

3

Things fall apart

On 7 April 1987, Fiji held its fifth general election since attaining independence. After a long three-month campaign and a week's polling, the newly formed Fiji Labour Party-National Federation Party Coalition won a convincing and historic victory over the long-reigning Alliance party, capturing 28 of the 52 seats in the Fiji parliament. Dr Timoci Bavadra, the new prime minister, assumed power with quiet dignity but unmistakable firmness, and quickly set in motion a government intent on delivering early on its various election pledges. Bitterly disappointed with the unexpected results of the election, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, the Alliance leader, conceded defeat in a terse statement and urged his party to accept the verdict of the ballot box. This surprisingly smooth, textbook transfer of power led Sir Leonard Usher, the doyen of local journalists, to write, 'It had been a long—too long—campaign, and at times some unpleasant elements of bitterness had crept in. These were now set aside. Democracy, clearly, was well and alive in Fiji' (Usher 1986:146). As it turned out, this optimism was premature.

The 1987 election results both affirmed the dominant trends in Fiji's ethnically based electoral politics and heralded the faint beginnings of a new era that promised to break away from it. In the circumstances, it was the promise—as well as the fear—of further divergence from the established patterns of political behaviour that received the most attention. For the first time in Fiji, it was not one of the small but extremely powerful coterie of paramount maritime chiefs but a western Fijian of

middling chiefly rank who was at the helm of national leadership. For the first time, too, the Fijians of Indian descent were able to achieve a significant measure of national political power. The new cabinet, whose members were young, exceptionally well educated and nominally left-leaning, inspired hope of a break from the communally divisive politics of the last 17 years. The promise of change threatened those intent on maintaining the *status quo*; among them were some members of the former Mara administration and the Alliance party. The malcontents formed a militant indigenous force, the ‘Taukei Movement’, which embarked a carefully orchestrated campaign to break the newly elected government. Within a week of the election, Fiji was rocked by a violent and terrifying campaign of arson, sabotage, roadblocks and protest marches, climaxing with the military-led overthrow of the Bavadra government on 14 May. The coup leaders attempted to reinstall the defeated Mara government, but were thwarted by determined but peaceful internal resistance and considerable external pressure. Frustrated by their inability to achieve their immediate goal, and ostracised and rebuffed by the international community, they then struck with a second coup on 25 September, severing Fiji’s links to the British Crown.

The traumatic sequence of events that followed the election contrasted with the long and uninspiring campaign that preceded—and precipitated—it. The 1987 election provided both the text, as well as the pretext, for the coup of 14 May. In this chapter, I focus on certain important aspects of the campaign in order to understand its character as well as the causes of the historic outcome. In particular, I look at the political parties that contested the election, the important campaign issues and strategies, and, finally, the voting patterns that led to the Coalition’s victory. Towards the end, I provide a brief account of the coup and its aftermath, eschewing the task of a more comprehensive coverage because the subject has received extensive treatment in scholarly literature.

Political parties

The 1987 election was contested by four political parties or coalitions, two of which were born on the eve of the campaign. The Alliance party, led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, had been continuously in power in Fiji

from 1966 to 1987, except for a brief four days in April 1977. Its long reign in office was the result of many factors, including, strong leadership, effective use of political power and patronage, solid support by its traditional constituency, the indigenous Fijians, and, not least, the absence of a credible alternative among the frequently warring opposition parties. In 1987 the Alliance appeared to be the political party best placed financially to last the distance in a long campaign. To further improve its prospects, the Alliance fielded a safe team, dropping four cabinet members and seven backbenchers who were considered to be liabilities and thus potential targets for political point-scoring. Some of the discarded members formed their own parties or contested the election as independents.

The Fijian Association constituted the backbone of the party, consistently capturing over 80 per cent of the Fijian communal votes. Chastised by the temporary loss of power in April 1977, brought about by a split in the Fijian communal vote, the Fijian Association began to expand and consolidate its base and, turning a blind eye to the party's public proclamations on multiracialism, welcomed to its ranks members of nationalist Fijian parties. Thus in 1987, the Alliance gave a blue-ribbon Fijian communal seat to Taniela Veitata, a Fijian Nationalist Party candidate in 1977, while another former FNP strategist was recruited to help diffuse the impact of Fijian splinter parties in marginal national constituencies. Fijian unity above all else, and the promotion of ethnic Fijian interests, became the over-riding goal of the Fijian Association and the Alliance party in the 1987 campaign.

The General Electors Association (GEA), composed of Europeans, part-Europeans, Chinese, and others of mixed descent, was the smallest, though financially perhaps the strongest, of the three Alliance branches. Ever since the advent of party politics in Fiji in the early 1960s, the GEA had thrown its weight solidly behind the Alliance. History, race, economic interest and a keen sense of power all helped to forge this politically expedient bond of trust. But in 1987, for the first time, a rift appeared in the GEA ranks, with the younger as well as the working class members of the part-European community joining the Labour party. Others deserted the Alliance complaining of stepchild-like treatment. The shift was small but significant, and it helped the Coalition in crucial marginal constituencies, such as Suva.

Of the Alliance's three constituent bodies, the Indian Alliance was the weakest spoke in the wheel. Its credibility in the Indo-Fijian community, always low, was seriously compromised by the defection of many of its disillusioned former leaders to the rival NFP. Unhappy with its performance and prestige, Ratu Mara ignored the Indian Alliance establishment altogether and recruited Indo-Fijian professionals and political opportunists personally loyal to and dependent on him to boost the party's prospects in that community. In 1987, he bagged what he thought was the prize catch of Irene Jai Narayan, who was not only a skillful politician—she had held her Suva Indian communal seat continuously since 1966—but was also a former president of the rival National Federation Party and the deputy leader of the opposition. Ousted from the NFP after an internal power struggle in 1985, she had briefly flirted with Labour, then joined the Alliance in November 1986. Political survival rather than a genuine conversion to Alliance philosophy appeared to be the main reason for her switch, as Mrs Narayan justified her action thus, 'Let's face it, whether one likes it or not, the Alliance will remain in power for a long time. It is difficult for an independent member to do much' (*Fiji Times*, 8 November 1986).

Mara selected Mrs Narayan for the crucial Suva national seat. This was a critical tactical mistake which was to cost the Alliance dearly, as the Alliance leader had badly underestimated the Indo-Fijian electorate's unwillingness to forgive Narayan's defection to a party that she had so vehemently criticised all her political life. And Narayan's own unexpectedly virulent attack on her former party and her erstwhile colleagues, mounted with the fanaticism of the twice converted, damaged her prospects further. As one voter told me, 'If Mrs Narayan had fallen from a mountain top, I would have caught her in my lap. But what do you do when she has fallen in your esteem?' The response of the Indian Alliance leadership, or what was left of it, to being ignored and bypassed was a quiet withdrawal of its support for the party and a silent move to the Coalition camp. In the end, the Alliance was left banking on the charisma of a single candidate for a crucial seat, while the Coalition remorselessly exploited Narayan's formerly vitriolic attacks against the Alliance to great effect. But these were errors that surfaced only at a later stage in the campaign. For much of the time the Alliance was confident of a victory and dismissive of its opponents.

