

Chapter 5

Rainbows across the mountains: the first post-RAMSI general election

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The social crisis that ravaged Solomon Islands from 1998 to 2003 has taught us many lessons. ‘Rainbows across the mountains’ symbolises a genuine wish by Solomon Islanders to rebuild their country with new insights and understanding. Some improvements, such as a vigorous campaign for a clean election, were seen in the 2006 national election, the first since RAMSI arrived in Solomon Islands in 2003. The Sogavare government, which assumed power in May 2006, has made a priority issues of good governance, quality leadership, the weeding out of corruption, national healing, decentralisation and equitable distribution of development and wealth. Though we face many challenges and difficulties, we hope that with political stability, a renewed wave of commitment and dedication by Solomon Islanders and the support of RAMSI, friendly nations and donor partners, we will achieve some of our goals.

When I was a small boy on Malaita Island in the early 1960s, whenever a rainbow appeared in the sky we were reminded by the elderly not to point our fingers at it. They told us that our fingers would be burnt or cooked. This created a tradition of fear and no one dared point at rainbows when they appeared. In the Bible, however, we are told that the rainbow is God’s promise to us that He will not destroy the Earth again with floods. This represents commitment and hope. Solomon Islands has experienced seasons of joy and sadness but perhaps no real progress in its 30 years of political independence. During the flood represented by the social crisis between 1998 and 2003, Solomon Islands nearly collapsed and disintegrated (Moore 2004; Fraenkel 2004; Bennett 2002; Kabutaulaka 1999; Dinnen 2002).

Fortunately, we saw a rainbow in the sky in July 2003, which represented not fear but hope. That rainbow was the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) (Moore 2005; Kabutaulaka 2005; Wainwright 2005; Brown 2005; Fullilove 2006). Then we saw another rainbow across our mountains, illuminating the tops of Tatuve on Guadalcanal and Alasa'a on Malaita, representing a genuine wish for a new and better Solomon Islands. This second rainbow was the 2006 general election. It was the vehicle to facilitate this wish and hope. Much has been said about arcs of instability in the Pacific; these rainbows represent arcs of stability and unity, reaching out to the different islands, cultures and people in Solomon Islands.

This chapter highlights some aspects of national and electoral politics in Solomon Islands, discusses the 2006 national elections (the first after RAMSI arrived) and touches on the policies of the second Sogavare government, which came to office in May 2006. Right at the beginning, I need to state my background and rationale. I have an academic interest in the politics and contemporary history of Solomon Islands (Alasia 1988, 1989, 1997), but I am also a participant in Solomon Islands politics. I was involved in the 2006 election as an adviser to Job Dudley Tausinga (one of the candidates for prime minister) and at the time of writing was a political advisor to Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. During the 1980s, I served a term as Minister for Education and I was, for a time, an adviser to Sogavare during his first term as prime minister in 2000. For more than 20 years, I have been involved in the affairs of my nation. I am not a dispassionate outside observer; I am a knowledgeable insider who has been able to talk openly and privately with many Solomon Islands leaders, and in my own small way have been able to shape government policy. There are some drawbacks to this, as I am bound by an oath of secrecy and obviously it is not in my interest to make public information that should remain private. The reader must accept this declaration and read on with it in mind. I believe that I have enough academic integrity to be able to separate political rhetoric from the truth. At heart, I am a Solomon Islands nationalist and, in the conclusion, I wear my nationalist heart on my sleeve, stating my thoughts as an indigenous Solomon Islander, not an academic. If Pacific islanders are to be involved in writing about the history and politics of our islands, we must be part of a reconceptualisation of the way we write. Total academic detachment and distance is not necessarily the way to decolonise Pacific

studies or provide an indigenous perspective. One final point—this chapter was finalised in October 2006 and therefore does not reflect developments since that time.¹

The 2006 general election was the seventh national election since the country achieved independence in 1978 (Moore 2004; Larmour with Tara 1983). RAMSI was deployed to the Solomon Islands in July 2003 at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Parliament—primarily to assist in the restoration of law and order and security. In mid 2003, the nation was sliding further into lawlessness, which forced the economy and state apparatus into near collapse. The social crisis from 1998 to 2000—which in many ways extended until the middle of 2003—was the culmination of a range of negative factors such as poor planning by previous administrations, mismanagement of the country's resources, corruption and land-tenure problems.

Decisions on land tenure are crucial to the future development of the nation. There are three types of land ownership in Solomon Islands: Crown, alienated and customary land. Eighty-five per cent of land is customary owned and this is where the majority of the population resides (Larmour 1979:Appendix II, 249). Solomon Islands is a nation of villages and villagers existing mainly through subsistence agriculture. As such, it is villagers who hold the principal key to development and progress, and who are the real power-brokers in terms of politics. It is their votes that decide the political future. Ordinary villagers have, however, been left out of political and development processes for far too long, and they feel that the parliament is not representative of their views. Part of the rehabilitation that is required is effective participation by rural Solomon Islanders in the electoral process—whether for local, provincial or national leadership. The Sogavare government elected in 2006 has promised to give emphasis to village-level development in a belief that this is the key to prosperity in Solomon Islands.

The lead up to the 2006 general elections

Parliament had its final meeting in December 2005 and was dissolved on 20 December, and all members went home to prepare themselves for Christmas and the general election. The April 2006 general elections differed from previous elections in at least three ways. First, a larger number of political

parties and groupings competed than ever before. For example, 10 political parties or groupings contested the 1997 elections and nine the 2001 election. In the 2006 elections, the number surged to 16. The party led by Sogavare—the Solomon Islands Social Credit (Socred) Party—fielded a large number of candidates. Three other parties were also led by former prime ministers: Bart Ulufa'alu's Liberal Party (which fielded a similar number of candidates to Socred); the People's Alliance Party (PAP), led by Sir Allan Kemakeza; and the Nasnol Pati (National Party), headed by Francis Billy Hilly. Three of the political party leaders were citizens of non-indigenous origin: Chinese hotelier Sir Tommy Chan led the Association of Independent Members of Parliament (AIMP), David Kwan led the Solomons First Party and Bobo Dettke (of German and Guadalcanal descent) headed the One Nation Party. Several other party leaders were long-term politicians. Job Dudley Tausinga, son of Ikan Rove—the Holy Mama or Supreme Authority of the Christian Fellowship Church (Tuza 1977)—led the Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement (SIPRA). The Democratic Party was led by lawyer Gabriel Suri. Malaitan John Garo headed the new Lafari Party, and Bellona trade unionist Joses Tuhanuku led the Labour Party. Long-time political hopeful Malaitan John Maetia Kaliuae led the United Party. Kemuel Laete led the Solomon Islands Youth for Change Group, and Edward Ronia headed the Christian Alliance Party. Candidates grouped loosely with the National Council of Women which, in a sense, became another party, and other independent candidates supplemented these formal political parties.

