

2

Continuity and change 1970–87

On the surface, calm and goodwill characterised race relations and political life in the post-independence years. Development proceeded apace as new jetties, wharves and roads were built; modern amenities such as electricity, piped water and paved roads reached remote villages in the islands. More and more people of all ethnic groups and social backgrounds streamed towards cities and urban centres in search of employment or better education for their children. Elections were held periodically; the sanctity of the ballot box was respected (partly, as it turned out, because one party was regularly returned to power and because the *status quo* was not threatened); and parliament served as the principal, and much respected, forum for political debate. On the surface, things looked fine, but forces were at work that would undermine this ostensible calm.

An important feature of the final constitutional negotiations in London was the agreement between the Alliance and the National Federation Party (NFP) that the method of election would provide only for the first House of Representatives elected after independence, in 1972. The electoral system thus was set up to be an interim solution. In their joint statement of 30 April 1970, both Mara and Koya agreed to appoint a Royal Commission that would work out a permanent electoral system for Fiji's plural society. A Royal Commission was appointed in 1975, with Professor Harry Street, Sir William Hart and Professor Sir Keith Lucas as its members (Parliamentary Paper 1975/24). In its report, the Commission accepted the importance of ethnic factors in Fijian politics

and recommended the retention of communal seats with the same weight to counter racial fears and to provide reassurance and a sense of security to ethnic minorities. But it also suggested that racial reservation for the 25 national seats be removed, turning them into common electoral roll in five constituencies 'with no restriction of race or religion for either voters or candidates'. It further suggested that election for these seats should be on the basis of single transfer vote. This careful formula attempted to reconcile the particular ethnic interests of the different communities with the urgent necessity to forge a sense of nationalism that transcended ethnic loyalties.

The Alliance Party rejected the recommendations on the grounds that they were not binding and that in any event the constitution, of which the electoral system was an integral part, was a permanent arrangement. Broadly interpreted, the Alliance stance was correct, but in relation to the provisions for altering the electoral system, it was in conflict with the Joint Statement of 1970. It appeared to be at variance with the position Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had adopted at the 13th Plenary Session of the London Constitutional Conference, where he had argued that the Commission's findings 'would be taken into consideration and then become part of the constitution otherwise its recommendations could be subject to the whim and fancies of any Parliament' (Parliamentary Paper 1975/24). This had been the understanding of the NFP leadership, which pointed out to the Royal Commission that 'both sides to say the least would accept the recommendations of the Royal Commission on moral grounds if nothing else'. By 1975, Mara had shifted his stance because the 'interim arrangement' had preserved his party's advantage as the 1972 elections clearly showed. The issue was not tested on the floor of the parliament, but the rejection of the recommendations was a foregone conclusion given the Alliance's preponderant majority.

The Alliance's stand contradicted the view of the British representative at the constitutional talks, Lord Shepherd, who held that the 'constitution is a living creature, subject to growth, susceptible to change; it is a sign of life, vigour and maturity to be ready for change when change is required' (Legislative Council of Fiji 1970:19). The Alliance was clearly not ready for change. The NFP leadership had also learnt a bitter lesson. As Ahmed Ali put it, 'their wish was meaningless

and the expected flexibility of independence had proved elusive; the rigidity of the colonial era still held sway; the old arguments against total rejection of common roll persisted despite expert advice' (Ali 1980:180). The Alliance's new position marked the end of the 'honeymoon period' between Koya and Mara and the beginning of bitter relations between the two that would culminate in Mara's vow in 1977 not to work with Koya again. Koya's own position within his party was considerably weakened by his inexplicably close relationship with Mara not bearing fruit. His political days were numbered.

The constitution continued to be a controversial issue. Many Fijians still appeared concerned that only a Fijian-dominated Alliance government would protect their heritage and rights. A government headed by high chiefs had been in power since independence, and for many Fijians this was only natural and just and they wanted it to continue. Some scholars argued that the Fijian élite would accept the paraphernalia of electoral politics only to the extent that it served their interest, and that any deviation from the established path would not be tolerated.

Events following the general elections of 1982 gave credence to the view that the Fijian attitude to sharing power with others was hardening. The 1982 general election was a closely contested affair which the Alliance won with a four seat majority and a plurality of 2,000 out of 1,003,000 votes (Lal 1983a). Soon afterwards, irate Fijian landowners in western Viti Levu threatened to evict their Indian tenants for not 'fulfilling their pledges to vote for the Alliance' (Lal 1983b). The paramount chief of Sabeto said of the Indian tenants that as they 'are the ones who opposed us, I will have them no more'. In the Senate, several Fijian Senators came dangerously close to speaking in a manner popularised by the nationalist leader Sakiasi Butadroka, declaring that 'blood will flow' if Indians did not 'cling' to Fijians. Some even argued for the deportation of opposition leaders who were alleged to have insulted Fijian political chiefs.

The vehemence of the remarks was matched by the silence they received in response by the Fijian community. In parliament calls were made to revise the constitution to provide for Fijian parliamentary dominance. The most significant support for this view came from the Great Council of Chiefs. At its 1982 meeting on the chiefly island of

Bau, opened for the first time since cession by a reigning British monarch, the council castigated the opposition for allegedly criticising Fijian chiefs during the election, and took the unprecedented step of passing a resolution calling for the reservation of two-thirds of the House of Representatives as well as the positions of governor general and prime minister for indigenous Fijians. This view found an astounding amount of sympathy, mainly among literate urban Fijians. A survey by the Suva-based Market Research Bureau showed 70 per cent of urban Fijians were in favour of reserving the offices of prime minister and governor general for indigenous Fijians, while 64 per cent supported the reservation of seats in parliament. In contrast, only 55 per cent expressed no objection to the election of an Indian as prime minister.

Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, then president of the Great Council of Chiefs, expressed deep sorrow at the apparent loss of chiefly influence and urged Fijians to preserve their unity under chiefly guidance. The Bau resolution was seen by the NFP as being anti-Indian, though in truth, as one Fijian observer, Savenaca Nacanitaba, commented, it was directed as much against commoner dissenting Fijians as it was at non-Fijians (*Fiji Times*, 29 July 1982). The chiefs, he suggested, were attempting to impose a 'culture of silence' upon their people. Significantly, 40 members present at the meeting, including Prime Minister Mara and some of his cabinet members abstained from voting on the motion, although Mara did speak against it. He subsequently defended himself by calling the resolution a 'waste of time' (Lal 1983b).

His critics argued that if, as the leader of a multiracial society, and as a committed multiracialist, he had spoken against what was primarily a racially discriminatory motion, much of the anxiety that the resolution caused among non-Fijians would have been avoided. But abstention made political sense in the circumstances. It enabled Mara to extricate himself from a difficult situation while allowing room for leverage in the future. In 1974, assured of wide support across the political spectrum, Mara took decisive action against Butadroka's motion to deport Indo-Fijians and put Fijians in political control. But the political climate had changed since then. In 1982, an Alliance victory was possible only because of the solid support of the Fijian community. Now to repudiate the wishes of the community's leaders for political supremacy would have

meant jeopardising his party's base. Thus, by abstaining, Mara did not overtly alienate his own constituency, while reminding the Indo-Fijian community of his moderate stand amidst extremism. Underlying the ire of the Fijian landlords against politically unreliable Indo-Fijian tenants, and the call for the revision of the constitution by the Great Council of Chiefs, lay a resurgent Fijian ethnonationalism. It was asserting its voice and seeking practical realisation of the concept of Fijian paramountcy. In effect, it represented a concerted challenge to the notion of political coexistence. Five years later, things would come to a head.

Land

A more emotive issue than the distribution of political power was land and its use by different communities. Enveloped in prejudice and misunderstanding, the question of land always aroused great communal passion in Fiji. Land ownership was not at issue—that question was permanently solved by the constitution (and common sense)—access to it and security of tenure were. The bulk of the Indo-Fijian population lived in the sugar cane belt of Fiji, constituted over 80 per cent of the sugar cane farmers in the 1980s, and produced 90 per cent of the country's sugar, most of it on leased native land of limited tenure. The Indo-Fijian tenant community wanted more secure tenure, extending beyond 30 years. Fijian landowners, apprehensive of losing control over a vital resource and some themselves wanting to enter commercial agriculture, resisted. The ensuing stalemate generated bitterness, further fuelling ethnic tensions.

The land problem had become more acute, and certainly more politicised, in the last two decades since independence. However, its roots lay in the 1920s when, after the end of indenture, an expanding and rapidly diversifying Indo-Fijian community began to make increasing demands regarding the land. By the 1930s land had already emerged as a contentious issue in Fijian–Indian relations. The Indo-Fijian tenants were complaining of the difficulty of obtaining land and of the vexation and expense involved in negotiating terms with individual Fijian landowners. Ken Gillion (1977) describes the reasons for the Fijian apprehension.

In the 1930s, they [indigenous Fijians] were becoming more aware of their economic weakness. Their numbers were on the rise just as were the Indians', the land was

needed for their children, and they wanted to grow more cash crops. In some cases when they could not afford to pay compensation for improvements, they were refusing to renew leases when they came up for renewal. Sometimes the land was then used for their own cultivation, but often it reverted to bush (Gillion 1977:90).

In 1936, in response to a CSR-inspired crackdown on recalcitrant landlords, the Council of Chiefs, encouraged by Ratu Sukuna, agreed to have the government assume control of 'all native land not required for immediate use and to administer such land in best interests of the Fijians' (Gillion 1977:191). This resolution led, four years later, to the passage of the Native Land Ordinance. Under it, an independent body, the Native Land Trust Board, was set up to manage and administer all native lands; its establishment brought a semblance of stability to land transactions between Fijian landowners and Indo-Fijian tenants. The length of leases was standardised to 10 years with the expectation, but not guarantee, of renewal.

The Native Land Ordinance also provided for a native reserve policy to demarcate gradually and set aside in perpetuity certain native lands 'for the use and maintenance of proprietary units'. How many native leases were put into reserve is not known, but the policy was a major source of friction between the tenants and the landlords. Driven off the reserved land and forced to fend for himself and his family without the communal or kinship support available to the Fijians, the Indo-Fijian tenant complained of harassment and hardship. His former farm went largely uncultivated and frequently reverted to bush; even when farmed, it operated far below its full economic potential. The Fijian landowner viewed the reserve policy differently, as a protection against the unquenchable thirst for ever more land by Indo-Fijian tenants. He saw reserved land and shorter leases to Indo-Fijians as incentives for him to enter the world of commercial cultivation and compete effectively with his Indo-Fijian counterparts.

