

THE MAJOR PARTIES

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The cycles of party politics

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Fiji politics runs through cycles of consolidation and fragmentation. For the Fijian parties, consolidation is the response to adversity, and fragmentation ensues whenever the heat of national politics cools down. The 2006 election, when Fijians united to back the main Fijian party, reflected such consolidation. But where was the adversity, and where the heat of politics? The truth was that the 2001 election campaign had never truly ended, but flowed almost seamlessly into that of 2006. Meantime, the political temperature had been kept high enough to command the attention of the Fijian voter. Otherwise, regional, provincial and *vanua* rivalries might have reasserted themselves more strongly, and more Fijians might have stopped to ask why they continued to live in villages and urban settlements where conditions were little better than decades before, and what the government had done about it.

For years after 2001, the dominant political issue was who should be in the government and who should not. The restored constitution required power-sharing, but the largely Fijian-backed Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) had not formed a multiparty cabinet after winning in 2001. The Fiji Labour Party (FLP) had taken the matter to court, and, for the next three years, debate raged over the legitimacy of the 2001 process of government formation. It became the central issue in Fiji politics. Not until November 2004 did Labour finally abandon its legal quest for inclusion in cabinet, and party leader Mahendra Chaudhry take up the position of leader of the opposition. No sooner

had he had done so than the government launched the controversial Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity (RTU) Bill, causing the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) to challenge the government's legitimacy and threaten a coup. As a result, the question 'who rightfully rules' – which elections are supposed in theory to settle – was never truly resolved by the 2001 poll, and Fijians were repeatedly reminded that the legitimacy of 'their' government and its legislation was in question. Under such conditions, what united the Fijians continued to be more important than what divided them.

Splintering of Fijian political parties occurs when the pressure is off, as in April 1977, in 1987 and again in 1999. Each decade's crisis triggers a countervailing rotation, in the latter years under the auspices of successive new political parties. The Alliance Party healed Fijian divisions at the polls of September 1977 and 1982, the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) obtained the unanimous backing of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs, or GCC) in 1991, and the SDL rose on the crest of yet another bid for Fijian unity in the face of adversity in 2001 and 2006.

For the Indian parties, by contrast, adversity often historically gave birth to internecine struggles. So it was in the 1930s, after the initial defeat of demands for a 'common roll', when a decade of struggles ensued between the Arya Samaj and orthodox Sanatanis, between those originating from south and north India and between Hindus and Muslims.¹ So it was in the wake of April 1977's constitutional crisis, when the 'dove' and 'flower' factions tore the National Federation Party (NFP) apart. And so it was in the wake of the 1987 coup, when the coalition between the FLP and the NFP broke down and was replaced by vigorous intra-communal competition. Yet this did not happen after the 2000 coup. Instead, the FLP went from strength to strength; it improved on its 66 per cent of Indian support in 1999 by obtaining 75 per cent in 2001 and 81 per cent in 2006. Had the FLP fragmented, in line with the previous cyclical experience, the 2006 election might have been very different. As a result, the events of 2000–2001 remained the crucible of party politics at the 2006 polls, and the 2006 election represented a sharpening of the political alignments already witnessed at the 2001 poll. This chapter explores that story.

The February 2001 Chandrika Prasad case proved a watershed in Fiji party politics.² Judges found that the interim administration had no legal standing.

One possibility was to reconvene the former parliament and so potentially restore the pre-2000-coup government. In theory, judges pay no attention to political practicalities. The law is the law, and constitutional interpretation stretches only so far as allowed by discerning the intent of the framers of those fundamental laws. In practice, the separation of powers between judges and legislators is often hazy, and so it was in Fiji. The Chandrika Prasad judgement was viewed by some as ‘the case that stopped a coup’.³ Yet, instead of requiring the reinstatement of the Labour-led government, the Court of Appeal ruling left space for the Fijian interim administration to repeat the process of selection of a new head of state and, thereafter, to re-legitimize itself by calling fresh elections. Not only had the military failed to issue the appropriate decrees abrogating the constitution, but President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had not, as everyone thought he had, resigned from office on 29 May 2000. Instead, it was a letter from President Mara enquiring about his pension entitlements on 15 December 2000 that became formally accepted as entailing his resignation. That meant that there were three months before a new president had to be selected, in accordance with the constitution.⁴ And of those three months, only 15 days were left when the judges delivered their telling verdict on 1 March 2001. The no-longer-recognized interim president, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, thus had 15 days to repeat the process of his own selection via the GCC, which he successfully did.