A few of these parties and groupings were well organised and well prepared for the election, while others were heard of first only a few weeks before the election. PAP, the longest surviving political party, was well organised, but it suffered under its own weight and age. The previous PAP-led government of Sir Allan Kemakeza had paid little or no attention to supporting the party. Consequently, some PAP officials became disgruntled and joined other political parties or groupings. In Solomon Islands, the government does not provide funding to support party officials, but this could change, as the new Sogavare government intends to introduce regulations to support party officials and secretariats.

The second factor that made the 2006 general election different from previous polls was that it generated a lot of interest and a greater number of individual candidates contested it. There were 328 candidates in the 2001

general elections; in 2006, there were 453 candidates, an increase of 125. The 2006 election saw, for the first time, a large number of women candidates (26). Interestingly, the province providing the highest number of women candidates (12, including three in Honiara) was Malaita, which is predominantly a patrilineal society. The next largest number came from Guadalcanal and Isabel provinces. The National Council of Women backed 15 of these candidates.

Some patterns remain the same in each election. There is no provision for absentee voting. Many Solomon Islanders returned to their villages all over the country to cast their votes, their trips home often paid for by aspiring political candidates (Wate 2006b). And, as usual, early in the run up to the election, individual candidates and the government attempted to clear the air on a number of issues. Some candidates manoeuvred to boost their image. For example, Joses Tuhanuku, the president of the Labour Party, called on voters to rid politics of Kemakeza.

The whole country knows that Allan Kemakeza was involved in a lot of very bad things during the ethnic tension. When he became Prime Minister in 2001, he appointed the ex-militants with guns to be his body guards, now most of them are in Rove prison and it is the RAMSI that is guarding him... Because of his lack of vision, Kemakeza has become a puppet for foreign interests, serving not the nation but his own and his cronies' vested interests (Solomon Star 2006b).

This call, however, fell on deaf ears. Even the fact that police had begun investigations into Kemakeza's alleged corruption in relation to huge pay-outs he made to himself when he was Minister of National Unity, Peace and Reconciliation in 2000—and allegations about his relationship with Geoffrey Moss, an Australian businessman banned from Solomon Islands (Mamu 2006b; Keilor 2006)—did not affect his re-election as MP for the Savo/Russells electorate. His re-election could demonstrate that local allegiances mean more than allegations of malpractice against a minister of the Crown.² There was also a certain kudos attached to Kemakeza as a former prime minister and the man who had invited RAMSI to Solomon Islands (Mamu 2006g).

On the other hand, one of Kemakeza's ministers, Alfred Sasako, was not as fortunate. Sasako, a seasoned journalist, created controversy with at least two diplomatic missions in Honiara—the Taiwanese Embassy and the Australian High Commission. In his media exchanges with the Taiwanese

Embassy, Sasako claimed that he had spent SI\$315,000—given to him by Taiwan to build a police house at Ato'ifi in his constituency—but the Taiwanese ambassador, Antonia C.S. Chen, disputed this claim.

There were many withdrawals of cash from the project account, but no specific explanation was given as to how the cash were [*sic*] spent. . . From their initial costing, the materials will cost \$140,000. But in the course of construction, they claimed that they ran out of materials so they came back and asked for some more finance. . . then they ran out of materials and came back a third time (Solomon Star 2006a).

Ambassador Chen pointed out that the cost of the police house should have been much less than SI\$315,000. Sasako also accused Australia of interfering in Solomon Islands' internal affairs. The Australian High Commissioner, Patrick Cole, described Sasako's accusations as baseless: '[g]iven the corruption and good governance problem[s] faced in the region by some seeking to run offshore international shipping registers, Australia made no secret of its strong support for the [Solomon Islands government's] decision not to proceed with establishing a register of its own' (Solomon Star 2006b).

A few days later, Prime Minister Kemakeza sacked Sasako from the cabinet for unnecessarily causing a stir with two of Solomon Islands' diplomatic friends. Sasako's outbursts and his widely publicised marital infidelity—highlighted on the front page of the *Solomon Star*—were adequate grounds for his constituents in East Kwaio to give him a 'thumbs down' and he lost his seat.

Many other accusations and exchanges of views on various issues, national and local, occurred during the run up to the elections and on the campaign trail. Candidates and parties campaigned for good governance and quality leadership, the eradication of corruption, fair distribution of development, unity and peace, law and order, economic recovery, the provision of adequate education and health services and women's issues. Most of all, however, they jockeyed for position in what was the most highly contested race in the nation's history.

The newspapers carried campaigns for fair and honest elections and advice on the roles of MPs. Individuals such as Dr Kabini Sanga, a New Zealand-based Solomon Islander academic, wrote newspaper articles

explaining the role of MPs as lawmakers and leaders. School students, clergy and one former governor-general also had their say (Sanga 2006; Concerned Students, Woodford International School 2006; Wate 2006e). The editorial in the *Solomon Star* the day before the election urged people not to be bribed by small gifts and promises from candidates.