The Native Land Ordinance of 1940 established the pattern of land tenure for the next two decades. In 1966, the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance once again attempted to settle the problems of lease renewals, following continual complaints of unfair treatment from both the landowners and tenants (Legislative Council of Fiji 1966). The primary purpose of the legislation was to give tenants greater security than before.

It provided that a first or second ten-year extension would be granted to the tenants if the landlords could not plead enough hardship to justify terminating the lease. The new legislation left both parties dissatisfied. The Indo-Fijian tenant continued to complain about the insecurity of tenure while the Fijian landowner felt that the Agricultural Tribunal, which adjudicated the disputes, usually favoured the tenant because he was not able to plead hardship to the extent that the tenant could. Consequently, a working committee to review the ordinance was set up. It presented its report to parliament in 1975. The essence of its recommendation to amend Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance (ALTO) was the establishment of 30 years as the minimum period of tenure, with provision for renewal. The new bill provoked two distinct responses from the Indo-Fijian tenant community. One section accepted it as the best terms they could obtain in the circumstances; the other saw it simply as an extension of the existing uncertainties. The NFP, representing the Indo-Fijian tenant community, split on the issue. Opposition leader Koya, also President of the Federation of Cane Growers, opposed the bill, while K.C. Ramrakha and Irene Jai Narayan along with eight others crossed the floor to support it. The NFP rift, long in existence, was now in the open and would adversely affect the party's fortunes in the 1977 elections.

Land was again at the centre of a major controversy in Fiji in 1979, driving a wedge between the prime minister and the opposition leader, and effectively killed talks on a government of national unity, which was being tentatively mooted. At the NFP convention in Ba in 1980, the Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Reddy criticised the Alliance government's policy, approved as early as 1975, of reserving large areas of Crown land, including Provisional Crown Schedule A land. Reddy asserted that reservation would affect 62,240 acres of Crown land, at least 192 existing leases and some five government projects. He questioned the need to reserve Crown land.

Given Fijian strength in this area and the Indian vulnerability is it necessary to take over what little Crown land there is and convert it into Native land? You may have the power to do it, but the power to do what is right and good is also the power to do what is wrong. I would have thought that a reasonable government would preserve as much Crown land as possible consistent with the principles of fairness to all in order to settle future evictees from Native lands now waiting to be resettled (Reddy 1980).

For Reddy, the reservation of Crown land was a further attempt to weaken the Indian tenant community and compound its already considerable vulnerability.

Ratu Mara's response to Reddy's criticism typified Fijian attitudes on the subject of land. First, he described Fijian magnanimity in granting leases and lamented the lack of Indo-Fijian appreciation.

Much of the capital for their [Indians'] successful ventures for the education of Indian professionals, came from cane money from leases on Indian land. Without resorting to the Bhumi Putra type of xenophobic legislation used in Southeast Asia, the Alliance government supports the policy of free economy, even though it may follow Darwin's tenets of the survival of the fittest.

Indo-Fijians already controlled business and industry, and the Fijian people had not asked for a share in these, despite Indo-Fijians' demand for secure land leases, said Mara

[i]f [Reddy's] contention is to be accepted, then all Indian tenancies, which cover much of the good land in Fiji, must be held by them in perpetuity. All the most valuable properties in urban areas must be their preserve and of course commerce, industry, transport and other professions must be completely controlled by them.

Instead of constructive dialogue on a vital national problem, racial stereotyping, distrust and misunderstanding once again won the day, as they have so often in Fiji's colonial and independent history. The vital question of why Crown land was being reserved, and whether the full implications of that action had been adequately discussed with representatives of the Indian Alliance, let alone the NFP, was left unaddressed.

The Fijian attitude on land had become much more politicised in the 1970s and the 1980s. As Brian Farrell and Peter Murphy (1978) correctly emphasised, the simple fact of possession gave Fijians 'power' that others did not enjoy; 'it is an effective cultural buffer to inroads made by Indians and Europeans' (1978:2). Threats of violence and upheaval were never too far from the discourse on land—'blood will flow in this country if Indians do not understand the deep emotional feelings Fijians have for their land', Ratu Mara said (*Fiji Times*, 3 March 1978). These sentiments were repeated by others in the following years. The leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA) began expiring in the late

1990s and many have not been renewed, to the detriment of the economy. The government wants native lands leased under a new act, the Native Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act, which gives landowners greater leverage than under the ALTA, which is what the tenants want. But given the sensitivities and the political stakes involved, the land problem will not be resolved anytime soon.

Education

It was often said that what land was to the Fijians, education was to the Indo-Fijians, although, of course, both the communities needed both land and education. The Indo-Fijians' success in the educational field, the Fijians' lack of it especially at the higher levels, and the government's sometimes desperate strategies to cope with the gap, constituted the core of the problem. Ironically enough, the Indians' success was caused in large measure by the nagging insecurity of land tenure. Education was seen early on as an important instrument for social advancement, upward mobility and economic security. The Indo-Fijians' push for education began early. As Gillion observes, the Indo-Fijians started with nothing 'except the keenness of the Indian parents and their willingness to sacrifice for their children' (1977:119). Private committee schools, often with little or no assistance from the colonial government, produced a steady stream of educated school leavers who filled the civil service and the teaching profession. When the University of the South Pacific opened in 1968, the majority of the students were Indo-Fijians, as they are today.