In the wake of the Chandrika Prasad case, Fiji’s political parties re-crystallized in new and unexpected ways. For the interim government, then Deputy Prime Minister Ratu Epeli Nailatikau appeared before the Court of Appeal to announce the government’s acceptance of the verdict, so the alternative of defiance was straightforward, and fortunately for Fiji, rejected.

Three legal possibilities arose in the wake of the judgement: (i) the return of the Chaudhry government, (ii) the advent of a ‘national unity’ government or (iii) fresh elections.

Few thought the first option politically practical, and no attempt was made to restore Mahendra Chaudhry as prime minister. A majority of Fijians, roused to the defence of indigenous paramountcy by the events of 2000, would not have tolerated it. In any case, the former People’s Coalition led by Chaudhry had splintered at the grass roots level even before the coup, and backbenchers

from the Fijian Association Party and Veitokani Lewenivanua ni Vakarisito had been deeply implicated in the events of 19 May 2000. One was imprisoned on Nukulau with George Speight.

The President's initial choice, reportedly, was the second option – a 'Government of National Unity', based on the 1999–2000 parliament, and led by ethnic Fijian Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tupeni Baba, rather than Chaudhry – but that did not eventuate either.⁵ Moves to dislodge the FLP leader and install Baba in his place commenced, spearheaded by veteran FLP members Krishna Datt and Pratap Chand. However, Chaudhry supporters boycotted the meetings, leaving them without a quorum. Meanwhile, the Labour leader visited Fiji's re-installed President, Ratu Josefa Iloilo, and offered a dissolution.⁶ It was a tactically deft manoeuvre. If what was on the agenda was the formation of a new unity government that would draw cross-party support, Tupeni Baba appeared the most acceptable leader, particularly if he had the backing of the majority of the 37 FLP MPs. If, instead, the outcome was to be a fresh election, Chaudhry's strengths in rallying the party faithful and pulling out the cane belt vote made him the likely choice for the leadership.

While the FLP argued, the President chose the third option, the one most likely to calm ethnic Fijian passions. He dissolved parliament and swore in Laisenia Qarase to lead the government until elections could be held. Having been an 'interim' prime minister, Qarase became a 'caretaker' one, with the advantage of incumbency to take into an election.

Chaudhry's triumph in the FLP internal battle was not without costs. The defeated Dr Tupeni Baba formed the breakaway New Labour Unity Party (NLUP), drawing with him a number of long-standing indigenous Fijian FLP members, and some support from civil society activists and Gujarati businessmen. Critically, however, Baba failed to retain the support of key moderate Indian leaders. Both Krishna Datt and Pratap Chand were subsequently disciplined by the party, although they remained within the fold and soon reappeared on the front benches. At the 2001 poll, Chaudhry and Baba were fierce opponents: Baba claimed a vote for Chaudhry would result in another coup; Chaudhry replied that Baba was desperate to be prime minister. Baba's NLUP fought a spirited campaign but it won only 4.5 per cent of the national vote, and secured only two seats. By the 2006 election, it had vanished without trace.⁷

The Chandrika Prasad case also entailed a reconfiguration on the Fijian side of politics and the emergence of a new Fijian party, the SDL. To begin with, Fijian leaders were deeply divided. Efforts to unite Fijian parties in a 'Fijian Forum' to fight the impending election were plagued by faction fighting, as was the GCC itself. Verata chief Ratu Ilisoni Qio Ravoka described deliberations at the Chiefs' Council as marked by 'personal differences, backstabbing, *vanua* rivalry, political rivalry, jealousy and traditional power struggle'.⁸ SVT leaders were reluctant to cede their position as the dominant Fijian party, despite strong indigenous criticism of their role in saddling Fiji with the 1997 constitution and precipitating the crisis of 1999–2000. The GCC withdrew its support for the SVT and declared an intention not to favour any one political party. That proved the death blow for Rabuka's SVT party, an organization originally invented as the chiefs' party. Schisms quickly became apparent in the SVT leadership⁹, and even before the polls the party machinery was ebbing away.¹⁰ The SVT was able to pick up only 8.6 per cent of the Fijian vote at the 2001 election, and vanished into oblivion in 2006.¹¹