Unlike the Alliance party, the Coalition was launched on the eve of the election. It was a coalition of two parties drawn together into an expedient, and initially reluctant, political union for the larger purpose of defeating the Alliance. The older partner in the Coalition was the mainly Indo-Fijian-supported National Federation party. We have already discussed its fluctuating fortunes in the previous chapter. On the eve of the 1987 elections, the National Federation Party's unity was fragile, and its public esteem low. Several of its sitting parliamentarians had switched to the FLP, as had many longtime party loyalists, disheartened by years of damaging, internecine fights at the top. Coalition with another party was the only alternative to avoid almost certain political demise.

That prospect was provided by the emergence of the Fiji Labour Party, whose rhetorically non-ethnic platform, multiethnic composition and vehement opposition to the ruling Alliance made it an attractive partner. The trade union-backed Labour party was launched in July 1985, primarily in response to the questionable tactics used by the government to address the economic problems that plagued Fiji. One such tactic was the wage freeze imposed in 1984, to boost an economy severely damaged by hurricanes, droughts, rising foreign debts and burgeoning civil service salary bills. The government wanted to use savings from the wage freeze—to the tune of F\$36 million—to expand the primary sector and assist the employment-generating business sector (see Narsey 1985). The unions criticised the freeze as unnecessary and oppressive, especially to lower income groups, and, moreover, as a breach of the spirit of the Tripartite Forum.¹

Anger about the government's economic strategies was further fuelled by the bitter and prolonged conflict between the Ministry of Education and the teachers' unions. The Volunteer Service Scheme, devised by the government to give fresh graduate teachers employment on a cost-share basis, incurred the wrath of graduating teachers, who accused the government—rightly as the courts subsequently agreed—of renegeing on the earlier promise of regular employment. The government's policy of large-scale arbitrary transfer of teachers, part of a wider policy to integrate Fiji's communally oriented schools, smacked of an arrogant and confrontational attitude. The Education Minister, Dr Ahmed Ali, was accused by both Indo-Fijian and Fijian teachers of 'adopting an anti-teacher stance designed to undermine the professional status of

teachers in the country'. Indeed, Ali's policies unwittingly provided the foundation for a common front between the Indian-based Fiji Teachers' Union and the exclusively *tankei* (indigenous) Fijian Teachers' Association, both of which protested against the government's educational policies (*Fiji Times*, 8 November 1986).

Coming at a difficult economic time, and carried out in stark contrast to the Mara administration's earlier record of consultation and dialogue, these actions politicised the traditionally apolitical trade union movement, which in turn led to the launching of the Fiji Labour party in July 1985. New on the scene, brimming with enthusiasm and armed with progressive social and economic policies contained under the general rubric of 'democratic socialism', the FLP promised, among other things, public ownership of vital industries, minimum wage legislation for the manufacturing sector, and increased local participation in such vital industries as tourism.² Not surprisingly, the party attracted significant local attention. Just four months after being launched, Labour won the Suva City municipal elections and made a strong showing in the North Central Indian national constituency by-elections. But for all the euphoria and early unexpected success, the FLP remained primarily an urban-based party, led by white-collar trade unionists. To become a national force strong enough to contend for government, the party had to broaden its base.

Initially, however, the FLP scorned the idea of a coalition. As party secretary Krishna Datt claimed in July 1986, '[bo]th the Alliance and the NFP work within the framework of capitalism and the FLP cannot share their ideologies' (*Fiji Times*, 20 July 1986). Yet a few months later, chastened by the hard realities of Fiji politics and realising the folly of confronting the Alliance alone, the FLP changed its tune and initiated discussions with the NFP, which it had recently criticised as being a party of 'a handful of businessmen and lawyers'. By October the two parties had held seven private meetings, and by December a coalition had been arranged. The terms of the arrangement were never made public, though several features later became clear. One was a seat-sharing formula, according to which the NFP agreed to give the FLP six of its 12 blue-ribbon Indian communal seats as well as half of the winnable Indian and Fijian national seats.

This formula enabled the Labour to project itself into the hitherto inaccessible rural areas, while the NFP was spared the almost certain

humiliation of losing its traditional iron-clad grip on the communal seats to Labour's Indo-Fijian candidates. Another notable feature was the acceptance by the predominantly Indo-Fijian-based NFP of an ethnic Fijian, from another party, as the leader of the coalition. This was both a tacit acknowledgement of weakness by the NFP as well as a concession to the non-ethnic philosophy of the Coalition. It also represented a significant shift in Indo-Fijian political opinion, which only a decade earlier had rejected a Fijian leader for the party (Ratu Julian Toganivalu). But the reality of ethnic politics in Fiji was that an Indo-Fijian prime minister would not be acceptable to the majority of the *taukei*, and, for the NFP to achieve any measure of political power, a coalition with another party with a Fijian leader, and a political philosophy broadly compatible to its own, was the only route to victory.

The third outcome of the coalition arrangement was the formulation of a compromise manifesto that whittled down some of the FLP's radical-sounding economic policies, such as encouraging worker participation in the management of industry and the nationalisation of selected industries, and that removed from the electoral arena such perennially contentious issues as land tenure and education. Finally, both parties agreed to present a combined, fresh slate of candidates. A start was made by endorsing only five of the 22 sitting Opposition parliamentarians.

The Labour Coalition, however, was not the only coalition to contest the 1987 elections. There was another, consisting of a faction of the NFP and the Western United Front, the NFP's 1982 election partner. The NFP-WUF coalition was the handiwork of Shardha Nand, the deposed secretary of the NFP, and other politicians discarded by the Labour Coalition's candidate selection committee, including Siddiq Koya. They massaged their personal grievances into a political cause, presenting themselves as champions of Indo-Fijian rights placed in danger by having a Fijian (Dr Bavadra) as the leader of the mainly Indo-Fijian-supported opposition party. Taking the logic of ethnic politics to its extreme conclusion, they argued that only an Indo-Fijian could be trusted to lead the Indo-Fijian community. Among other things, this faction of the NFP demanded a separate Ministry for Indian Affairs along the lines of its Fijian counterpart, 99-year leases on Crown lands, and the allocation of

jobs in the public sector according to the percentage of seats occupied by each ethnic group in Fiji's parliament, that is, 42 per cent each for the Fijians and the Indians and the remaining 16 per cent for general electors.³

The Western United Front was a reluctant and silent partner in the coalition. Its leader, Ratu Osea Gavidi, the charismatic campaigner of 1982, was quiet and generally inaccessible, spending more time battling his irate creditors in court than fighting political opponents in elections. Since 1982 the WUF itself had become somewhat of a spent force. The policies for harvesting pine, the dispute about which had led to the formation of the party, was now a non-issue, and many western Fijians outside of the Nadroga/Navosa region had been enticed back into the Alliance fold. Further, the WUF had lost credibility with many NFP leaders because of its withdrawal from the royal commission investigating allegations suggesting that Soviet money was used by the original NFP–WUF coalition in the bid to defeat the Alliance in the 1982 election. The NFP–WUF coalition campaign began promisingly, but its prospects vanished when Koya and other candidates withdrew, ostensibly to avoid being tainted with the spoiler's role. In the end, most of the Indo-Fijian members of the coalition, widely perceived as grasping opportunists, suffered defeat, losing their deposits by getting less than 10 per cent of the total votes cast in their constituency. Gavidi lost (42 per cent of the votes) to his old Alliance rival, Apenisa Kuruisaqila (53.5 per cent).