The Fijian experience was less successful, despite the early effort of the colonial government and the Christian missions. The reasons for this are complex. The 1969 Education Commission, appointed to draw up an agenda on the future direction of education in Fiji, noted among other reasons that the geography of Fiji, the isolation of rural Fijian teachers from any intellectual stimulus, the shortage of qualified Fijian primary school teachers, rural poverty and social distractions contributed to the problem of Fijian education (Government of Fiji 1969). To grapple with the widening gap, the commission recommended that 50 per cent of Fiji government university scholarship funds be reserved for Fijians on a 'parallel block' basis; that is, in the event of the quota being

unfulfilled, the unallocated balance should be devoted to other specifically Fijian educational needs, such as repeats for university students. These provisions were to extend for a period of nine years, with a preliminary review at the end of six. Increasing competition for a restricted number of places at the University of the South Pacific's Foundation program brought the issue to a head in the 1977 elections.

Using the parallel block principle, the government awarded university scholarships to Fijian students with the university entrance pass mark of 216, while Indo-Fijian students needed a mark of 261 to qualify. Education became a highly emotive issue when cold statistics and abstract principles impinged on individual lives of Indo-Fijian students and parents. The NFP, which had tacitly accepted the principle of preferential treatment outlined in Development Plan VII, took up the issue, eager for political mileage. Koya denounced the policy in ringing terms. 'It is bound to produce recriminations, frustrations, bitterness, the destruction of the image and reputation of the university and indeed the government of the day in the eyes of the world' (*Fiji Times*, 18 March 1977). The Alliance reminded him and his party of Fijian concessions on land. Mara defended his government's policies as being necessary for lagging Fijians to 'catch up' with others. Koya linked Fijian demand for parity in education to the Indo-Fijian call for greater representation in the military, whose almost exclusively Fijian composition was a source of anxiety among Indo-Fijians. Failure to accept parity in both these areas was an 'example of a political party indulging in hypocrisy', said Koya (*Fiji Times*, 18 March 1977).

In the immediate aftermath of the 1982 general elections education was once again at the forefront. Frustrated by the continuing poor performance of Fijian students at senior high school and university level, the Fijian Teachers Association, an umbrella organisation of ethnic Fijian teachers, asked for the reservation of 70 per cent of government scholarships for university studies for Fijians. The new Minister of Education, Ahmed Ali, rejected the idea, but did make strenuous efforts to upgrade facilities in Fijian schools and to staff them with better trained teachers. In addition, he closed down the Nasinu Teachers College and turned it into a dormitory for University of the South Pacific's Foundation (mostly Fijian) students to provide them with more tutorial help and an environment more conducive to studying. In the 1990s, the government

moved further ahead with legislating support for Fijian education through special schemes. The Qarase government explicitly endorsed a race-based program for Fijian education through its 'blueprint'. It waived fees for form seven Fijian students, and provided state assistance to Fijian-run schools, but not to Indo-Fijian schools even though, in many cases, these schools had high numbers of Fijian students.

The policy of discrimination—or affirmative action—that governed the Alliance government's educational efforts was alleged by its critics to exist in other spheres of national life as well, especially the civil service. Theoretically, all civil service appointments were made by the Public Service Commission. Promotions and opportunities for advanced training were in principle based on merit and qualification. In practice, it was alleged that the situation was far different. Jai Ram Reddy, in his address to the NFP convention in Ba in 1980, aired the feelings of many in his party and community when he asserted that 'Fiji is implementing a policy designed to ensure that all strategic levels of government are staffed by loyal personnel which in effect means that Fijians are placed in positions of command in order to deliberately create an "out group", namely the Indians'. The bitterness and distrust that this produced 'conflict alone may resolve', he said, using Mara's words (Reddy 1980).

In 1980, the deputy leader of the opposition, Irene Jai Narayan, put forward a motion in parliament expressing concern at the racial imbalance in the civil service. She urged that in addition to racial balance, there be parity at all levels in the civil service. Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, then acting prime minister, replied that the principle of parity applied only at the point of entry, and that promotions and other opportunities for advancement depended entirely on merit. He called Mrs Narayan's charges 'cheap political propaganda of the worst kind' (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 1980, cited in Nation 1982). To be fair to the government, there had been few cases of systematic discrimination on the basis of race and political affiliation, especially when compared to what happened in the post-coup years when nepotism and political patronage ran rampant. But, as John Nation pointed out in 1981 at a seminar held at the Australian National University, by the 1980s the feeling within the Indian community is that power over the civil service is in Fijian hands.

The direction of the Alliance government's development program and its utilisation of foreign aid were controversial both among Fijians as well as Indo-Fijians. Western United Front and the Fijian Nationalist Party argued, as we shall see shortly, that western as well as underprivileged Fijians had been neglected, and the Indo-Fijians alleged racial discrimination against their community. They pointed to the major development projects of the previous decade, and the crowning achievements of the Alliance government, the pine industry, cattle schemes, cane expansion at Seaqaqa, and fisheries development, all of which had been directed towards the development of the Fijian community. The major exception was the negotiations of the Lomé Convention, where a bipartisan approach to the vital sugar industry resulted in better prices for the largely Indo-Fijian sugar farming community. The Alliance government was clearly caught in a no-win situation. Many Fijians continued to complain about backwardness and neglect, seeking preferential treatment in selected areas of national life. The Indo-Fijians accused the government of being blatantly pro-Fijian. It was out of dissatisfaction with prevailing currents of politics that the Fiji Labour Party emerged in 1985.

