over the succession.

The quarrel was a classically Fijian one absorbing tremendous emotional energies while the mundane work of the community was virtually abandoned. A mataqali in the Buli's town of Korovou had the right at custom to offer the yaqona to the Tui Tavua at his consecration. This custom was ignored at the installation of the new chief and the Korovou party declared the rites invalid. In July the hundred days of mourning feast (burua) was attended by Ratu Pope Seniloli and Deve Toganivalu. They intervened unsuccessfully to achieve a settlement. Reay resumed official control of the villages in August and asked Ratu Sukuna to adjudicate. The Tavua people were asked to atone (bulubulu) to Korovou for the breach of ritual. They

refused, so Reay declared the March ceremony invalid and ordered another to replace it on 28 November. The people sullenly refused to make the necessary preparations.

In desperation Reay called in Ratu Sukuna again, and in this chief's presence on 12 December the two sides agreed to reinstall the Tui immediately. The ceremony took place in a grudging spirit, and Reay pondered the dilemma of the administrator forced either to use a strong hand to attain limited objects connected with hygiene - matters on which the Fijian conscience was silent - or to respect the autonomy of the people and allow traditional-type feuds such as this to consume what seemed a grossly disproportionate amount of their time and energy.³⁴

On reflection Reay decided that village exemption actually tended to reinforce the very 'communal system' the government was pledged to modernize, even though traditional leadership was less oppressive for individuals. In the several villages where it was tried in 1935-37 the final results were mixed. Some villages, especially in Solaira, went into immediate decline because the chiefs no longer had influence over the people. Others like Saumakia thrived. Obviously much depended on the personal quality of the traditional chiefs if autonomy was to work.

Elsewhere in Fiji there were similar experiments only in Tailevu where Naila village was exempted in late 1931 and for several years grew fair quantities of rice and cane vakoro (the village working together). Daku was exempted in 1937 and did very well under its visionary chief, Ratu Emosi, although its main source of income was firewood. It was hard to generalize from these examples:

In some communities of Fijians we get as much and sometimes more from voluntary effort than can be extracted by compulsion; in others the little more we get by compulsion is offset by the discontent engendered; we have reached a stage in Fijian development when the individual will no longer submit without protest to the curtailment of his liberty and the planning of his time and work by others, and the Communal Services Regulation may be said no longer to have the sanction of the community, except possibly in the more out-of-the-way islands.³⁵

Although hardly qualified to speak for all Fiji (and in trouble as soon as he tried), by 1937 Reay had done a complete volte-face and was now convinced that a better solution to the problems of Fijian villages was their abolition. Communal and cooperative efforts, agricultural 'clubs' and the like had been tried, he argued, and found wanting. Even at Naila, often held up as a showplace of Fijian enterprise, nine men who were exempt individually as galala to work and live on their own land were much in advance of those working communally.³⁶

Reay's new-found enthusiasm for lone galala seems to have been based on a small sample of some thirty families on Colo East and even fewer in Colo North who were already living apart from villages. He frequently praised them in his reports because all tended commercial crops, had well-kept houses and compounds, children who helped the family rather than ran loose in the villages; they paid their taxes, were seldom in want, kept free of village intrigues, reduced their involvement in ceremonial observances, and appeared to Reay to be a lot happier. In 1938 Reay visited the Mogodro tikina of Colo West and was similarly impressed with twenty-five settlers near Bukuya, all in 'excellent' houses. They were typical of about a third of the district who had begun to move out onto their lands after 1935 on the suggestion of a former Buli. They grew large quantities of yaqona for the Ba market:

I feel justified in claiming from the Mogodro example, and from the example of the many settlers I have studied in three other provinces, that in Viti Levu outside the cane areas - and no doubt in Vanua Levu also - where men can be induced to break away from the village in this way there is an overwhelming chance of success.³⁷

The Director of Agriculture naturally gave Reay strong support. Jack had come to Fiji in 1934 after fourteen years in Malaya where he had witnessed, he claimed, a highly successful and sudden change-over from an inefficient communal farming system to one of individual smallholders intensively cultivating up to 3 acres and living on their own land

in pretty solid comfort, while producing 40% of the world's rubber and 80% of Malaya's copra: the Malay is now a man of independence and enjoys much more luxury than the Fijian and is far

happier in appearance, manner, and mode of living on his little piece of land with his wife and usually 3-4 children or more.

There was no hope for Fijians, Jack and his supporters argued, until they became individual peasant proprietors with 'some security from the lazy and improvident'.³⁸

The arguments failed to convince some of the DCs who valued the village as a centre of a polity that from its slender resources could provide all its members with a church, a school, a football ground or cricket pitch, a bathing pool, piped water, mutual help in times of stress, the opportunity to participate in councils or church assemblies, and access to the advice of child welfare workers, nurses and medical practitioners. Did the proponents of village destruction, it was very fairly asked, see beyond the shortlived benefits of commercial production by galala to ask who would care for them in their old age or what would replace the civilizing and broadening influences of village life?

The views of the 'individualists' were put to the test in Colo North about July 1937 in a decisive experiment with policy repercussions for the next twenty years. Reay called in the Qaliyalatina and Savatu people to Nadarivatu and persuaded them that they should abandon their villages and go out and live on their planting lands. Four villages in Waima tikina, Colo East, were given the same choice. According to oral accounts Reay used a great deal of rhetoric and even fear - that there would be a great shortage of food - to obtain his way. He indicated ominously that anyone left in the villages would bear the whole burden of the provincial program of work. The Waima people were reluctant to move, hoping that the older experiment of village exemption would continue. Some had no suitable land away from the village. The men of Qaliyalatina, who had had no taste of village exemption, began building houses on their lands with more enthusiasm, some in remote glens up to 16 miles from the village. Reay assured Suva that the people were happy and that the women who might have been expected to miss village life the most were enjoying their freedom from the burdens of feeding visitors, and their greater degree of privacy and comfort. Or so they told the Commissioner.

Reay addressed the District Commissioners' Conference of 1938 - in the memory of a chief who was there, 'like a professor to so many students'. Old men in Mogodro had told him that scattered hamlets were the usual mode of settlement in ancient times, with occasional resort to fortified settlements in time of war. The centralized village was an aberration in the interior introduced in Gordon's time as a control device. The price paid by the people for settled government was a loss of individuality and independence. His latest experiment, then, should be understood as a harking back to a healthier state of society.³⁹

The DCs were not convinced by Reay's arguments, fearing with the Colonial Secretary 'a hurricane flood of detribalization at any moment'. They wanted social changes to 'evolve', to come 'from within'. Finally they arrived at a compromise formula stating that the 'rural system', an extension of village society to embrace some Fijians living in groups on their own land and farming it systematically, was the 'next natural step in Fijian development'.⁴⁰ And so there, on the eve of war, the trustees of Fijian progress let the issues blur into abstractions.

Unquestionably the 1930s provided Fijians with greater opportunity and mobility than they had experienced before, and it was possible for a man to remove himself from obligations to his community and kindred for years at a time. Whether the net result was beneficial to Fijian societies depends on the value attached to such signs of 'progress'. Many individual Fijians had made particular choices that collectively threatened the viability of their villages and local government institutions. These alone ensured that there were wide areas of human life where Fijians were still masters of their destinies in a manner that could not prevail in the quarters, however congenial, provided by a foreign-owned mining company or a sugar mill or a copra plantation.

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