Of all the political parties, the Fijian Nationalist Party maintained the lowest profile in the 1987 campaign. The party maintained its stridently anti-Indian stance while at the same time advocating a platform designed to promote Fijian interests. It proposed the 'thinning out' of Fiji Indians through an active policy encouraging emigration, to be funded by the British government which had introduced Indians into Fiji in the first place. The FNP made an issue of the paucity of Fijians in commercial and industrial sectors, which it saw as a direct result of a conspiracy by the Indo-Fijian and European business classes. It drew attention to the disparity between the numbers of Fijians and Indo-Fijians employed in the public sector, blamed the Alliance for the problem, and demanded that this disparity be redressed. Finally, and unsurprisingly, it demanded an exclusively *tauveki* parliament through revision of the 1970 Constitution; absolute Fijian control of the political process was seen as a precondition for Fijian

economic and social progress. In the end, however, while there was personal support and sympathy for Butadroka, who won 37.9 per cent of the votes—an increase of 7.3 per cent over the 1982 figure—the FNP failed to recapture old ground, though its candidates drew sufficient Fijian support in marginal national seats to help the Coalition defeat the Alliance.

The campaign

The campaign for the general election began early in the year, partly in anticipation of a February poll. It was long and unremarkable, lacking, for instance, the dramatic tension of the last stages of the 1982 campaign when the contents of the so-called Carroll Report were revealed in an Australian television program, or the intense and ultimately self-destructive struggle between the competing factions of the NFP in the September 1977 elections. But the campaign had its own unique features that helped to define its character. Learning from past experience, both the Alliance and the Coalition dispensed with the problematic public spectacle of touring the country to select candidates from a list prepared by constituency committees. Instead, each party appointed a small committee that made the selection, and whose decision was final and irrevocable. This swift, if somewhat heavy-handed, action gave them more time to focus on each other instead of having to contend with internal selection squabbles. It also produced an avalanche of defections as the frustrated aspirants switched parties. In the end, however, most of the defectors suffered ignominious defeat at the polls.

Another significant difference between the 1987 election and previous ones was that, for the first time since the advent of elections in Fiji, the leaders of both the ruling and leading opposition parties were ethnic Fijians. This fact diluted—though never completely eliminated—the exploitation of racial fear during the campaign. However, the divisive race issue was supplanted by other emotional distinctions, such as regionalism and class. Many Fijians saw in the election a contest between commoner Fijians from the west led by Dr Bavadra, and the traditional chiefly élite and eastern Fijians led by Ratu Mara.

As the campaign progressed, the strategies of the two rival parties revealed themselves. Confident of victory, the Alliance adopted a

dismissive attitude toward the opposition. Ratu Mara set the tone in November 1986 when, referring to the Labour politicians, he asked: 'What have the Johnnys-come-lately done in the promotion of national unity?' (*Fiji Times*, 28 November 1986). He returned to this theme time and again throughout the campaign. Dr Bavadra became the target of a sneering newspaper campaign. In a typical advertisement the Alliance said: 'Bavadra has never been in parliament. He has no EXPERIENCE. He has no INFLUENCE. The Council of Chiefs do [sic] NOT listen to him. The international scene where we sell our sugar has NEVER heard of him. He cannot get renewal of leases for farmers' (*Fiji Times*, 15 March 1987). In the opening Alliance campaign address over Radio Fiji, Mosese Qionibaravi, the deputy prime minister, called Bavadra an 'unqualified unknown'. The Coalition was often portrayed as weak, vacillating and not to be trusted. One typical campaign advertisement ran: 'The opposition factions are fragmented and quarrelling among themselves. Their policies are confused and shift constantly as one group or would-be leader gains ascendancy. Principles are proclaimed as fundamental and are then dropped when pressures are applied by vested interests, or for political expediency'. The Alliance on the other hand presented itself as the very model of stability: 'united in purpose, strong and fully accepted leadership, clear and consistent policies, and a political philosophy with values that have been proved by experience'.⁴

Other important features of the Alliance campaign strategy were to appeal for Fijian ethnic solidarity and to instill fear among the *tauveki* about the consequences of a Coalition victory. The unmistakable Alliance message was that only an Alliance government headed by paramount chiefs could guarantee the security of Fijian interests. Once again, Ratu Mara led the Alliance charge. 'Fijians have the political leadership despite being outnumbered in this country', he said, and 'if they failed to unite that leadership would slip away from them' (*Fiji Times*, 24 September 1986). And Mara accused the Coalition of trying to undermine Fijian leadership by taking up Fijian causes with the intention of discrediting the Alliance, such as the Nasomo land dispute in Vatukauloa, the plight of the cocoa growers in Vanua Levu, and competing claims of ownership of Yanuca island in which his own wife was involved. Mara's racial appeal became so blatant that he was taken to task in a *Fiji Sun* editorial, the

only political leader to be criticised in this way throughout the entire campaign.

In past elections, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara called for political parties not to indulge in politics of fear, and not to fight the election on racial lines. But now the Prime Minister himself has begun a racially oriented campaign. His call for the Fijians to unite to retain political leadership is unwarranted. If every individual race began campaigning on these lines, the country would be in trouble (*Fiji Sun*, 24 September 1986).

Fear was an important aspect of the Alliance campaign strategy, fear not only of the *tankeis* losing control over their land but also of being forced to embrace an alien ideology. The Alliance warned the Fijian electorate, particularly those residing in rural areas outside the purview of modern influences, about the evils of democratic socialism—the Coalition’s creed borrowed from the Anglo-Australasian tradition. It was a system, the Alliance claimed, ‘in which LAND, FACTORIES, MINES, SHOPS, etc. are ALL OWNED by the STATE and the COMMUNITY. This is opposed to the present system in Fiji where ownership of Fijian land rests exclusively with Fijian *mataqali*, and businesses belong to individuals or shareholders in a public company’. The fact that some of the trade union leaders had visited Moscow (as indeed had some government ministers) was presented as indisputable proof of the Coalition’s sinister designs.