Political parties

In the 1980s, the Alliance and the National Federation Party were the dominant political parties, but they shared the national stage with two splinter Fijian parties, the Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) and the Western United Front (WUF). The Alliance had won consistently at the polls since 1966, except for its first and only temporary defeat at the April 1977 elections. The experience of government, uninterrupted leadership, and the crucial support of the Indo-Fijian and European business sector gave it an edge over its rivals. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had been at the helm of party's leadership since its inception, and though there was overt criticism of his autocratic style, his tantrums and his banyan tree like effect on all around him, his position was not seriously challenged. Indeed, at critical times, such as in the 1982 elections, it was his stature that ensured the Alliance's success. In the 1980s, although he still walked tall, the aura of invincibility that surrounded him in the immediate

aftermath of independence had weakened. The corrosive effects of ethnic politics and persistent criticism of his policies and style, from both Fijians and Indo-Fijians, had tarnished his earlier lustre.

The basic, communally-federated structure of the party remained intact. The Alliance was marginally more multiracial than its rivals, though since independence its claim on Indian votes had declined significantly. The Fijian Association was the backbone of the party, and Fijian solidarity behind it had 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, helped to consolidate the party's dominance at the polls.

The weakest spoke in the Alliance wheel was the Indian Alliance. Its credibility was seriously damaged by its consistent failure to attract significant numbers of Indo-Fijian voters to its ranks and by the departure from the party of its founding members. Sir Vijay Singh, a former Alliance attorney general, left the party in 1979, after being dismissed from the cabinet following weeks of controversy and speculation about the extent of his involvement in the now-infamous 'flour mills of Fiji' court case. He joined the NFP in 1982. M.T. Khan, another former Alliance cabinet minister, was not reinstated in the cabinet after he was unsuccessfully tried for corruption. He too joined the NFP and was a candidate until his 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 (*Fiji Times*, 11 January 1982). Failure to win the party ticket, personality clashes and a feeling of relative insignificance in the internal affairs of the party 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 Indo-Fijian community. The Indo-Fijian business community, primarily Gujaratis, allied itself more closely with the Alliance and the Fijian elite through joint commercial ventures. The Alliance promised 'business as usual'—the Indo-Fijian 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, had long been a supporter of 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 burgeoning sense of a distinct Muslim identity within the Indian community. The demand for Muslim separatism has a long history, but in the 1980s, it reached new heights. In a survey carried out in late 1979, two-thirds of the Muslim population 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 paltry 3 per cent desired Hindustani, the Indian lingua franca (Ali 1980:150). They therefore distanced themselves from the NFP, perceived as a Hindu party, and created stronger ties with 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, the NFP was plagued by a continuous history of internecine struggle for leadership that seriously damaged its credibility as an alternative government. One difficulty for the party was its own ethnic constituency, the Indo-Fijian community, which was deeply divided along religious, cultural and regional lines. The roots of the division and factionalism go back to the immediate post-indenture period of the 1920s. An equally important factor was the party's problematic leaders, who invariably came from the legal community. Personality clashes rather than informed policy differences were the main cause of the interminable infighting.

Siddiq Koya, a leading criminal lawyer from the big, boisterous sugar province of Ba, took over the leadership of the party after A.D. Patel's death in 1969, and remained as the leader until 1977 when Jai Ram Reddy succeeded him. But Koya returned to party leadership again in 1984, after Reddy resigned from parliament over a dispute with the

Speaker of the House. The mantle of leadership never rested comfortably on Koya's shoulders. Party Secretary Karam Ramrakha, for example, resigned in 1972 over Koya's alleged unconsultative style. Koya's own, surprisingly cordial, relations with Mara immediately after 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 members, Ramrakha and 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 Indo-Fijian community. Stunned by its narrow victory (26 seats out of 52), and unable to reconcile its internal differences about leadership, the NFP fumbled for a solution for four days, at the end of which the governor general, Ratu George Cakobau, 'exercising his deliberate judgement', appointed Ratu Mara prime minister. Certain members of the NFP were accused of betraying their leader by telling the governor general that they would not support Koya for prime minister. Karam Ramrakha, who was suspected by some of talking to Cakobau—an allegation he denied on oath, wrote, 'The brute and undeniable fact is that when Mr Koya went to the governor general to become prime minister, the governor general, and the governor general alone, refused to make him prime minister' (*Fiji Sun*, 24 January 1987). Ramrakha's contention is valid—it was Cakobau who breached the Westminster convention which requires the parliament to resolve the question and not have the governor general decide in advance what the outcome of the parliament's vote of confidence should be.

The April 1977 elections and the events which followed split the NFP into two bitterly opposed groups, which later crystallised into the 'Dove' faction led by Koya, and the 'Flower' faction led by Ramrakha and Narayan. At the September elections, with few policy differences to go on, the two factions turned upon each other with unprecedented bitterness in a campaign remembered in the Indo-Fijian community for the cynical manipulation of cultural and religious symbols and affinities of the 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). Koya lost his Lautoka seat and his position as the leader of the opposition to 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 fruitful cooperation with Mara and his government (1977–79), followed by a period of bitter relations (1980–84) that resulted in an almost total breakdown of communication between the two. The latter's rise in national and NFP politics was meteoric. A New Zealand trained lawyer, he was appointed to the Senate by Koya in 1974. He first stood for election in April 1977 and became NFP leader just 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 virtually impossible in 1977. But unity was achieved on Reddy's terms; many former Doves were, or complained of being, excluded from party affairs and in the selection of candidates 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 genuineness of party unity.