The launch of the SDL in May 2001 signalled both continuity and change in Fiji politics. In a bid to remain prime minister, Qarase initiated a constitutional review process aimed at providing a 'safety-valve' for indigenous discontent, and announced that government funds were to be spent on a pro-Fijian blueprint, including plans for the construction of a tar-sealed road through the rebellious province of Tailevu, near Speight's home area of Wainibuka. Qarase, himself a Lauan, received the backing of former president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and the Lau Provincial Council, mending what had been, in the Fijian tradition, a gross insult to the former long-serving prime minister, the Tui Nayau Ratu Mara, perhaps the last of Fiji's high chiefs with great political stature (*mana*) and a corresponding position in the legislature. Lauan, as well as Indian, shops and buildings had been destroyed in the unrest on 19 May 2000, Lauan houses had been stoned, and the notion that Lauans had for long captured and monopolized the resources of mainland Viti Levu had gained currency even in government circles. At the height of the post-coup crisis, Ratu Inoke Takiveikata, the Qaranivalu – highest chief of lowland Naitasiri¹² – had gone so far as to say that outer islanders (meaning Lauans) should not 'talk because you are visitors to Viti Levu' at a meeting of the GCC.¹³ Yet peace was made

among the Fijian leaders, at least temporarily. When the SDL was formed in Tamavua village, Naitasiri, its founding president was none other than the Qaranivalu (until he was later convicted and imprisoned for involvement in the mutiny of November 2000). The former president played his part in the new Fijian political reconciliation, despite animosities that festered beneath the Lauan surface. Now retired and at home on Lakeba, Ratu Mara ensured that his daughter, Adi Koila Mara, stood aside, giving Qarase a free run at the Lau Fiji Provincial Communal seat.

The SDL quickly became the new dominant mainstream indigenous Fijian party, despite scandals before the election. Chief among these was an 'agricultural scam' associated with the distribution of pitchforks, outboard motors and other agricultural implements to Fijian villagers, particularly in coup-supporting areas of Tailevu and Naitasiri. The 2001 achievement of the SDL in capturing 50 per cent of the Fijian vote, and winning 32 seats in the new parliament, was extraordinary, and saluted as such by defeated veteran SVT politicians, such as Jim Ah Koy and Berenado Vunibobo. The SDL captured all the urban Fijian communal seats, as well as Lau and most of mainland Viti Levu. Most remarkably, the antagonism between Fijian parties in western Viti Levu, the Party of National Unity and the Bai Kei Viti, had allowed the SDL to triumph also in that part of the country.

Another six seats were won by the Conservative Alliance–Matanitu Vanua (CAMV), a new political party formed by customary chiefs and politicians who were implicated in the 2000 coup. The leader of the CAMV, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, was the Tui Cakau, the leading chief from the Cakaudrove area, and the highest-ranking chief in one of Fiji's three confederacies. George Speight himself was elected for the CAMV from his prison cell, although he soon lost his seat owing to his failure to attend three consecutive parliamentary sittings. He would not have been able to obtain the Tailevu North Fijian seat without the support of the Cakobau chiefs from Bau Island (see Tuitoga, this volume). The president of the Methodist Church publicly blessed both parties, offering Fijians the cohesion of shared faith in place of factionalization among traditional rulers.

The FLP also emerged triumphant in its communal heartlands, seeing off the potential threats from the NFP and the NLUP. In the open constituencies, it was able to repeat the 1999 achievement of capturing common roll seats in

the cane belts. Beyond that, contests – as in 1999 – depended on the ordering of minor party preferences. Yet this time, the smaller parties' preferences did not favour the FLP. Prior to the polls, these parties had clubbed together in a 'Moderates Forum' – comprising the NLUP, NFP, SVT, UPP and FAP. These parties gave each other second, third and fourth preferences, but, critically, tended to place the FLP as last preference and the SDL in penultimate position. That decision gave the SDL nine of the open constituencies; CAMV preferences gave the SDL an additional three of these seats, and one was secured at the first count, without relying on preference votes. In addition, the SDL won the North Eastern General Communal seat, bringing the total to 31, compared with the FLP's 27.¹⁴ The 'Moderates Forum' parties were left with only four seats in parliament, and soon lost two of those after Kenneth Zinck crossed the floor to join the government and after the courts overturned the Nadi Open result, giving an additional seat to the FLP.