In contrast to the Alliance, the Coalition entered the campaign as the distinct underdog. It was new and inexperienced, underfunded and comparatively disorganised, unable to match its rival in the media war. Its candidates, therefore, ran their largely self-financed campaigns in pocket meetings in their own constituencies. But the Coalition message was clear: it charged the Mara administration with abuse of power and reminded the electorate of the mounting economic difficulties for lower-income families. Bavadra, in his concluding campaign speech, said, ‘Wage and salary earners remember the wage and job freeze; farmers remember their extreme hardships and insecurities; rural dwellers remember the high prices; parents remember the increased bus fares; squatters remember physical removal and neglect; teachers remember Dr Ahmed Ali’s reign of terror in the Ministry of Education; students remember the pain of their hunger strike; the *tankei* remember that most of Fijian development

money goes to a few provinces'.⁵ The Coalition, for its part, promised a new direction and a clean and compassionate government. Its election theme, 'time for a change', caught the mood of the electorate as the campaign concluded. It was, by all accounts, a remarkable transformation, brought about as much by the Coalition's own effort as by the voters' deepening disenchantment with the Alliance's negative campaigning.

Leadership

Leadership was an important issue in the campaign. The Alliance projected an image of unity, purpose and experience. The Coalition, on the other hand, was portrayed as a bunch of professional critics whose view of the real world was 'so flawed that it would not pass as seconds'. Ratu Mara was once again the party's trump card, and he vowed to fight to the end: 'I have not yet finished the job I started and until I can ensure that unshakeable foundations have been firmly laid and cornerstones are set in place, I will not yield to the vaulting ambitions of a power crazy gang of amateurs, none of whom has run anything, not even a bingo party'.⁶ He assured the nation that 'as long as the people of this blessed land need me, I will answer their call. I will keep the faith. Fear not, Ratu Mara will stay' (Final election broadcast). The future of Fiji and the Alliance party were inextricably linked, it was suggested; one could not exist without the other. Without his and his party's leadership, Mara said, Fiji would go down the path of 'rack and ruin'; it would become another of those countries 'torn apart by racial strife and drowning in debt, where basic freedoms are curtailed, universities closed down, the media throttled and dissenters put into jail and camps'.

Ratu Mara's long incumbency presented a real challenge for Dr Bavadra; unlike Mara, Bavadra was a newcomer to national politics, and virtually unknown outside Fiji. By profession a medical doctor, Bavadra had held a number of senior positions in the civil service before retiring in 1985 to head the newly formed Fiji Labour Party. Bavadra came from a chiefly background, though he was not himself a paramount chief. He was a sportsman, and had attended the Queen Victoria School, but his credentials with the Fijian establishment were tenuous and suspect.⁷ His cause was not helped by the Alliance's concerted effort to paint him as a

tool of Indo-Fijian politicians and therefore an untrustworthy guardian of Fijian interests. Thus Bavadra was forced frequently to defend his own 'Fijian-ness' as well as his party's platform.

By the end of the campaign, however, Bavadra had managed to turn public opinion in his favour. His unassuming character and his common touch, accessibility and openness, contrasted with Ratu Mara's characteristic aloofness, and projected an image of a compassionate man who could be trusted. His style of leadership received praise from his colleagues. Commenting on Bavadra's 'first among equals' approach to leadership, Satendra Nandan wrote: 'It is a type of leadership which a democracy requires in the modern world, by the command of the people rather than by an accident of birth. It is a leadership which encourages growth in a team, rather than the banyan tree leadership under which everything else dies for lack of light. It is the leadership by a man who is known nationally as a leader, not identified with one particular province of a country; by a man chosen by a genuinely multiracial party, a leader who is easily approachable, not held in awe but in affection; a leadership which sincerely believes in collective responsibility for collective decision for the collective good' (*Fiji Times*, 24 March 1987). Never before in Fiji had the contrast between two competing styles of leadership been presented so starkly to the public.

Conduct of government

The Alliance campaigned on its record of experience and stability, while the Coalition drew support by launching a concerted attack against it. 'We have all become accustomed to the arrogance of power, abuse of and insolence of office', said Dr Bavadra (*Fiji Times*, 24 February 1987). The Alliance had 'reneged on the fundamental principles of democratic responsibility and accountability. It pretends to be democratic but in fact puts all decisions in the hands of a very few. This brand of democracy aids a few at the expense of the vast majority'. This theme was pursued throughout the campaign. The Coalition accused the Alliance of practising the politics of racial separation, similar in effect if not in name to the apartheid regime of South Africa. The difference between the two was 'one of degree, not one of substance'. In rebuttal, the Alliance affirmed

its commitment to opposing ‘any suggestion of constitutional change that would weaken or destroy the principle of guaranteed on of Fiji’s major racial groups in the House of Representatives’ (Alliance Party Manifesto 1987:2).

To check what it saw as abuse of power, the Coalition proposed an anti-corruption bill, a code of conduct for parliamentarians, and the abolition of legislation that allowed secrecy in government, specifically the Official Secrets Act. For the most part, The Alliance chose to dismiss the issues raised by the Coalition. As Mara declared, ‘Allow me simply to say that there is no country in the world today in which similar concerns do not emblazon the headlines. The fact is that these problems are a by-product of modernisation. Fiji neither has a monopoly on these problems nor are they extensive and corrosive here’ (Alliance Party Political Broadcast). His point was valid, of course, but the Alliance’s acceptance of these issues as political reality contrasted sharply with the Coalition’s promise to tackle these problems with vigour. The above attitude seemed to symbolise the Alliance’s apathy to many in the electorate and certainly hurt the Alliance in the urban and peri-urban areas where violence and crime had increased dramatically in the previous five years.

The economy

The economy was another important campaign issue. Predictably, the Alliance trumpeted its record: inflation remained around 2 per cent, the balance of payment figures were sound, with foreign reserves at record levels, and the country was assured of guaranteed prices for its basic export item, sugar, through long-term international agreements. The Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to the promotion of individual enterprise within a capitalist framework. In short, the Alliance promised ‘business as usual’ along an assured and well-trodden path.

But the Alliance’s optimism about the state of the economy was based on shaky foundations. A number of experts pointed out that the Fijian economy was in serious trouble from over-planning and over-reliance on the public sector to generate employment and investment. The Coalition criticised the Alliance’s management of the economy, but in general its economic strategy and philosophy didn’t differ substantially

from their opponent's. The Coalition went to great lengths to assure the business community that it was not anti-business. Its election manifesto stated that 'employment creation through an expanding private sector will form a major thrust of our economic policies'. To generate private-sector growth, the Coalition promised to facilitate 'easy access to long-term loan finances at low interest rates'. And in his closing campaign address, Bavadra left no doubt of his support for the private sector: 'I reaffirm the Coalition's recognition and acceptance of the vital role of the private sector in the development of the nation. There is no threat. The private sector must remain. It will remain'.⁸ This was a politically sensible stance that prevented the otherwise almost certain large-scale defection of the Indian business community to the Alliance fold. Their support in the marginal Suva seat proved crucial for the Coalition.