Forget about what others may say to you, or any material goods that a candidate has already given you. When you go to the polls, it is you and your conscience alone. Forget about the candidates that gave you money or goods and asked you to vote for him or her. Forget about that relative candidate of yours who asked you to vote for him or her because he or she is your relative. Your future and that of your nation, is much more important than a bag of rice or \$100. This election is an opportunity for all of us to get rid of former MPs who did nothing in the last House, and replace them with quality and capable ones. At the polling station tomorrow, let your conscience decide (Solomon Star 2006c).

Two civil society groups campaigned strongly in urban and rural areas. The first was the AusAID-funded Civic Education Project, which had teams in all provinces creating awareness to help citizens vote wisely. The second group was Winds of Change, which, through its Clean Election Campaign, did its best to inspire all citizens to vote honestly and wisely. It urged sitting MPs, candidates and voters alike to sign a 'Voter's Pledge' committing potential politicians not to accept bribes or make false promises, and for everyone to reject corrupt dealings and vote selling (Figure 5.1). Some 5,000 voters, MPs and candidates signed the pledge forms. Whether they committed themselves honestly to their pledges is another matter, but this at least reminded candidates that people were concerned about dirty politics and that voters should not be bought with money or false promises (Wate 2006a, 2006f; Mamu 2006c, 2006f, 2006h).

The third factor that made the 2006 general elections different from previous elections was the use of the single ballot box system. Initial criticisms of this system abated after the electoral office and a civic education team conducted a massive educational campaign among voters. The single ballot box system definitely prevented the practice of selling votes or ballot papers on election day, but what it might not have stopped was a range of last-minute and unwarranted activities during the night before election

day. This became known as the ‘devil’s night’ because many cases of vote buying took place. That this occurred is common knowledge, but no one has challenged it in the courts.

No one political party or group was able to field candidates for all 50 electorates. The Liberal and Socred parties sponsored more than 30 candidates each, while most parties managed to field between five and 20 candidates, with the Solomon Islands Youth for Change Group sponsoring only one candidate in East Honiara.

Figure 5.1 Advertisement for the Clean Election Campaign, by Winds of Change, promoting the voter’s pledge

Clean Election Campaign

Have you signed your pledge yet?

ACCEPT BRIBES
VOTER'S PLEDGE
 I PLEDGE THAT I **will not** ...

- Accept bribes
- Accept any false promises
- Sell my vote
- Involve in any corrupt activity before, during or after the elections.

I PLEDGE THAT I **will** ...

- Use my full conscience to decide my vote
- Listen to God to help me decide my vote
- Vote for an honest leader.

Signed: _____
 Name: _____
 Village: _____
 Constituency: _____
 Province: _____
 Date: _____

Send your signed pledges to:
 Winds of Change
 CIC, PO Box 1762, Honiara
 or drop your pledge into the
 Clean Election Box at the
 Central Market, Kingsey's track
 or the Winds of Change
 Office in the Kukum Shops.

**Make A Personal Pledge to
 Make this A Clean Election**

**YOU and YOUR VOTE
 CAN make a DIFFERENCE**

Please send your pledge to Winds of Change,
 PO Box 1762, Honiara or drop it into our Clean Election
 Campaign Box at the Winds of Change office, at the
 Kukum Shops, or inside Kingsey's track.

Winds of Change

The 5 April 2006 national elections: results

Three observer groups with 44 foreign observers from the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum, bolstered by local volunteers, were present during the election in Honiara and in the provinces. They managed to visit more than 150 of the 802 polling stations in 29 of the 50 electorates (Wate 2006c, 2006d; Mamu 2006d, 2006e). The 2006 election was an improvement on the 2001 election because of the absence of guns and intimidation. The observer teams were satisfied and reported that the elections were free, fair and conducted in an orderly manner. In spite of this, some voters still claimed the elections were biased and unfair.

Of the 342,119 registered voters, 192,775, about 56 per cent, cast their votes in a population estimated to be about 500,000. In 2001, there were 178,083 votes cast from among 280,790 registered voters, or 63 per cent (Mamu 2006a). The fact that one constituency did not go to the polls because the sitting member (Job Dudley Tausinga) was returned unopposed meant that the percentage of those who voted in 2006 was lower than in 2001. Approximately 1,500 spoilt votes were recorded throughout the nation, mainly because of uncertainties in relation to using the single ballot box, but also because of poor-quality printing (Solomon Islands Government 2006a).

It is interesting to look back at my own predictions made the day before the election. I said that no political party would win more than 15 seats, which was a very different situation from 1989, when Solomon Mamaloni won 26 seats and formed the only one-party government in the history of the nation. My prediction of a coalition government proved quite correct (Wate 2006g). Another typical pattern in Solomon Islands politics also continued: the 50-seat parliament had an equal share of old and new members. Unfortunately, none of the 26 female candidates won, once more making parliament a male-dominated affair. The main problem for female candidates was that although they drew strong support during campaigning, the mood changed just before and on election day because male relatives and husbands usually have the final say on how women vote. Male candidates also had more money to buy votes. The average female candidate had only SI\$10,000–20,000 of personal funds available for campaigning, whereas male candidates often had access to SI\$100,000–200,000 gained

from business connections. The legal maximum under the Electoral Act is SI\$50,000 a candidate, but it is very difficult to track how candidates spend money during their campaigns. Families are inclined to block vote. A split for voting purposes is frowned on and, once more, women follow the lead of the family's male voters. After the election, the National Council of Women called for the introduction of quotas for women members of parliament (Mamu 2006i). Of the democratic governments in the world, about only 10 have no female representatives—five of these are in the Pacific.

The following seven political parties or groups failed to gain a seat in the present parliament: the One Nation Party, the Solomons First Party, Solomons Christian Alliance Party, the United Party, the Labour Party, the National Women's Council and the Solomon Islands Youth for Change Group. With the exception of the Labour Party and the United Party, these were late contenders who appeared just a few weeks before the election and had no real substance. Party fluidity and instability will remain a major problem in Solomon Islands politics for some time. This problem could be eradicated by the Sogavare government's plan to introduce legislation to strengthen political parties and discard Clause 66(2) of the national constitution, which provides for the existence of independent groups in parliament. The initial division when the new parliament sat was that the Sacred Party ended up with two seats, AIMP had 11, PAP had four, SIPRA had five, the Nasnol Pati had five, the Liberals had three, the Democratic Party had four, the Lafari Party secured two seats and the rest were independents (Solomon Islands Government 2006b). This scenario changed during 2006 as MPs moved from one party to another, or from opposition to the government side, and as cabinet ministers resigned or were sacked. In its initial months, the Sogavare government gained strength.