Under Reddy's leadership, the platform of the party was broadened to increase its appeal to non-Indian voters as well as to enable former Indian Alliance members to join the party without losing face. The old ideological foundations of the party, its commitment to common roll, for instance, were relegated into the background or silently discarded as more emphasis was placed on sectarian social and economic issues. 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' (*Fiji Times*, 14 August 1981).

Consistent with this approach, Reddy advanced a new economic platform that seemed to be at variance with the NFP's earlier

proclamations. Under Koya, the NFP had embraced a populist posture though with what seriousness it is difficult to tell. Thus in 1972, Koya spoke of nationalising vital industries, creating a welfare state, providing compulsory and free education, among other things. 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 organisations which indulge in unfair practices’.

Reddy took a different path. In its manifesto for the 1982 general elections, the NFP proclaimed ‘the NFP1-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’. 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 community had about the NFP being a ‘left of the centre’ party. In an effort to win a larger constituency, Reddy cut the NFP’s ties with its past.

A final 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 little success. The first experiment had been the merger of the Fijian National Democratic Party with the then Federation Party, leading to the creation of the National Federation Party. In 1970, the NFP embarked on the ill-fated ‘operation *taukei*’ though, as we have already seen, it was only able to attract a mere 2.4 per cent of Fijian communal votes in the 1972 election, a figure which subsequently—and unbelievably—declined even further. Aware of the need to attract more Fijians to increase the NFP’s appeal as an alternative government, Reddy had told his party as early as 1974 that, without a multiracial base, the NFP was doomed to remain a ‘permanent opposition’. His softening of the NFP’s earlier confrontationist posture was, in part, a device to that end. Not surprisingly, therefore, he formed an electoral coalition with a splinter Fijian party, the Western United Front, in 1982. But for reasons mentioned above even the coalition failed to realise the

goal of broadening the party's ethnic base. The net, perhaps unintended, result of Reddy's pragmatic endeavours was to cut the NFP loose from its traditional ideological moorings and to fashion it in the image of the Alliance.

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 (see Premdas 1980). Embracing emerging Fijian nationalism, the party rejected both multiracialism and equal political coexistence and instead espoused the cause of 'Fiji for Fijians'. Such a platform was not proposed for the first time in 1977. In 1972, Villiame Savu's Fijian Independent Party had espoused similar causes, wanting the Fijians 'alone to decide the destiny of their land'. 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 Indo-Fijians to India, a sentiment that seemingly reflected the feelings of large sections of the Fijian community. At the same time, he also cut loose at the eastern chiefly establishment, especially Ratu Mara, accusing him of promoting the 'dictatorship' of Lau at the expense of other provinces, an allegation vehemently denied by Mara. Butadroka launched the platform of his party in December 1976, demanding Fijian paramountcy.

The interests of the Fijians must be paramount at all times.

The Fijians must always hold the positions of governor general, prime minister, as well as the ministries of Fijian affairs and rural development, lands, education, agriculture, home affairs, commerce and industry and cooperatives.

More opportunities should be given to Fijians to enter business and commerce.

The Fijian administration should be strengthened with government financial backing and support.

A Fijian Institute should be established to teach Fijians business. Indians should be repatriated to India after Fiji gained full independence.

More government development projects should be concentrated in rural areas.

All lands illegally sold should be returned to Fijians (*Fiji Times*, 20 December 1976).

Butadroka's message, delivered in emotional, accusatory tones, attracted mostly rural, illiterate and underprivileged urban Fijian voters. The Alliance's apathy helped the Nationalists to make deep inroads into the traditional Alliance constituency. In the April 1977 elections, Butadroka won the fiercely contested Serua-Namosi seat, obtaining 4,640 (52.1 per cent) of the total Fijian communal votes. Altogether, the FNP took away 20,819 (24.4 per cent) of the Fijian communal votes from the Alliance, causing it to lose six marginal national constituencies to the National Federation Party. Low Fijian voter turnout compounded the Alliance's fate at the polls. Butadroka had made his point: the victory of the NFP showed that the constitution did not protect the paramountcy of Fijian rights, an ideal cherished by many Fijians of all political persuasions. Enraged by the NFP's success and delighted with his own 'victory', Butadroka resorted to making inflammatory racial statements which contravened the Public Order Act and landed him in gaol. His absence from the campaign for the September elections, and the Alliance's concerted attempts to win back Fijian voters chastened by its unexpected loss, led to the Nationalists' defeat and to an overwhelming victory for the Alliance. Butadroka lost his seat, and the overall electoral support for his party declined from 24 per cent to 11 per cent.

Out of parliament from 1977 to 1982, the Nationalists maintained a low profile. The party also shifted its extremist stance somewhat. While keeping its Fiji-for-Fijians stance, the party adopted a less racially slanted position on the eve of the 1982 elections. Instead, the Nationalists now paid more attention to the preservation and enhancement of Fijian interest. The Nationalists now advocated that the constitution of Fiji should be amended to allow Fijians to occupy 90 per cent of the House of Representatives seats; that all Freehold and Crown Schedules A & B lands as well as traditional fishing rights be returned to Fijians; and that Fijian schoolchildren should be provided with free and compulsory education.