While the two parties agreed on broad issues of economic philosophy, they differed on both the performance as well as the management of the economy. The Coalition made an issue of unequal regional development in Fiji, pointing out that certain areas had been developed at the expense of others. A campaign attack alleged that Lau, Ratu Mara's own province, had received a disproportionate share of development aid, scholarships and hurricane relief money (*Fiji Sun*, 30 March 1987). Mara denied the charge of favouring Lau, but statistics confirmed the Coalition allegations. For example, between 1984 and 1986, Lau, one of the smallest of the Fijian provinces, received F\$528,099.05 in scholarships, 21 per cent of all the money allocated for Fijian scholarships. On the other hand, much larger provinces received far less: Ba, F\$156,085.25 (6.2 per cent); Tailevu, F\$364,244.44 (14.5 per cent); and Rewa, F\$221,638.93 (8.3 per cent).⁹ At the First Annual Convention of the Fiji Labour Party, Bavadra said 'it is important to remind ourselves that the government resources poured into Lakeba are derived from wealth produced by others elsewhere in the country. It is time that the government stopped viewing the rest of Fiji as serving the interest of a few centres in the east. The people of Lakeba are entitled to a share in the national interest, but just a share. It is time we had a government that is more truly national in outlook' (Bavadra 1986:n.p.).

The Coalition also highlighted the plight of the disadvantaged sectors of Fiji society that had missed out on the Alliance's 'economic parade'—the grossly underpaid garment factory workers, squatters and other poor

families. Indeed, the Coalition alleged collusion between big business and the Alliance government in keeping wages down, and made the still unrefuted charge that Indian garment manufacturers had contributed about F\$51,000 to the Alliance campaign fund to prevent the legislation of a minimum-wage policy for the industry. Pointing to the Alliance's record of high foreign reserves, Bavadra asked, 'But what use is that when there is so much unemployment? What use is that if people can't afford bus fares? What use is that if business confidence is lacking?' (Bavadra 1986). Bavadra's logic appealed to those who felt marginalised and left out of the economic picture portrayed by the Alliance.

Another difference between the Alliance's and the Coalition's economic policies was the latter's emphasis on the need to promote greater local participation in Fiji's economic development. This was in direct response to the increasing feeling that the Mara government had become less concerned over the years to the plight of local entrepreneurs and to local sensitivities. The difference between the two parties was aptly captured in their respective approaches to the promotion of the tourist industry. Both parties supported the promotion of tourism in Fiji, but the Coalition went further. It proposed to develop hotel-linked farms owned by neighbouring villages, to facilitate greater equity in the participation of local people in the hotel and allied transport industries, and to provide special incentive allowances to those reinvesting tourist dollars in Fiji. The Coalition presented itself as a friend to local business and local entrepreneurs, helping it to allay their fears and win their much-needed financial support. The Alliance, in contrast, appeared to be a part of and for big business.

Taukei affairs and national development

The Alliance and the Coalition differed sharply in their policies and visions for the nation and for the *taukei*. Both parties accepted the provisions of the constitution that entrenched certain vested ethnic political interests. Not surprisingly, however, while the Alliance championed its long-held view that 'race is a fact of life' and pledged not to disturb the *status quo*, the Coalition was committed to non-racialism. It pressed for a common, unifying national name and identity to forge a

genuine multiracial nation out of its component ethnic parts. The Alliance, on the other hand, rejected the notion of a common designation for all Fiji citizens, arguing that it would pose a serious threat to specific *tauvei* rights, particularly land. The Alliance similarly rejected out of hand the Coalition's proposal to reform the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) to make it more efficient and responsive to both landowners' needs and tenants' concerns. As Bavadra noted in July 1986, 'my concern is that the NLTB has become too much the tool of certain vested interests in this country and that all too often steps taken by the NLTB are not in the best interests of the majority of the landowners themselves'.¹⁰ To improve the situation, the Coalition proposed to establish a National Lands and Resources Council, composed of tenants' and landowners' representatives, that would oversee the NLTB and work to provide a fair return to the owners as well as ensure greater security of tenure to the tenant community. But the Coalition made it clear that it would not 'attempt to change the existing land laws without the full consultation and approval of the Great Council of Chiefs' (Bavadra 'Closing election address'). The Alliance opposed any reform to the NLTB whatsoever, and Mara called the FLP's thinking on the subject extremely dangerous: 'Fijians should be wary of it because it could lead to the slipping away of native land' (*Fiji Times*, 17 August 1986). Precisely how that was possible when Fijian land rights were deeply entrenched in the Constitution the Alliance party left unexplained, but the effect of the Alliance's strong public opposition was to plant fears in *tauvei* minds about the possible loss of their cherished rights under a Bavadra government.

On Fijian leadership and politics, the Alliance position differed markedly to the Coalition's. The Alliance preached the need to maintain Fijian ethnic unity under chiefly leadership. 'The chiefs represent the people, the land and the custom. Without a chief there is no Fijian society', said Senator Inoke Tabua, a close Mara associate (*Fiji Times*, 17 August 1986). But in recent years, both the role of the chiefs, as well as the formerly cohesive nature of traditional Fijian society, were being threatened by modern influences—education, urbanisation and mass media. To stem the tide, and to reinforce chiefly authority, the Mara administration attempted to reintroduce selected aspects of the old Fijian Administration. A specially

commissioned report, prepared by Pacific Islands Development Program of the Honolulu-based EastWest Center, under the leadership of ex-Fiji colonial official Rodney Cole, provided the blueprint for reforms in the system (Cole et al. 1984).¹¹ Among its specific recommendations were the retention of many hitherto discarded customary laws and the official recognition of village leaders. These recommendations, formally implemented in March 1987, would, so the administration hoped, buttress chiefly authority and protect the traditional structure of Fijian society by insulating it from the corrosive influences in the larger society. Withdrawal into the shell of communal isolation rather than the initiation of a national dialogue was the Alliance's response to a host of serious social and economic problems facing the *tauveki*. This approach received wide support across many rural areas and in the islands where the *tauveki* were practicing subsistence agriculture and had minimal contact with other ethnic groups, but it had little relevance and meaning in urban areas where individual struggle for existence took precedence over communal solidarity.