Formation of a new government: the election of Snyder Rini as prime minister

Soon after the election results were announced, new MPs made their way to Honiara for the vote for the prime ministership and the formation of a new government. Only five politicians signed the Winds of Change pledge that they would not accept bribes in relation to the vote for prime minister (Mamu 2006k). Unaligned politicians found themselves wooed, cajoled

and finessed by all groups; rumour has it that some MPs were bribed with between SI\$20,000 and SI\$60,000 to change sides, but all groups denied this. This scene described in the *Solomon Star* (Mamu 2006l) is typical: Martin Maga (MP for Temotu Pele) and Japhet Waipora (MP for West Makira) arrived in Honiara on a domestic flight on 12 April. Sir Tommy Chan beat Patteson Oti to the airport and whisked them away to his Honiara Hotel. Oti marched in, forcefully removed them and sped them off to the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel (Mamu 2006l). The AIMP, PAP and Lafari members set up camp at Chan's Honiara Hotel, immediately claiming 24 MPs (Mamu 2006j). People were clearly irritated with the Kemakeza government and with this attempt by the same group to hold power. Many Solomon Islanders wanted change, which showed in the final alignment of members. All other political parties outside the Honiara Hotel camp held a joint meeting, chaired by Job Tausinga, on 11 April and agreed that they would organise themselves with the aim of forming an alternative government. On 12 April, all members of the Sacred Party, the Democratic Party, SIPRA, the Nasnol Parti, the Liberal Party and some independents met at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel to discuss the idea of signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide and govern their working relationship, and to commit to forming the next government.

During the meeting, 26 MPs signed the MOU and four more promised to join. Even with those who signed up on 12 April, the coalition already represented more than half the 50-member parliament (Mamu 2006m). The Iron Bottom Sound group agreed to conduct an internal election and begin an elimination process to confirm one candidate for the post of prime minister. This vote took place on 13 April: the candidates were Tausinga, Patteson Oti, Derek Sikua, Joses Sanga and Milner Tozaka. One notable absence was Sogavare and the other Sacred Party MPs. Because of a misunderstanding, they did not participate in the internal election even though they had signed the MOU the previous day. After the signing of the MOU, Sogavare and his group (which then numbered about five MPs) decamped to the Pacific Casino Hotel and prepared to consolidate their numbers for the internal elimination process. When Sogavare and his group arrived at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel on 13 April to participate in the internal election, a commotion took place during which they were accused of trying to destabilise this camp. As a result, Sogavare's group withdrew and confirmed the formation of a third political camp at the Pacific Casino Hotel.

Before the elimination process, all candidates who contested the leadership signed an important pledge. They promised that, even if they lost, they would remain part of the group and support the winning candidate, who would eventually be their nominee for the post of prime minister. After four rounds of voting, Tausinga was declared the group's candidate. After that elimination, only one candidate (Milner Tozaka) broke his pledge and left to join the Honiara Hotel Group, which had endorsed as its candidate Snyder Rini (the deputy prime minister and education minister in the previous government). By 13 April, it was obvious that three political groups would compete for the prime ministerial post at the first meeting of parliament on 18 April. On Friday 14 April, the governor-general announced the three candidates for the post of prime minister: Tausinga, Sogavare and Rini. Had Sogavare remained with the Iron Bottom Sound group, Tausinga would have become the new prime minister; however, with three groups at three different locations, a complex round of campaigning occurred during the several days before the vote. The many negotiations between the three political camps were also played out in the media. The Tausinga-led group claimed it had the numbers to form the next government, while Rini's group counter-claimed and assured the nation that it had the numbers to form government. Wild claims were made and, at one stage, basic arithmetic suggested that there were 72 MPs involved—in a 50-seat parliament.

Sogavare's camp held the balance of power because it had 10–11 members at any one time, and it seemed possible that Sogavare could pull support from Rini's and Tausinga's groups to form government. There was also the possibility that Sogavare—who had already served as prime minister—would back Tausinga because he was the longest serving MP and because of the nature of Tausinga's electorate, which was the most stable in the nation. In practice, other forces were at play; 17 April was the second 'devil's night', with continuous twists and turns. During the night, the Iron Bottom Sound group heard confidential reports that Sogavare was willing to back Tausinga. Tausinga's camp did manage to get Sogavare and his group's support, but it was later alleged that Rini offered a better deal in terms of portfolio arrangements and possible project financing. In spite of this, the Tausinga camp was still confident of winning, even though the number of MPs supporting him fluctuated between 22 and 23. The number of MPs in Rini's camp fluctuated between 17 and 18.

On the morning of the parliamentary vote, the MPs at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel had breakfast and, after a short prayer, 20 of them boarded a bus while two others went in private vehicles. A large crowd had already gathered outside Parliament House. The governor-general, assisted by the clerk to the national parliament and the attorney-general, conducted the election. After the first round, Tausinga polled 22 votes, Rini 17 and Sogavare 11 (Mamu 2006n). In the final round after Sogavare had been eliminated, Rini polled 27 votes and Tausinga 23. When the Governor-General, Sir Nathaniel Waena, first appeared on the balcony of parliament and presented Rini as the new prime minister of Solomon Islands, there was a negative reaction from the waiting crowd. People began shouting 'Corruption', '*Waku* [Chinese] government', 'Same old government' and 'We want Tausinga'. The crowd was unhappy to see Kemakeza's former deputy as the new prime minister. They claimed that Rini's government would be the same as its predecessor—full of corruption and a puppet to Chinese businessmen such as Sir Tommy Chan and Robert Goh. The crowd at parliament definitely did not accept the decision and was horrified at the thought of another four years under 'Asian influence'.³