The outcome left both large parties short of a majority, and there were brief rumours of a seemingly impossible coalition between the ousted prime minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, and his nemesis, the coup-supporting CAMV. The CAMV, however, wanted an amnesty for the coup convicts, including George Speight, a concession that presumably would have been a public relations disaster for the FLP. Predictably, it was the SDL and CAMV that joined forces to form a government. This was to prove a government plagued by controversy from its inception, both domestically and overseas. As prime minister, Qarase issued the constitutionally required invitation for the FLP to join the cabinet, but in a way that welcomed refusal. When Chaudhry accepted the offer, the Prime Minister responded that the conditions attached to the FLP's acceptance were too onerous, and that the FLP had rejected the Prime Minister's condition that cabinet be based on SDL policy. The court found otherwise, and a succession of high profile multiparty cabinet cases commenced that were used by Mahendra Chaudhry mainly as a method for de-legitimizing the government. Had the court been obeyed, Qarase potentially would have had to unwind his coalition with the CAMV, which was not entitled to participate in cabinet according to constitutional rules (except as part of the entitlement of the party of the prime minister). In addition, Chaudhry claimed vote-rigging at the 2001 polls, also pressing this before the courts.

From the 2001 election onward, the question of ‘who rules?’ in Fiji was kept permanently at the centre of Fiji politics, with another court case perpetually around the corner that would decide, again and again unfavourably, on the constitutionality of the Qarase-led government. No sooner had Mahendra Chaudhry finally given up and accepted the position of leader of the opposition in late 2004, than another issue emerged that again threatened the legitimacy of the government, and rekindled the ‘who rules?’ issue, albeit from a less familiar direction. The RTU Bill threatened, among other provisions, to provide an amnesty for coup-related prisoners. It brought to a head the long-simmering antagonism between the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and the Home Affairs Ministry (see Ratuva, this volume). Military commander Frank Bainimarama threatened to stage a coup if the Bill were passed. For the FLP, this seemed a blessing in an odd disguise. In the run-up to the 2006 poll, its party president, Jokapeci Koroi, in an ill-advised TV interview, astonished the viewing public by backing the military’s threats to seize political power. Chaudhry refused to condemn the statement, despite having been part of the FLP government overthrown by a military coup in 1987. That the aspiration for political power could encourage such short-term pragmatism seemed extraordinary to most.

The perpetual centrality of struggles over the composition of government during the period 2001–2006, first due to the multiparty cabinet controversies and second due to the RTU Bill, gives some insight into the nature of communal party politics in Fiji. On both sides, parties mobilized around the race issue, even if the position of the FLP as the representative of the minority community and as the victim of the coups enabled it to couch its appeal in a more universalist doctrine. The SDL used race politics overtly. The 2001–04 multiparty cabinet controversies kept the need for ‘Fijian unity’ perpetually to the forefront and checked the potential for provincial splintering. The military’s new threat to Fijian rule in the wake of the RTU Bill generated an unprecedented mobilization. SDL campaign manager Jale Baba brought busloads of Fijian villagers to demonstrate in support of the Bill outside the makeshift parliament at the police hall at Nasese in June 2005. Days earlier, uniformed military personnel had occupied the public gallery in parliament, and FLP MPs had staged a walkout. For the SDL, the RTU Bill, replete with its messages of Christian forgiveness and charity, proved a highly effective electoral

tool (see Bhim, this volume). When public consultation on the Bill went out to the provinces, it generated overwhelming endorsement for government policy.¹⁵ Had the SDL instead sent out a more direct request for electoral support for the party itself, it is doubtful that backing would have been so wholehearted.