The Coalition's markedly different line on Fijian leadership drew a clear line between modern political and traditional roles for Fijian chiefs. The Coalition promised to educate the *tauveki* on their constitutional rights as opposed to their traditional and customary obligations. As Bavadra said, 'so long as the Fiji constitution specifically guarantees individual political freedoms and associations, no individual irrespective of his colour, creed or sex is obligated to be subservient to a master, whether it be a chief or a political party, other than what his conscience dictates'.¹²

Neither did the FLP support further insulation of Fijian society from the mainstream of Fiji society, as the Alliance promised to do. Bavadra told a meeting in Suva, 'by restricting the Fijian people to their communal lifestyle in the face of a rapidly developing cash economy, the average Fijian has become more and more economically backward. This is particularly invidious when the leaders themselves have amassed huge personal wealth by making use of their traditional and political powers' (*Fiji Times*, 17 November 1986). Needless to say, this attitude presented a direct and unprecedented threat to the chiefs who had acquired wealth and influence by juxtaposing their modern political and traditional roles. They naturally reacted with unremarkable indignation, and predicted a dire future for the *tauveki* under a Coalition government.

Foreign policy

Foreign policy was not a significant campaign issue in Fiji but received considerable attention externally. A large part of the reason for outside concern was the widely, if inaccurately, held view that the Coalition consisted of leftist radicals bent on wrecking Fiji's traditionally pro-Western policies. In fact, the Coalition's foreign policies were almost identical to those of the NFP–WUF coalition's 1982 platform. In 1982, the NFP–WUF had promised to 'maintain an active policy of nonalignment'; to 'keep the Pacific region free of big power rivalries, and in cooperation with countries in the region, oppose all forms of nuclear testing or nuclear waste disposal in the Pacific'; and to 'support, by all peaceful means, the struggle of peoples of remaining colonies in the Pacific for independence and self government'. The Coalition promised to pursue these same policies, with one curious exception. Whereas the 1982 coalition had sought to 'establish and strengthen Fiji's relationship with all nations without prejudice to their political ideologies', the 1987 Coalition said it would not allow the Soviet Union to open an embassy in Fiji. The 1982 coalition, it appears, was even more 'left-leaning' than its 1987 counterpart, though, of course, its views had not received as much scrutiny or publicity.

For its part, the Alliance, too, committed itself to a nonaligned policy for Fiji, a nuclear-free Pacific and independence for New Caledonia. But it added, significantly, that it would pursue its policies 'bearing in mind that it [Fiji] is a small nation and needs friends for its security'. One friend that the government courted assiduously, and with promising result, was the United States, which had begun to view Fiji as the key player in regional politics. Fiji's strategic importance to the United States was enhanced by New Zealand's firm antinuclear stance, and the consequent problems with the ANZUS alliance. In the final analysis, however, as on many other issues, the difference between the Coalition and the Alliance on important matters of foreign policy was more one of degree than of substance. Once in government, the Coalition was intent on pursuing a prudent and moderate foreign policy course, seeing the need to consolidate its power within Fiji as its most important challenge.¹³

As the campaign ended, the two parties painted contrasting visions of Fiji under their respective rules. Dr Bavadra's Fiji would be committed to

social justice and economic equality. The Alliance promised to keep Fiji on its accustomed path, firmly ensconced within a capitalist framework; without the Alliance, the electorate was told, Fiji had no democratic future. In his last election message to the nation Mara said, 'I firmly believe that these elections will be crucial to the future of our homeland. Let there be no doubt in your mind: Fiji is not so much at a turning point, as it is at the crossroads. If we take the wrong direction, we will finish up in blind alleys, from which there is no return and no way out'.

Voting

Given the communal electoral system, it is not surprising that voting follows an ethnic pattern. As Table 3.1 shows, Fijians always voted overwhelmingly for the Fijian-dominated Alliance and the Indians have rallied behind the NFP. The general electors were consistent in their support for the Alliance, 90 per cent in 1982 and 85 per cent in 1987. Political success in Fiji was thus contingent on maintaining solidarity in one's own ethnic community while actively promoting disunity among the opposition's. The Alliance played the game with much skill, preserving Fijian unity while capitalising on dormant factionalism and disunity in the Indian community. The NFP, as the figures show, has not encountered much success in splitting the Fijian communal vote in its favour.

The 1987 election confirmed the historic trend of predominantly ethnic patterns of voting, but the figures also belie the emergence of some new trends. Although Indo-Fijian support for the Alliance remained constant around 15 per cent, that support was not as broadly based as it had been in the past. In recent years, the Indo-Fijian business class and a significant section of the Muslim community constituted the base of the Indian Alliance; the party's support among the South Indian community, or among the reformist Arya Samaj religious group, important in the past, declined significantly in 1987. And while it remained true that the majority of Fijians supported the Alliance, it was also significant that 21.8 per cent voted for other parties and independents, thus indicating that among many Fijians the Alliance was not regarded as the sole representative voice of the Fijian community. On the other hand, the Coalition was able to make significant inroads into the Fijian constituency, enough to cause the Alliance's defeat in marginal seats.

An important feature of the 1987 election was a record-low voter turnout, the lowest since independence. Indo-Fijian turnout declined from 85 per cent in 1982 to 69 per cent in 1987, while in the same period the Fijian turnout dropped from 85 per cent to 70 per cent. This decline affected the outcome in the marginal constituencies. The reasons for the drop are not clear, though several plausible explanations exist. One, undoubtedly, was the confusion caused by the omission of names from the hastily prepared and improperly checked electoral rolls; names of voters were inadvertently transferred from one polling station to another, thereby causing unsuspecting voters to miss the deadline for casting their votes at a specified time and place. Another reason could have been the widespread feeling that the election was a foregone conclusion in the Alliance's favour, thus causing some supporters to stay away. Among some Fijians, especially in urban areas, absence from the polling booth was a protest against the Alliance. The Alliance suffered from a decline in Fijian voter turnout in all except four of its twelve communal constituencies, the largest decline being in areas where it was already particularly vulnerable. In Lomaiviti/Muanikau the Fijian turnout dropped by 23 per cent, in Rewa/Serua/Namosi by 17 per cent, in

Table 3.1 Voting patterns in Fiji, 1972–87 (per cent)

Party	1972 (April)	1977 (September)	1977	1982	1987
Fijian communal vote					
Alliance (per cent)	83.1	64.7	80.5	83.7	76.6
NFP (per cent)	2.4	–	0.1	0.8	9.6
FNP (per cent)	–	24.4	11.6	7.7	5.4
WUF (per cent)	–	–	–	7.0	3.4
Total no. of votes cast	76,462	82,651	94,038	121,366	120,701
Indian communal vote					
Alliance (per cent)	24.1	15.6	14.4	15.3	15.1
NFP					
Labour Coalition (per cent)	74.3	73.2	84.9	84.1	82.9
Total no. of votes cast	84,753	103,644	103,537	110,830	122,906

Source: *Fiji Gazette*, various years.