The 'Black Tuesday' riots

From just after midday until 6pm, the crowd prevented the new prime minister and his supporters leaving parliament. Only the 22 MPs who had voted for Tausinga were allowed to pass. The situation was unprecedented. At one stage, the RAMSI Participating Police Force (PPF) and security tried to help Rini escape, but they were stoned; several PPF officers were injured. PPF reinforcements arrived with riot gear, ready to do battle. The Speaker of Parliament, Sir Peter Kenilorea, appealed to the crowd to go home and to respect the parliament's decision, but they would not listen to him. As the afternoon went on, the situation deteriorated. The crowd torched and burned several RAMSI vehicles and about 50 RAMSI/PPF personnel were hurt. Kenilorea also appealed to the PPF not to use tear-gas, but was ignored. The use of tear-gas certainly aggravated the situation. Luckily, no one was killed.

Another crowd had massed in Point Cruz, the centre of Honiara, and just after 3pm they began to loot nearby shops. Their numbers were swelled by

the crowd from parliament (which is just above the Point Cruz area) and, after 6pm, the new crowd moved into Chinatown (a half-hour's walk away) selectively burning and looting Chinese-owned shops and businesses. About 600 Chinese fled to the Rove Police Club for safety. Some Chinese were airlifted out of the country during the next few days, but for those who stayed, Rove became a refugee camp for several weeks where the Solomon Islands Red Cross looked after them. While many returned to mainland China, most are now back in Honiara, although not in Chinatown, which has not yet been rebuilt.

After the crowd left parliament, the prime minister and members of the new government were moved to the Rove police headquarters under tight security and remained there for that night and the next day. Looting and burning continued around Chinatown until the next day. RAMSI and the PPF were ill prepared and could do little. RAMSI planning had cut the police force, removing most of the officers and temporarily weakening the force's capacity to deal with crises. The police chose, wisely, not to aggravate the crowd and looters, as they really could do nothing against the mob; consequently, however, local and PPF police stood helplessly by as millions of dollars worth of stock was looted and almost all buildings in Chinatown were destroyed. There was also some damage in surrounding suburbs, such as Kukum. I was with the Tausinga camp and the situation in Honiara was still very tense when we held meetings at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel to assess and monitor developments. Later that day, two MPs who had voted for Rini—Patrick Vahoe and Trevor Olovae—crossed over to join Tausinga's camp. They had been under pressure from their constituents to switch sides.

The next day, 19 April, 1,000 people marched to Government House to present a petition to the governor-general to remove Rini. Waena thanked them and told them to go home, promising that he would seek legal advice before responding to their petition in a live broadcast on national radio in two hours. The crowd had been well behaved, until, on the way back down the hill, they stopped to burn Robert Goh's residence at East Kola Ridge and burned and looted the Pacific Casino Hotel, where Goh had his office. Goh always claimed that his involvement in government was limited to a one-dollar annual fee, but few believed him. The rioters claimed that Goh, a shareholder in the Pacific Casino Hotel, and his company, which audited government accounts, had siphoned off millions of dollars under Kemakeza's

administration. Goh's was the only private house deliberately targeted by the mob. Patrick Leong, the main owner of the Pacific Casino Hotel, later accused RAMSI of not adequately protecting his property. Foolishly, he had relied on RAMSI police for protection and had refused an offer from members of the nearby Malaitan Fishing Village to protect his property (for a considerable price).

As promised, on the evening of 19 April, in a live address to the nation, the governor-general responded to the petitioners' demand and explained that, as the defender of the national constitution, he would not encourage Rini to resign. Rini stressed that he would not resign because this would set a bad precedent; he denied that he had bought votes and denied any Asian influence on his government. The next day, three important events occurred: under tight security, Rini was sworn in as prime minister; the governor-general imposed a curfew, from 6pm to 6am (Lamani 2006; Wasuka 2006a); and extra troops arrived from Townsville. The opposition then lodged a motion of no confidence in the prime minister as well as a motion to dissolve parliament, and called on the governor-general to convene parliament. These actions were primarily to ensure that the crisis would be solved only on the floor of parliament. The governor-general duly convened parliament on 26 April.

Over two days, one-quarter of the commercial centre of Honiara had been destroyed and a foreign racial group targeted. Church leaders and ordinary Solomon Islanders apologised to the Chinese for the destruction of their property. One of the first to do so was Archbishop Adrian Smith of the Catholic Church, and the Vatican was one of the first foreign governments to assist the Chinese refugees, with a small donation of SI\$38,000. One long-time Chinese resident and leader, Sir Henry Quan, had forewarned in early 2006 that the new Chinese immigrants were causing problems for the established Chinese residents. Many of these 'new' Chinese had been involved in scandals and corrupt practices, such as the fraudulent issuing of passports for remuneration, which allowed them to receive Solomon Islands citizenship after only two years, instead of the normal 10. Indeed, the looters did not target businesses belonging to Quan, George Wu or Aba Corporation, the owners of which were long-time Chinese residents and Solomon Islands citizens. The Chan family of Honiara Hotel also survived with their assets intact, due to their substantial private defence force and the help of

the Anglican Melanesian Brothers, who unleashed their religious *mana* (power) on behalf of Chan's hotel. After the riots, Quan was forthright in saying that some of the new Chinese were to blame for the unfortunate situation. He was also very critical of RAMSI's PPF for its lack of preparedness.