These policies, which should have been music to the ears of frustrated, extremist Fijians, elicited little electoral support in the 1982 elections. The FNP obtained only 7.7 per cent of total Fijian communal votes, although Butadroka himself made a strong showing, winning 30 per cent of the votes in Serua-Namosi. The rout of the Nationalists was not surprising. Its own rudimentary organisation was no competition for its

more sophisticated and better-funded rivals. Many of its platforms were regarded correctly as being unrealistic and constitutionally unimplementable. The events surrounding the April 1977 elections, when the FNP helped to bring about NFP victory, cast a long and terrifying cloud over the thinking of those Fijians unprepared for a NFP government. The Alliance's own assiduous attempts to court the Fijian voter of the extremist persuasion cut the ground from under Butadroka's feet. The fact that soon after the elections the Alliance endorsed a former Nationalist candidate for the Suva municipal elections effectively demonstrated the extent to which the party was prepared to suppress its multiracialism to win back its constituency. The 1982 elections showed that the Nationalist platform was widely shared in the Fijian community. Just how widely would become clear five years later.

The Nationalists were joined by another splinter Fijian party, the Western United Front. The WUF, too, was founded on a grievance. 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 had long complained of regional discrimination and step-brotherly treatment. In the 1960s and early 1970s, several attempts were made to re-assert a distinct western identity, but the separatists were contained through traditional reconciliation ceremonies. The WUF was the latest and probably the most ambitious attempt to articulate western grievances in some coherent political fashion. The guiding force behind the formation of the WUF was Ratu Osea Gavidi, 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 Fijians and led to the formation of the Western United Front.

Pine planting began in Fiji in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and by 1979, 28,000 hectares were under pine, mostly in western Viti Levu (see Gregor 1980). To govern the entire pine operation, the government created the Fiji Pine Commission (FPC) in 1976 to 'facilitate and develop an industry based on the growing, harvesting, processing and marketing of pine and other species of trees grown in Fiji' (Fiji Pine Commission Act no 5 of 1976). The pine industry was not the exclusive domain of

the Fiji Pine Commission, however. The other major partner was the land-owning *mataqali*, assisted by the Fiji Forestry Department. The Commission invited proposals from interested companies to harvest mature pine. Four proposals were received: from the M.K. Hunt Foundation, Shell/New Zealand Forest Products, British Petroleum (BP) Southwest Pacific Limited, and the United Marketing Company owned by a convicted US businessman, Paul Sandblom (see Martin 1981). The Commission accepted BP's initial proposals, because they appeared more flexible and promised a rational management of the industry. The landowners, led by Gavidí, leaned to the UMC proposal because it apparently recognised legitimate landowner rights, offered them a greater share of the profits, and allowed participation at all levels of the industry. The Fiji Pine Commission remained unconvinced, and the government declared Sandblom a prohibited immigrant.

The simmering conflict between Ratu Osea Gavidí and the Fiji Pine Commission, and through it the government, erupted in the open as landowners boycotted several of the Commission's pine planting programs. To the western landowners, the Alliance government's action was seen as another unacceptable interference in their right to utilise their resources as they saw fit. The Western landowners preferred, as the NFP-WUP Manifesto spelled out, 'the establishment of a decentralised, socially compatible, technologically appropriate and economically viable processing system for both native and exotic forests and [assisting] direct participation by forested lands in the exploitation of such forest resources'. The government, on the other hand, preferred more centralised control of a resource that has the potential to become a major revenue earner for Fiji.

The pine dispute unearthed subterranean private resentment among western Fijians at the perceived iniquitous treatment at the hands of the eastern chiefly establishment. It served to highlight other grievances such as the paucity of western Fijians in the civil service and other statutory bodies, disparities particularly glaring in view of the overall western contribution to the national economy. The issues were brought into sharper relief during a House debate on the allocation of \$435,868 for the renovation of certain historic sites on the chiefly island of Bau. Tui Nadi, Ratu Napolioni Dawai, attacked the proposal as unjustified, and pointed to the more pressing needs of western Fijians: water supply,

roads, dormitories for school children from outlying islands. Dawai resigned from the Alliance and joined the WUF.

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

- to protect and encourage the unity of western Fijians
- to protect the interests of landowners and defend their rights to develop their resources according to their aspirations
- to seek changes in the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and Rural Development to improve the lives of western Fijians
- to improve educational facilities of western Fijians and provide them opportunities in commercial and industrial enterprises.

Clearly, the WUF had a specific regional focus and a distinct regional constituency. To become effective nationally, it needed to be more broadly based. Cooperation with the Alliance was obviously out; Mara had castigated the party a day after its launch as a 'disruptive' force which preached 'ridiculous political ideologies' (*Fiji Times*, 18 July 1981). An attempt was made to form a progressive front with the FNP but this 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. Gavidi then turned to the NFP in early 1981 because it was 'the most prominent political party opposed to the Alliance'. A NFP–WUF Coalition materialised on 11 January 1982. The exact terms of the arrangement were never publicly stated, but Reddy explained its significant aspects in the short-lived *Coalition Bulletin*.

In this arrangement, each party is to maintain its independent identity and objectives. In other words, there is no submergence of one party into another. It must be remembered that the two parties are totally independent, with interests that each would like to protect. I don't envisage that where parties are independent and are being led by strong leadership with principles that they themselves espouse there is any real danger of anyone becoming subservient. It is a partnership of equals (*Coalition Bulletin* 1982).