Kadavu/Tamavua by 16 per cent, and in Ra/Samabula by 13.4 per cent. Tamavua, Samabula and Muanikau are all a part of the greater Suva area and within the Suva Fijian national constituency where a voter turnout drop and a swing to the Coalition caused the Alliance's defeat. This was a constituency that the Alliance had always won with the slightest of margins, and, in the 1987 elections, it was widely viewed as the seat most likely to tip the balance of the election. It had a total of 41,179 voters (16,962 Fijians, 20,778 Indians and 3,439 general electors).

The Alliance's candidates were Ratu David Toganivalu, the deputy prime minister, and Mrs Irene Jai Narayan. Pitted against these two seasoned politicians were the Coalition newcomers, Dr Tupeni Baba, a Fijian academic at the University of the South Pacific, and Navin Maharaj, former Suva (and Alliance) mayor and businessman. The Alliance counted on the experience and popularity of its candidates to carry the constituency. But that was not to be. Maharaj, a veteran of municipal politics, mounted an effective door-to-door campaign, and Baba developed with the campaign to become an articulate and accomplished spokesman for his party, connecting especially with the city's younger voters, both Indo-Fijian and Fijian. Business community support for Toganivalu was neutralised among the powerful Gujarati community by Harilal Patel, who contested the Suva Indian communal seat. And Mrs Narayan, instead of being an asset, became a liability. Her previous record of solid opposition to the Alliance was used against her; many of her former supporters refused to overlook her defection from the NFP to the Alliance; and the Indian Alliance, feeling discarded and discredited, refused to campaign for the party. Making matters worse for themselves, leading Alliance party functionaries, including Mara, devoted an inordinate amount of time in western Viti Levu hoping, at long last, to win an Indian communal seat.

Another marginal seat was the southeastern national (Naitasiri/Nasinu area), which the Alliance also lost to the Coalition. Here, there were 22,228 Fijian registered voters, 19,974 Indians and 761 general electors. Several factors helped to defeat the Alliance. But perhaps more important was the effect of the Fijian Nationalist Party, which collected 8.5 per cent of the Fijian communal votes that otherwise, it can reasonably be supposed, would have gone to the Alliance. The Coalition

candidate, Joeli Kalou, a teacher and a trade unionist, was an accomplished campaigner, while his Alliance rival, Ratu George Tu'uakitau Cokanauto, youngest son of the late Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, remained uncomfortable on the hustings, relying more on traditional political connections than on active campaigning. For its Indian candidate, the Coalition astutely chose a Muslim, Fida Hussein, for an area with a large Muslim population. His presence on the ticket helped to blunt the effect of the Alliance's assiduous courting of Muslim voters. The Alliance's downfall in this constituency, as elsewhere, came about through shrewd Coalition strategy, as well as through the Alliance's own complacency and ineffectiveness.

At his first news conference after being sworn into office on 12 April, Dr Bavadra briefly reflected on the momentous events of the previous week. He viewed the 'the peaceful and honorable change of government' as the reaffirmation of the 'deep democratic roots of our society and the profound unity of our people' (*Fiji Times*, 13 April 1987). He saw in his triumph the dawn of a new era, full of new potential and opportunity. 'Together', he said, 'let us write a new chapter, which, God willing, will be one which we and our children will be proud of' (*Fiji Times*, 13 April 1987). Unfortunately for him and his supporters, neither the gods nor his opponents were willing or prepared for change.

The 14 May coup

While the new government set about its work, its opponents—defeated after almost two decades of untrammelled rule—organised to oppose and eventually overthrow it, climaxing with the military-led and Alliance-condoned coup of 14 May 1987. The Fiji coup is probably the most written about event in modern Fijian and Pacific islands history. The story is too well known to need retelling here.¹⁴ I shall therefore refer only to major events and developments to complete the picture. The immediate interpretation of the May coup was that it was essentially an ethnic conflict, with the Fijians asserting their power against a government that they themselves did not control. The ethnic factor was certainly mobilised, by the Taukei Movement among others, to support the destabilisation campaign. But the coup was not simply an ethnic conflict.

A whole variety of individuals and groups felt threatened by the Coalition's victory. Some former cabinet ministers feared that the new government would investigate allegations of abuse and mismanagement. Politicians at risk of losing their jobs—some had no other career to fall back on—contributed to inflaming opposition to the new government. Prominent leaders supported the usurpers by joining the new post-coup administration rather than taking a stand for the democratic ideals that they had previously championed. The election of a middle-ranking chief as prime minister unsettled some Fijians used to being governed by paramount chiefs. Bavadra's championing of democratic values, his plea to observe distinctions between modern and traditional roles did not sit well with some. For others, Bavadra's ascension from western Viti Levu to the office of the prime minister threatened the traditional structure and distribution of power in Fijian society. For a whole variety of reasons, then, the Labour government had to go.

The full truth of the complex motivations of the principal players will never be known, though they all have advanced self-exculpatory reasons for their behaviour. Ratu Mara justified his participation in the first coup administration on the grounds that his house was on fire and he had therefore no choice but to get involved to save his life's work, which led someone to quip that he should have in that case joined the firefighters and not the arsonists. No direct evidence has linked him to the pre-coup machinations, although Rabuka remembers mentioning to the former prime minister the scenario he had in mind during a game of golf.¹⁵ The overwhelming impression in Fiji is that Ratu Mara was not directly involved, but that it is inconceivable that a politician of his experience and contacts did not know what was in the offing. There is also a deep sense of disappointment on all sides that Mara did not do more to save the fledgling democracy at the moment of its greatest crisis. Other observers implicate Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Rabuka's paramount chief, of being aware of what was about to take place. There is little doubt that Ganilau had emotional sympathy with the purported aims of the coup,¹⁶ but whether he sanctioned it is impossible to determine. For his part, Rabuka has never implicated Ganilau.

Rabuka himself, in 1987 a lieutenant colonel and the third ranking officer in the Fiji military, captured the limelight and provided a host of

self-serving reasons as to why he had executed the coup. Above all, he claimed it was the interest of law and order and in the national interest of Fiji. He portrayed himself as the humble servant of the Fijian cause. He talked at length in his first authorised biography (see Dean and Ritova 1988) about his loyalty and devotion to chiefs but then showed no hesitation in usurping their authority when they stood in his way. He executed the second coup in September, undermining the Deuba Accord that the Coalition and the Alliance had signed to lead Fiji back to democracy. He continued to talk about his love for the army but then refused to retreat to the barracks. He assured the Indo-Fijians that he would look after their welfare but suggested they might be better off converting to Christianity. The saga of confusion and contradiction went on. Rabuka sought, to some degree convincingly, to portray himself as the champion of Fijian rights, but few believed—or believe—that he had carried out the coup all on his own, without the prior knowledge of important sections of the Fijian society.