The 26 April meeting of parliament: Prime Minister Rini resigns

The numbers game continued, but at least this time, there were only two political groups: Rini's and Tausinga's, each with 25 MPs. The political situation was still uncertain as no MP really wanted to switch sides. On 25 April, a day before the meeting of parliament, Steve Abana, the MP for Fataleka—sensing that no camp would give way to the other—made a breakthrough with the idea of inviting Sogavare and his colleague Clay Soalaoi (MP for Temotu Vatud) to join forces with Tausinga. This would increase that side's position to 27 MPs. To break the political deadlock, Tausinga acted for the betterment of the nation, relinquished his bid for the post of prime minister and offered to support Sogavare. I had been involved in Tausinga's political campaign and had the opportunity of discussing this very important matter. We agreed that it had to be done. This humble gesture by Tausinga will go down in the nation's political history as one of the greatest moments: an act that saved the nation from more turmoil.⁴ On 26 April, just before parliament met, Sogavare and Soalaoi (who were still cabinet ministers in the Rini government) arrived at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel and accompanied Tausinga to parliament.

There was a heavy RAMSI military and security presence around Parliament House. The motion of no confidence in Rini was scheduled to be moved during the meeting; however, before moving it, the outspoken MP for Temotu Nende, Patteson Oti, made a statement in parliament recommending that Prime Minister Rini resign rather than face the no-confidence vote, as he no longer had the necessary support. Rini was surprised to see two of his ministers sitting on the opposition bench and he asked the parliament for a brief adjournment for consultation purposes. When parliament resumed half an hour later, Rini acted honourably, in compliance with tradition and the national constitution: he resigned on the floor of parliament. After eight days in office, Rini became the shortest serving prime minister in Solomon Islands history (Wasuka 2006b, 2006c).

After Rini's resignation, there were shouts of jubilation in the streets of Honiara, as people felt that Rini had finally listened to them (Rusa 2006). The repercussions of the riots continued, however, with fears that essential food items, provided mainly by Chinese shops, would run out. This was only temporary and the economic effects of the riots were not serious except, of course, for the Chinese shop-owners. The final political fall-out was more devastating than the initial food shortage. Two Honiara MPs, Charles Dausabea and Nelson Ne'e, were arrested and placed in police custody, as they were alleged to have been involved in orchestrating the riots. The overall situation improved and the curfew was lifted on 27 April. People were free once again to move around the capital after dark (Wate 2006h).

The election of Manasseh Sogavare as prime minister—4 May

When nominations for prime minister opened on 27 April, the political group at Iron Bottom Sound Hotel nominated Sogavare as its candidate, with Tausinga, Sikua, Oti and Ulufa'alu (whom Sogavare had replaced as prime minister in 2000) as his nominees. The Rini camp put forward Fred Fono, the MP for Central Kwara'ae, as their candidate (Wate 2006i). For the first time in Solomon Islands' political history, a second round of campaigning for the election of a prime minister was held within a month. The political situation was still tense and uncertain, because, after the arrests of Dausabea and Ne'e, the Sogavare camp decreased by two to 25 MPs, while Fono maintained 23 members. The Sogavare group consolidated its numbers by holding a series of daily meetings. There was tight security to prevent agents from the other group coming in to lure members away. The same was true of Fono's camp, backed by the AIMP, PAP, Lafari Party and the Independent Group (Wate 2006j).

The party leaders within the Sogavare group appointed a drafting committee to draw up new policy initiatives in the event of Sogavare's election as prime minister. I was appointed the chairman of the committee and our task was to harmonise the different views on a wide range of issues raised in the manifestos of the six political parties and groups, namely the Socred, Liberal, SIPRA, Democratic and Nasnol parties and a few independents. The priority at that stage, however, was to consolidate the group supporting Sogavare. The final meeting on the afternoon of 3 May was attended by 25 MPs, with the support of the two MPs in custody.

During the night of 3 May, security personnel at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel confirmed that Fono's agents had tried all night to lure at least two Malaitan MPs from the Sogavare camp. Fono even gave a note to a senior security officer, Medley Kwalumanu, promising him SI\$10,000 if he could persuade the MP for Lau/Mbalelea, Samuel Bentley Rogosimani, and the MP for East Kwaio, Stanley Sofu, to change sides. This note was kept as evidence. Several weeks later, when Fono claimed that Sogavare's camp used dirty tactics before the election, Kwalumanu spoke out against Fono in the media, calling him a hypocrite, and the note bearing Fono's signature and mobile phone number was published in the *Solomon Star* (Wate 2006l). This silenced Fono.

On 18 April, the crowd outside Parliament House had been noisy. On 4 May, it was silent, waiting nervously for the result of the contest between Sogavare and Fono. The governor-general had agreed that the two MPs who were in police custody could participate in the election. A bizarre scene ensued as parliament waited while two officials, accompanied by police, went to the police cells so Dausabea and Ne'e could cast their votes (Wasuka 2006d).⁵ After only one round of voting, Sogavare polled 28 votes to Fono's 22.⁶ Sogavare was duly elected prime minister for the second time. When the waiting crowd received this election result, there was shouting and cries of delight in the streets and vehicles blared their horns. At the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel, the MPs who had voted for Sogavare waited for the prime minister-elect singing hymns of praise. When Sogavare arrived, Bishop Leslie Boseto, the MP for South Choiseul, said prayers of thanksgiving. Tausinga was the last MP Sogavare embraced and they sat down together to enjoy the celebrations.

Manasseh Sogavare was born on 17 January 1955 in Papua New Guinea. A Seventh-day Adventist from eastern Choiseul, he left high school in 1974 to become a clerk in the Honiara Consumers Cooperative shop, but soon moved to another clerical position, in the Inland Revenue Division of the Ministry of Finance. Sogavare rose through the ranks to become the Commissioner for Inland Revenue in 1991 and permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance in 1993. He resigned in 1994 because of a disagreement with the Mamaloni government, and went to study accounting and economics at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. He won the East Choiseul seat in the 1997 elections and became minister for finance in the Ulufa'alu government. Sacked in 1999, Sogavare became leader of the opposition and completed a flexible-delivery Masters degree in management studies from

Waikato University. When Sogavare took over from Ulufa'alu in late June 2000, large forces were positioned against him. His first prime ministership was a balancing act, as he had to placate the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). After the general election in December 2001, he became leader of the opposition for a period.