The RTU Bill was also a concession to the CAMV, designed to subdue militant criticism over the continued incarceration of Fijians on coup-related charges. When CAMV president Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu was himself imprisoned for 'unlawful' assembly during the mutiny at the Sukanaivalu Barracks back in 2000, it threatened to break the governing coalition. Yet, Ratu Naiqama and several of the other prisoners were released on compulsory supervision orders. As former New Zealand prime minister Geoffrey Palmer pointed out in a talk before the Fiji Law Society on 22 June 2005, scope to pardon prisoners already existed through the Prerogative of Mercy Commission under the 1997 constitution. What then was the intention of the Bill? The RTU Bill potentially achieved something that other possible responses did not, in the sense that an amnesty wipes out the damage to status in a way that a pardon or premature release do not. Was the Bill primarily a political device, rather than a practical measure? Was this a Machiavellian tactic on the part of the government? The Bill, after all, also played an important political role in other respects. In the run-up to the 2006 poll, the CAMV liquidated itself, with prominent ministers joining the SDL and, in most cases, keeping their seats. That political objectives played their part is also suggested by the shelving of the RTU Bill before the election, although an amended version was due to be put before cabinet thereafter.

Whichever way, the liquidation of the CAMV altered the calculus of Fijian politics. After the 2001 election, the presence in the governing coalition of a substantial ethnic extremist party helped to shape the basic direction of government policy. Government initiatives over the period 2001–2005 were nearly all aimed at placating the perceived threat from Fijian nationalists. Prime Minister Qarase's speeches regularly revisited the experience of the SDL's predecessor, Rabuka's SVT, emphasizing the danger of the mainstream Fijian party being outflanked by more militant nationalists. In reality, the most likely option was always that CAMV ministers would join the SDL. But could they carry the grass roots of the party with them in that transition? Would radicals

who had been left out in the cold, like former Fiji Intelligence Services boss Metuisela Mua or the coup-prisoners themselves, vigorously challenge the new orientation? What would be the reaction in those villages in the Wainibuka area of northern Tailevu or in Cakaudrove Province on Vanua Levu, where the military clampdown in 2000 had left lasting grievances? The RTU Bill not only offered to wash away the stain of conviction for CAMV ministers, but also promised to soothe that festering resentment in the coup-supporting regions. That the RFMF was so opposed to the Bill only strengthened the perception of villagers in Northern Tailevu and Cakaudrove that the SDL was, in fact, *their* government.

The SDL was careful to avoid direct, and potentially damaging, competition with the CAMV. At the West Cakaudrove by-election in June 2005, the party withdrew its candidate at the eleventh hour, giving a free run to CAMV lawyer and former Native Land Trust Board official Niko Nawaikula, who later proved a key supporter of the CAMV liquidation. At the 2006 election itself, four of the previous six CAMV MPs were returned from constituencies in the former rebel regions, although now as SDL candidates. Those who rejected the new accommodation fared poorly.¹⁶ The older Nationalist Vanua Lavo Tako Party was also badly defeated, ending up with only 1 per cent of the Fijian vote. The former threat to the SDL on the extremist Fijian flank, which had proved so important in moulding party policy during 2001–2006, had all but vanished. Nor was there any substantial new threat from the centrist parties, owing to the poor showing of Ratu Epeli Ganilau's revamped Alliance Party and the western Viti Levu-based Party of National Unity. What then would define the orientation of the new government?

With the election results announced, Qarase announced his intention to form a multiparty cabinet including members of the FLP.¹⁷ Harried by journalists from Fiji TV, the Prime Minister at first emphasized his principled opposition to any 'government of national unity'. This was suitable only for war-time, he said, emphasizing the unbridgeable ideological gulf between the SDL and the FLP, and the absurdity of a constitution that left parliament with no substantial or effective opposition. Nevertheless, the portfolios offered to the FLP were to be substantial, initially out of a hope to avoid a rerun of the cycle of endless litigation experienced in the wake of the 2001 election by

obeying the spirit as well as the letter of the law. Within days, Qarase had warmed to the new power-sharing arrangements, just as FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry showed increasing discomfort at the thought of FLP ministers entering cabinet. The portfolios offered were those left in a 'mess' by the SDL, he said, and when Qarase refused to match the FLP list of nine ministers with the portfolios indicated, Chaudhry threatened to reject participation. It was the FLP Management Board that pushed for acceptance of the offer. The FLP leader chose to remain outside cabinet, even seeking to become Leader of the Opposition while his colleagues entered cabinet. Within days of the formation of the new multiparty cabinet, signs of a split emerged within the FLP, with the 'gang of five', including FLP ministers Krishna Datt and Poseci Bune, denouncing Chaudhry's decision as regards nominees to the Senate and submitting an alternative list.