Two weeks after the coup, Ratu Penaia Ganilau appointed a council of advisors to assist him to restore normalcy to Fiji. Fourteen of the 18 members of the Council were personally endorsed by Rabuka; only two its members were from the coalition—Timoci Bavadra and Harish Sharma. Critics accused Ganilau of putting in place a process designed to ‘realise the aims of the coup’ through legal means. In July, Ganilau appointed a constitution review committee to conduct public hearings throughout the country to gauge public opinion on how best to achieve the goal of strengthening ‘the political rights of the indigenous Fijians’. Despite deep reservations, the Coalition agreed to participate in the committee.

The views expressed to the committee were predictable. Most in the Indo-Fijian community opposed any change to the 1970 constitution without full national debate. The only exception was the Fiji Muslim League, which generally supported the Fijian position on constitutional matters. The Coalition argued that the incumbent political system was

...just, fair and equitable. The system has withstood the test of time and has become accepted by the majority of the citizens of this country. It protects the special interests of the indigenous Fijians through special provisions of power of veto by the nominees of the GCC [Great Council of Chiefs]. To devise changes to

the existing constitution on the basis of the preponderance of any particular race must in the end be harmful to race relations as it would enhance polarisation of our communities along racial lines. It will also disturb the power in the current constitution. This could lead to loss of confidence in the long-term stability of the country to what has been evidenced since the coup.¹⁷

Views varied among indigenous Fijians, but on the whole there was enthusiastic support for the coup and for the recognition of nationalist Fijian aspirations. Most Fijian individuals and groups who appeared before the committee wanted Fijians to be in control. The various strands of Fijian thinking were encapsulated in the submission of the Great Council of Chiefs. Its constitutional review committee, headed by Ratu Mara and Rabuka, demanded that Fiji be made a Christian state, departing from the sectarian principles of the 1970 constitution. The constitution, the Great Council of Chiefs argued, should expressly incorporate provisions for preferential treatment and affirmative action for Fijians in public offices, statutory bodies and even private companies. It suggested the abolition of the Senate and the creation of a 71-member House of Representatives with 40 Fijians (28 of whom were to be nominated by the Provincial Councils, 8 nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and 4 nominated by the prime minister; 22 Indo-Fijians, 8 general electors and one Rotuman nominated by the Council of Rotuma. Four of the 22 Indo-Fijian seats were to be reserved for Muslims. Apart from demanding Fijian numerical dominance in parliament, the Great Council of Chiefs also wanted certain positions reserved for Fijians, including the offices of prime minister, and ministries of Fijian affairs, agriculture, home affairs, finance and industry. The commander of the Fiji military forces would always be a Fijian, as would be the Commissioner of Police, the chairman of the Public Service Commission and secretary to cabinet.

With the Great Council of Chiefs and the Coalition espousing diametrically opposed views about the best constitutional arrangements for Fiji, it was a foregone conclusion that the constitution review committee's report would be a divided one. And it was. With his plans to return Fiji to normalcy in disarray, Ganilau set in motion a fresh proposal to move the country forward. He appointed a politically balanced council of advisors to help him usher in an interim administration under his control, among whose tasks would be to lay the ground work for a new

constitution. His proposal, which came to be known as the 'Deuba Accord'—after the location where it was formally negotiated—was about to be enacted into legislation when Rabuka executed the second coup on 25 September.

Rabuka was not party to the negotiations. His exclusion from the talks was an error of judgement on the part of Coalition politicians. It is tantalising to ask what sort of future of Fiji might have had had he been present. Rabuka might not have accepted the inclusion of Indo-Fijian Coalition members in the caretaker administration. But seeing Bavadra, Mara and Ganilau on the same side might have dissuaded him from the route he subsequently took on 7 October when he unilaterally declared Fiji a republic. On 9 October, Rabuka swore in a Military Administration consisting of Fijian nationalists and members of the Taukei Movement.

The Military Administration was in power from October to December. It was a period of wanton disregard for human rights and rampant racial extremism. Coalition leaders were harassed and some were put in prison. A series of decrees curtailed the freedom of speech and movement. All political activity was banned, and a strict observance of the Sabbath enforced. Civil servants could be dismissed on the grounds of 'public interest'. Making matters worse for the administration was a rapidly deteriorating economy. The rising cost of living, the increasing inflation, a compulsory 25 per cent salary cut for all public servants at a time when the Fijian dollar had already been devalued by 35 per cent compounded the misery. Projects soon to be started were put on hold, and foreign and local investors eyed their prospects warily. International condemnation was unsparing. Ratu Mara correctly surmised that unless the economy were revived, Fiji would face bankruptcy by the end of the year.

With the military administration in disarray, Rabuka was persuaded to hand power back to his chiefs. He did so but not before a number of his prior conditions were met. No Coalition member was to be included into the new cabinet, and military representation in the new administration had to be guaranteed. Mara and Ganilau accepted the preconditions. With details out of the way, Rabuka formally approached Ganilau to accept the presidency of the new Republic of Fiji, which he did on 5 December. The following day, Ganilau told the nation that 'the future protection of the indigenous Fijian interests is in safe hands'.

Mara accepted his appointment as prime minister with ‘honour and pride’, telling his people that they had nothing to fear from his administration. With Ganilau and Mara back in office, one chapter in Fiji’s recent past had closed, and another was about to open.

Notes

- 1 The Tripartite Forum—composed of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, Fiji Employees Consultative Association, and the government—was formed in 1976 to reach ‘common understanding [on issues] which affect national interest such as industrial relations, job creation, greater flow of investment and general social and economic development of the country’.
- 2 The full manifesto is reprinted in Lal 1986.
- 3 The manifesto was largely the handiwork of Shardha Nand.
- 4 A typescript of the address is in the author’s possession.
- 5 Quote from a typescript of the concluding address in the author’s possession.
- 6 Quote from the opening campaign address, a copy is in the author’s possession.
- 7 For an introduction to Bavadra’s life, see Bain and Baba 1990.
- 8 From his closing campaign address.
- 9 These figures are derived from a report prepared by the Fijian Affairs Board and presented to the Great Council of Chiefs at their 1986 Somosomo meeting.
- 10 Bavadra’s speech, First Annual Convention of the Fiji Labour Party, Lautoka, 19 July 1986. Similar sentiments about the NLTB were expressed throughout the campaign.
- 11 For a discussion of the problems of Fijian Administration in the 1960s, see Lasaga 1984.
- 12 Bavadra’s speech, First Annual Convention of the Fiji Labour Party, Lautoka, 19 July 1986.
- 13 Coalition Foreign Minister Krishna Datt told General Vernon Walters that his government was re-examining its stance on the nuclear issue.
- 14 For an early literature review, see Lal and Peacock 1990.
- 15 For Rabuka’s version, see his authorised biography (Sharpham 2000).
- 16 Though less politically ambitious than Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia Ganilau was nonetheless a staunch Fijian nationalist, as seen from his speeches and statements in the 1960s.
- 17 The quote is from a transcript of the Coalition’s submission to the Constitution Review Committee, as cited in Lal 1988.