By the time he was voted in as prime minister for the second time, he was a much wiser man, and well blooded in the political arena. A powerfully built martial arts expert with the distinctive jet-black skin typical of the western Solomons, Sogavare is physically impressive. He dresses well and has piercing eyes. A day after his election, Sogavare announced his new cabinet line-up, but two appointments did not go down well with the public or overseas observers: Dausabea and Ne'e were offered portfolios, with the justification that they had been charged but should be presumed innocent until convicted. The situation was made worse when Sogavare offered Dausabea the police and national security portfolio. National and international commentators ridiculed Sogavare, spoiling what had until then been support from all sides. Australia's Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, was scathing, but, as Sogavare said at the time, Australia and members of RAMSI had no right 'to interfere in matters concerning the appointment or removal of ministers within the Government of Solomon Islands' (Wasuka 2006e). After local pressure was applied, however, caretaker ministers were appointed and, a little later, Dausabea's and Ne'e's appointments were withdrawn (O'Callaghan 2006; Wate 2006k; Wasuka 2006f).

Two weeks later, the Grand Coalition for Change policy framework document was released. In the foreword, Prime Minister Sogavare wrote

[t]he Grand Coalition for Change Government is very serious about leading this country in the direction that will benefit and uplift the people of Solomon Islands. To this end, it has to be reform minded, people focused and rules based. It will remove barriers that impede 'development with a human face' to occur at the grassroots level and will carry out policies through government structures that will deliver results. The GCC government's vision is to give this country hope, prosperity and peace in a secure environment (Grand Coalition for Change Government 2006).

The document focused principally on a bottom-up approach to rural development, which was to be implemented once funds were allocated in the February 2007 national budget.

Of the many pressing issues the government faced, the main ones were: understanding the causes of the Honiara riots; determining the future relationship with RAMSI; federalism; the need to restore ethical leadership; establishing a commission of inquiry into land dealings on Guadalcanal before the crisis; and the need for a truth and reconciliation commission relating to the 1998–2000 crisis period.

With regard to the April 2006 Honiara riots, a commission of inquiry was established to look into its causes; unfortunately, however, attempts were made to derail it. The appointed chairman, former Australian judge Marcus Einfeld, came under scrutiny in the Australian and Solomon Islands press for exaggerating his qualifications and anomalies in other legal matters (Mamu 2006o, 2006q; Wate 2006s; Nason 2006; Merritt 2006; Andrusiak and Merritt 2006; Merritt and Andrusiak 2006). In the Solomon Islands, Attorney-General, Primo Afeau, challenged Sogavare in court over two of the inquiry's terms of reference concerning Ne'e and Dausabea. He argued that they should not be included in the commission's brief as this would constitute contempt of court (Mamu 2006p, 2006q; Afeau 2006; Wate 2006n, 2006o; Sogavare 2006) because Dausabea's and Ne'e's cases were already being tried. In his deliberations on 6 September, however, Justice John Brown of the High Court ruled that the two terms did not constitute contempt as the commission had not begun. The two terms were, first, for the commission to investigate the role of any MP (including Dausabea and Ne'e) in the execution of the April civil unrest; and second, to review the circumstances relating to the arrest, charging and detention of those accused, as well as to investigate and evaluate the basis on which their continued detention in custody was reasonably justified and not politically motivated. The commission was set to proceed with its work. Sogavare initially stood by Einfeld and the terms of the commission, but he eventually gave in—replacing Einfeld as head of the commission with a retired Papua New Guinea judge. He also eventually backed down over the two contentious terms of reference.

There were allegations that RAMSI and the Australian High Commission played a part in attempts to derail the commission of inquiry because it might find fault with the RAMSI police and the Australian police commissioner for not doing enough to contain the riots.⁷ On 12 September, the Australian High Commissioner, Patrick Cole, was expelled—a severe move that no government would take without great provocation. Unwilling to

countenance the continued bullying and criticism by Australia and Cole—who was accused of trying to stop external funding of the commission—and given Cole’s previous behaviour, which had led Rini to ask for his recall, Sogavare ordered that Cole be removed (Wate 2006t; Walters 2006). Australia’s Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, countered by saying that he believed the expulsion was ‘a personalised attack for no good reason’ (ABC 2006) and that the Sogavare government was using the commission of inquiry to cloak the nefarious activities of Dausabea and Ne’e, as well as to attack RAMSI. Others have suggested that Sogavare has been beholden to Dausabea since 2000, when he and other Malaitans supported Sogavare’s nomination as prime minister (Manimu 2006). There has also been criticism of the relationship between Sogavare and Julian Moti, an Australian lawyer of Indo-Fijian descent, who has become mixed up in the legal wrangling over the commission. Aspects of Moti’s past have led to questions about his suitability for office (Downer has also been scathing about Moti). Nevertheless, Moti was made a QC and was appointed to replace Afeau as attorney-general (Wate 2006q, 2006r; Eremae 2006; Kenilorea 2006; Moti 2006). During this difficult time, Australia’s media behaved disgracefully in its unwarranted attacks on the Solomon Islands government (Sydney Morning Herald 2006; Skehan 2006; Sheridan 2006; Walters 2006; The Australian 2006).

The second pressing issue for the new government was to arrive at some understanding with RAMSI to strengthen the partnership, taking into account areas in which RAMSI should start training Solomon Islanders to take over from it, even if this takes another five or so years. The government agreed that RAMSI has a role to play in rehabilitating Solomon Islands and it renewed its tenure in 2006, but a thorough reassessment was considered necessary. The Sogavare government was reasserting national sovereignty and RAMSI seemed uneasy about this. RAMSI and particularly Australia as the major partner were largely able to have their own way with the Kemakeza government between 2003 and early 2006. The ease with which they could ‘handle’ the Solomon Islands government no longer exists and RAMSI and Australia are smarting under the strain of dealing with the independent Sogavare government.

The third leading issue was the long-standing wish by the majority of Solomon Islanders to implement federalism. The costs involved in establishing

federalism and the shape it will take have not yet been confirmed—the matter was to be finalised in 2007 through a national independent constitutional congress. A few provinces have already prepared themselves for federalism. For example, Makira/Ulawa Province has passed an ordinance known as the Community Governance Regime, which involves setting up ward councils of chiefs and ward development authorities. Interestingly, they do not want new elections or a state parliament (see Scales, this volume).