Was Qarase's conversion to power-sharing a direct reflection of the difficulties this entailed for the rival FLP? There was an element of that, but there was also a more optimistic interpretation. Multiparty cabinet has inevitable attractions in Fiji, particularly for governments like the SDL 2001–06 administration, which had become familiar with the day-to-day difficulties of ruling without consensus. The new arrangements offered government a hitherto lacking legitimacy; also, as the new FLP ministers set about their work, the advantages of drawing on the reservoirs of talent in the Indian community became palpable. Above all, support among ordinary Fijians for the new accommodation was strong. The vast majority of indigenous Fijians might have voted for a party committed to upholding the interests of their ethnic group, but they liked the idea that, once so constituted, that party seek to collaborate with the big Indian party, particularly given that this was occurring from a position of strength. Qarase came to define the objectives of his second government by a commitment to make the power-sharing arrangements work, despite indicating a preference for a multi-ethnic over a multiparty cabinet.

The 2006 election campaign witnessed some convergence in policy, despite the vigorous opposition of the two large conflicting parties and an outcome that entailed the eradication of all the minority parties. The SDL's manifesto focused on poverty reduction, and shortly before the election the government abolished value-added tax on essential food items – borrowing a key policy

from the 1999–2000 Labour-led Peoples' Coalition. The government also promised to double \$30 family welfare allowances to \$60 per week, a move that galvanized Fijian support both in rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, in the wake of the 2006 election, the core policies of the new government – the Qoliqoli Bill, the RTU Bill, proposals for an Indigenous Claims Court and the shift from the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act to the Native Land Trust Act – all reflected that earlier incubus of the SDL as a party defined by the objective of placating indigenous discontent. Most of those core policies also entail potentially costly distributive exercises, likely to prove burdensome at a time when the Fiji government is spending more than it is receiving, and when budget deficits are ballooning. Economic growth is likely to slow from more than 3 per cent in 2006 to 2.2 per cent in 2007 as Fiji feels the impact of falling sugar prices and a contracting garment industry, and the outlook for 2008 is not much better.¹⁸

Postscript

The military coup of 5 December 2006 offered the possibility of a major break in the cyclical pattern of Fiji party politics. The RFMF was transformed from the major instrument upholding indigenous paramountcy into its nemesis, or so it, at least temporarily, appeared. FLP leader Mahendra Chaudhry and General Secretary Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi entered the interim cabinet, and the purging of the Qarase order led to triumphs for FLP MPs, members and supporters across the commanding heights of the state-run sectors of the economy. History appeared to have run full circle, with Mahendra Chaudhry taking the finance portfolio he had lost as a result of the military coup back in 1987. The new arrangement oddly mirrored the stillborn Qarase multiparty cabinet, except with the key FLP leaders now playing their part in an unconstitutional regime together with a group of Fijian leaders who had not secured substantial indigenous support at the time of the 2006 poll.

At the time of writing, the longer-run impact on party politics remains unclear, but the distinct historical communal responses to adversity surveyed in this chapter may, if given sufficient time, give way to a more complex pattern. 'Might is right' may become an indigenous focal point for political loyalty, and Fijians may rally behind a strong military regime. Bainimarama

wants to delay elections for years – in part to allow time for a census and the redrawing of constituency boundaries, but mostly in order to entrench his revolution so that centrist politicians, with the multi-ethnic vision of those like Ratu Epeli Ganilau, can one day capture a substantial share of the Fijian vote. The interim prime minister wants to reconfigure Fiji politics in such a way that communal parties like the SDL no longer command the indigenous vote. Yet, international pressure is against him. The Commonwealth, the European Union, the Pacific Islands Forum and bilateral partners want a quick return to constitutional democracy. Fiji's economic prospects are against Bainimarama as well, as budget stringencies curb Fijians' access to the public sector and to a government that used to be 'theirs'.