The independent interests included such vital and sensitive issues as land and common roll, both of which were shelved. The coalition of an exclusively Fijian splinter party with a predominantly Indo-Fijian party was widely seen as a milestone in Fijian politics. To its supporters, it heralded a new era in multiracial politics; to its opponents, it represented

an expedient political coalition with the sole purpose of dislodging the Alliance from its political perch. There is little doubt that the NFP-WUF coalition was a politically convenient arrangement. WUF and Gavidia needed the extensive political machinery of the NFP to launch themselves on the national scene. The fact that Gavidia had broached cooperation with the FNP before he had approached the NFP was a clear enough indication that he did not necessarily share the NFP's views. Reddy and the NFP appeared to gain from the coalition an apparently swelling pool of dependable Fijian support that had eluded the party since its inception. Yet the coalition also entailed risks for both leaders. For Reddy, coalescing with a regionalist party detracted from his carefully-nurtured though potentially volatile national image as incipient prime minister. For Gavidia, cooperation with the NFP was equally risky, given the extent of ethnic polarisation endemic in Fiji's electoral system, especially during elections. But the risks appeared worth taking in view of the more than even chance of victory at the polls.

The results of the 1982 elections demonstrated the electoral failure both of the WUF as well as the coalition. Gavidia narrowly lost his seat (47.9 per cent of the votes) to the Alliance (50.5 per cent). The other WUF candidate to make a decent showing was Ratu Napolioni Dawai who got 22.8 per cent of the communal votes in the Ba-Nadi constituency. Overall, the WUF received a mere 7 per cent of the total Fijian communal votes. Three factors were responsible for the WUF's poor performance. One was Gavidia's poor campaign strategy that frequently took him away from his constituency, giving the impression that he took his own supporters for granted. Second, coalition with a predominantly Indian-based party produced harmful results in an atmosphere of tense ethnic polarisation. The third factor was the Alliance's concerted attempts to win back the vital Nadroga-Navosa Fijian communal seat. The coalition ended for all practical purposes with the campaign—unsurprisingly, given that it had failed to articulate an alternative vision of Fiji's future that went beyond seeking narrow political advantages over its rival.

The 1982 election was a typical affair, consistent with past trends. In one respect, however, it differed from the past—the allegation of foreign involvement 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 by-elections of 1968. The first disclosures of foreign involvement in the Fiji elections were made by the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *Four Corners* program which highlighted the role of Australian multinationals in Fiji and probed allegations of misuse of Australian aid for political purposes by the ruling Alliance party. In particular, it dwelt on the contents of a privately-commissioned report (by Motibhai and Company) titled 'Report of Consultants to the Prime Minister of Fiji on the Economic and Political Outlook and Options and Strategy and Political Organization', prepared by Australian consultant Alan Carroll and his associates. The Carroll Report recommended strategies for winning the election that included, among others, utilising the existing cultural and religious divisions in the Indian community, buying off the FNP leader Butadroka, and accelerating pending prosecutions against WUF leader Gavidi to take him out of the running. The coalition accused the Alliance of implementing the recommendations as well as using Australian aid money to promote its political fortunes. The Alliance denied the allegations. An angry Mara dubbed the television program as 'an act of sabotage against a sovereign nation' and vowed not to forgive or forget its producers nor those officials of the coalition who were alleged to have colluded with the Australians. But the Alliance's masterstroke was to seize upon and twist the opening lines of the *Four Corners* programme that Fiji's present political leaders were descendants of chiefs 'who clubbed and ate their way to power' and to publicise this 'cannibal quote' and the entire television programme 'as a gross insult to Fijian chiefs and tradition', while expediently shelving the critical questions that were raised.

As the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the various allegations was under way, Mara made a sensational allegation of his own. In an interview with Australian journalist Stuart Inder, 12 days after the Fiji elections, he charged the coalition with colluding with the Soviet Union and receiving from it a sum of one million dollars to unseat him from power because he was the major impediment to Soviet expansion in the South Pacific. Further, Mrs Soonu Kochar, Fiji's Indian High Commissioner, was accused of meddling in Fijian politics, and her retired husband was linked as the go-between for the Soviets. Subsequently, in a letter Mara released to the Fiji media, he identified Siddiq Koya as the

coalition member responsible for making the deal with the Soviets. The two sets of allegations were investigated by the Royal Commission of Inquiry headed by retired New Zealand judge, Sir John White (Government of Fiji 1983). The investigation of Mara's Soviet allegation was frustrated by the Alliance's successful withholding of the crucial evidence on grounds of national security.

The overwhelming feeling within Fiji was (and remained) that the initial allegation of Soviet involvement was baseless and that the Alliance, in fact, had no proof. Some saw it as a ruse to divert attention from the other issues before the Commission. At the end of the protracted hearings, Sir John White produced an innocuous document that absolved all parties to the dispute of any deliberate malpractices. Rosemary Gillespie, the Carroll team member who leaked the Carroll Report and other documents to the ABC and a star witness at the hearings, not inappropriately dubbed the final outcome a 'whitewash', an exercise in futility.

An unfortunate consequence of the Royal Commission hearings was the rekindling of the embers of ethnic tension generated in the campaign, and the hardening of attitudes on both sides of the House. A cycle was complete: the politics of old had once again returned to the fore, poisoning race relations and undermining the possibilities of national dialogue on a host of problems facing Fiji. Five years later, Fiji would discover to its enormous cost just how frayed political relations had become.