The fourth major issue was to ensure that ethical leadership is practised; this involves weeding out corruption and bad governance. The government commenced preparing several pieces of legislation, including an anti-corruption bill, a political parties integrity bill and a code of conduct for all MPs. It is galling to have the Australian prime minister and foreign minister accuse the Sogavare government of corruption when it is trying hard to introduce mechanisms that will place limits on corruption.

The fifth matter was the institution of a commission of inquiry into land-tenure issues on Guadalcanal before the social crisis that began in 1998. This is the basis of Guale concerns, which will not be quieted until there is a thorough investigation of the events that led to the crisis years. The sixth urgent matter was the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission to uncover the root causes of the social crisis of 1998–2000 and to provide an opportunity for real healing to take place. There have been calls for such a commission from many quarters and it is necessary to achieve national reconciliation and unity. Once again, however, RAMSI and the Australian High Commission have not been supportive.

Since independence in 1978, the Solomon Islands government has always supported the Republic of China (Taiwan) while often also flirting with the People's Republic of China (Moore 2004:163–4). Although Sogavare made certain statements that seemed ambivalent and Taiwan's ambassador issued a plaintive plea for continued support (Chen 2006), Sogavare finally came out strongly in support of Taiwan. Before taking a trip to Taiwan in July 2006, he gave assurances that he was not displaying a double standard and requested that the Nasnol Pati dishonour a memorandum of understanding it had signed with the government of mainland China in late 2005 (Wate 2006m). Francis Billy Hilly and his party rejected the request, saying that the issue was never raised at joint party meetings. This led Sogavare to sack Hilly from his cabinet and replace him with Ped Shannel from the opposition, although it has also been

suggested that Sogavare was protecting the general secretary of his political party, Filipino Siri Ramon Quitala (Mamu 2006r). For Sogavare, this was an issue about the integrity of his government, but no doubt it will also reap benefits in strengthening the relationship with Taiwan.

In October 2006, the opposition moved a motion of no confidence against the Sogavare government; however, Sogavare's diplomatic fracas with Australia only strengthened his domestic standing and the motion was defeated.

The 2006 general election brought with it much hope and a wish for clean and honest government. The three different observer teams agreed that the elections were free, fair and honest. When Rini was voted in as prime minister on 18 April, the people's hopes for a better Solomon Islands were short-circuited and the Honiara crowd reacted negatively, causing the April riots. One could argue that Honiara is not representative of the nation—and certainly the nation cannot be ruled by a Honiara mob—but I would argue that the crowd captured the mood of the majority of Solomon Islanders, who wanted change and were devastated to see Rini elected. The destructive actions of the mob, however regrettable, in their own way resembled the people's power that swept Corazon Aquino to office in the Philippines in 1986. The people spoke and the politicians had to listen.

The April riots were also a symptom of something bigger and deeper. The targets were Chinese business houses because they had been controlling the country's economy for so long. People resented the fact that some Chinese had become involved in politics and corruptly influenced politicians. The Chinese faced the brunt of the rage of indigenous Solomon Islanders, but they were the obvious face of a much larger Asian community and extensive corruption. For example, Koreans, Malaysians and Filipinos represent corrupt forces in the logging industry and the new Chinese (as distinct from the 'old', pre-World War II Chinese families) became involved in scandals such as the fraudulent issuing of passports. These new Chinese are notorious for the poor treatment of their workers. As well, foreigners (mainly Chinese) own a large amount of property in Honiara. These matters do not go down well with the populace, whose anger welled over in April 2006.

When RAMSI first came to the Solomon Islands, there were high hopes that the nation's problems would be tackled. Slowly, this is occurring, but too slowly, and much more still needs to be done. Sogavare's Grand Coalition

for Change government was setting priorities intended to improve people's lives. Political stability is crucial to ensure a conducive environment for economic progress and, after the experiences of April 2006 which saw factions of MPs camped in three hotels (at great expense), it was clear that ways must be found to improve political stability. Legislation is to be introduced so that the governor-general could approach the MP who commands the most support after an election to form government. The intention was to get rid of the corrupt politics and the political horse-trading that presently mars our parliamentary system.

The second Sogavare government intended to embark on a program of land reform to deal with the convolutions of Solomon Islands' traditional land-tenure systems. A tribes and customary land titles bill was to be drafted with the intention of encouraging people to work on their land, open it up for development and make customary land a transferable commodity. Cultural mapping of land also continued under the Customary Land and Recording Act (Wate 2006p). The decentralisation of power and development are crucial issues and the government intended to work in this area to ensure that rural people benefit from their hard work and resources.

The people know that, ultimately, they are the owners of the resources and the development process. They must become full participants in this bottom-up approach to rural development, knowing that they have contributed to the overall development and progress of Solomon Islands. It is only then that we will realise that a rainbow across the mountains is part of this development and we should not fear pointing our finger at it. By pointing our finger at the rainbow in the sky, we are aiming to build a sound, united, peaceful and progressive Solomon Islands for us and our children.

Acknowledgments

This chapter was completed in late 2006. It contains the author's own opinions and is in no way representative of the views of the then Solomon Islands government.

Notes

- 1 I take as my text here Hereniko and Wesley-Smith 2003.
- 2 Kemakeza was arrested in October 2006 (Wate 2006u).
- 3 A video recording exists of the lead up to the riot outside parliament, recorded for use by a new TV station in Honiara.
- 4 Tausinga became deputy prime minister, until his resignation in December 2006.
- 5 There was a precedent for this: another MP had been allowed to vote while in hospital.
- 6 It was alleged that Rini voted for Sogavare.
- 7 See Moore, this volume. Moore concluded that the police commissioner was unprepared to handle the situation and that the RAMSI police performed poorly. The Australian government reaction to the commission of inquiry seems to indicate that they fear a similar conclusion.

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