If a party of the same hue and flavour as the SDL retains majority Fijian support, the survival of the new order will come to depend on Mahendra Chaudhry and the Fiji Indian vote. Here too the future is uncertain. As the economy slumps and as the honeymoon for the 'clean-up' campaign wears thin, Chaudhry may well lose Indian support for the new accommodation.

Whatever lies before Fiji following its most recent political upheaval, the coup of 5 December 2006 has finally laid to rest the exclusively ethnic interpretation of Fiji politics, not least because Fiji Indians can no longer see themselves, in good faith, as the solitary victims of Fiji's history.

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Notes

- ¹ Gillion, K.L. 1977. *The Fiji Indians; Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, The Australian National University Press, Canberra, chapter 6.
- ² On 4 July 2000, an Indian farmer, Chandrika Prasad, who had been displaced in the wake of the May 19 coup, filed an action claiming human rights violations with the High Court at Lautoka against the Republic of Fiji and the Attorney General. The case was first heard by Justice Gates in Lautoka in November 2000, who upheld the 1997 constitution and ordered 'the status quo is restored. Parliament should be summoned by the President' (Prasad v Republic of Fiji, 2001). The interim government appealed, resulting in the landmark case heard in February 2001.
- ³ Williams, G. 2001. 'The case that stopped a coup? The rule of law and constitutionalism in Fiji', *Oxford University Commonwealth Law Review*, 1(1):73–93. For a contrary view, see Head, M. 2001. 'A victory for democracy? An alternative assessment of Republic of Fiji V Prasad', *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 2(2):535–49.
- ⁴ *Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands*, 27 July 1998, s. 88.

- ⁵ 'Baba was President's First Choice', *The Fiji Times*, 24 March 2001.
- ⁶ 'Chaudhry wants fresh elections', *Fijilive.com*, 7 March 2001.
- ⁷ Both of the two 2001–2006 NLUP MPs contested as independents in 2006, and both lost.
- ⁸ *The Fiji Times*, 9 March 2001.
- ⁹ 'Leadership Confusion', *The Fiji Times*, 23 March 2001; 'Fijian Parties to Unite', *The Fiji Times*, 23 March 2001; 'Nationalists withdraw from Fijian forum', *The Fiji Times*, 23 March, 2001; 'Northern Chiefs eye Break from SVT', *The Fiji Times*, 24 March 2001.
- ¹⁰ 'SVT Group Breaks away', *The Fiji Times*, 23 May 2001.
- ¹¹ Only one candidate contested under the SVT banner in 2006, ironically an Indian, Arvind Deo Singh, in Nadi Open constituency.
- ¹² The Naitasiri title is one of the more contested in Fiji, and the occupant's authority certainly does not stretch across the modern-day province, which includes the bulk of the pre-war Colo East Province, which historically owed no loyalty to the lowland chiefs.
- ¹³ Cited in 'Splitting the Upper Echelon', *The Review*, June 2000, p.25.
- ¹⁴ The SDL's 31 seats do not include the Lau/Taveuni/Rotuma seat won by Savenaca Draunidalo. He stood as an independent, but was quickly identified as belonging to the SDL camp.
- ¹⁵ The GCC, although the recipient of those provincial consultations, expressed some disquiet and some support for amendment.
- ¹⁶ In the Bua Fijian Communal constituency, the incumbent Vula Josateki had opposed the CAMV liquidation and stood as an independent. He obtained only 146 votes, compared with the SDL's Mitieli Bulanauca's 4,321 (whereas in 2001, Josateki, standing for the CAMV, had won with 3,215 compared with Bulanauca's 2,049). The other former CAMV MP who refused to stand on an SDL ticket was Manasa Tugia. He had previously been MP for Cakaudrove West, but in 2006 stood as an independent for the North East Fiji Urban Communal seat and obtained only 353 votes, compared with the SDL's 11,548.
- ¹⁷ The initial public declaration by the Prime Minister to this effect had been during a leaders' debate broadcast live on Fiji TV, but most had interpreted this declaration as likely to entail a re-run of the token portfolios offered in 2003 in obedience to court decisions, in order to remain consistent with the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the constitution.
- ¹⁸ Reserve Bank of Fiji, *Economic Review* 23, 8 August 2006, p.2.