

Chapter 5: Flesh on the Skeleton

Until the people of the Colony realise their duty towards the working classes of the Colony, until we fix a minimum wage for the working classes in the Colony, we must provide relief to these people, not as act of charity but as a matter of obligation.

A.D. Patel 1945

The Indian has not the slightest desire or motive to dominate any community in Fiji. We have got to find a solution whereby none of the three important communities residing in Fiji may have any reason to feel that any one of them is being dominated by another other.

A.D. Patel 1947

The smoke from the fires in the cane fields had barely cleared the mountain ranges of Western Viti Levu when elections for the Legislative Council were held. A.D. Patel was elected to the Council from the North Western Indian constituency, winning 1841 votes to 554 for the incumbent and his opponent in the strike, B.D. Lakshman.¹ The main reason for Patel's victory was his role in the 1943 sugar cane strike. The government and opponents of the strike had hoped that because of the hardships they had suffered, the Indian cane growers would reject Patel. The growers, however, thought otherwise. Patel would remain an elected member of the Council for the next six years, defeating his old rival Chatur Singh by 1722 votes to 1106 in the 1947 election. The post-war years were a time of unprecedented flux in the colony as it struggled to accommodate the social, economic and political issues and challenges that followed the war. We will look at Patel's thoughts on some of them, but first it is necessary briefly to look at another event which cast a dark shadow over the subsequent history of Fiji: the Second World War.

Fiji, like all the other members of the British Empire, went to war on 4 September 1939. The Governor announced the news at 8 o'clock that night by radio. The freedom of the whole world would be in danger if the principle of might is right were allowed to go unchallenged, he said. 'But far more than this, the peoples of the world would be kept in bondage of fear; and all hope of settled peace and security of justice and liberty among nations, would be ended. This is the ultimate issue that confronts us.'² A curfew was declared, censorship on postal and telegraphic communication imposed and the movement of enemy

¹ Patel did not contest the 1940 election because he was in India attending a conference of the Indian National Congress as a representative of the Fiji Indian community.

² CSO F115/11.

aliens monitored. Measures were taken to increase the revenue of the colony to meet the extra cost of supporting the imperial war effort. Individual and residential taxes were increased by 25 per cent and corporate taxes by 50 per cent. Eventually, Fiji's total war expenditure would amount to nearly £5 million, the largest of any comparable colony in the Empire, and nearly half of the total revenue raised in Fiji during the war years. Individuals contributed generously. The Indian community raised enough money on their own to buy a fighter bomber for the Royal Air Force, which they asked to be named the *Fiji Indian*.

At first the news of the outbreak of the war caused much anxiety in Fiji, but with time, life returned to normal. It was difficult to remain constantly on edge about an event taking place on the other side of the world. But when Japan entered the war in 1941, the situation changed, even more so as it advanced menacingly southwards into the Pacific. To enlist the support of the Indian community, the government appointed a broadly representative Central Indian War Committee whose members included, besides A.D. Patel, Vishnu Deo, A.R. Sahu Khan, B. Raghvanand, Tulsi Ram Sharma, Andrew Inder Narayan Deoki, K.B. Singh, B.D. Lakshman, Dr C.M. Gopalan, Dr Girin Mukherji, H. Sahodar Singh, and Ramakrishnan. On 11 May, the Committee met to consider various proposals put forward by the government regarding the war effort.³ A number of resolutions were adopted. The Committee noted the change in the government's invitation to the representatives of the Indian community to discuss ways of furthering the war effort, but sought 'further assurance that the policy of political and economic discrimination against non-European races in the Colony would be abandoned.'

Petty racial discrimination rankled with the Indian community. There was residential segregation in all the major municipalities. Indians could not use the Suva Sea Baths even though they paid their city rates. The best wards in hospitals were reserved for Europeans. No non-European could hold any position in the civil service beyond the level of grade two. Europeans were entitled to trial by jury in all cases at law, but non-Europeans were not. Non-European children were excluded from European schools, such as the Suva Grammar. There were other petty restrictions, including the liquor restriction which required Fijians and Indo-Fijians of 'good standing' to apply for a permit to drink. If the war was being fought to secure peace and justice and freedom, as the Governor had said it was, then these values should be reflected in the public life of the colony, Indian leaders demanded. The government had indicated that it might enlist Indian troops for the Fighting Battalion, Pioneer Battalion, Reserve Pioneer Battalion and other units including the Medical Corps. The Committee raised no objection but requested recruitment on a voluntary basis. This was important, because the Indian farmers were living in settlements and depended on their own, as

³ *Fiji Times*, 12 May 1942.

opposed to communal, labour to work their land. The Committee insisted that non-European soldiers, including the Indian recruits, receive the 3s.0d per day and the separation allowance of 3s.0d and 1s.6d per child that Europeans were receiving: equal pay, equal worth, equal risk. And finally, the Committee agreed for the Indian community to participate, at government direction, in any 'other measures of relief vital to the safety of the civilian population of the Colony.' For the Indian leaders, the principle of equality was important. As they told the Governor, 'It is a question of terms and conditions, not the intrinsic value of money. It is the value generally placed on Indian labour and Indian service.' It was, for them, the question of the 'value of the life of an Indian joining the Labour Battalion.' Said Hasan, the Muslim leader, said he did not favour discrimination and that he appreciated the 'reality of the situation' but he asked the government to pay at least a living wage to those who bore the brunt of increased cost of living on account of the war.

The Indian community's response appeared lukewarm, conditional, while the Fijian community was exuberant in its support of the war effort. Culture, history, the nature and focus of the recruiting drive, and official attitudes and preconceptions, all accounted for the difference in the attitude of the two communities toward the war effort.⁴ There were many reasons for this disparity. The Indian Central War Committee gave some of them, but there were others. One was the government's reluctance to enlist Indians as soldiers, official pronouncements notwithstanding. In 1916, the government had rejected Manilal's offer to send an Indian platoon 'to take part in the responsibilities of the Empire at such a critical time as the present.'⁵ It reluctantly created an Indian Platoon in 1934, but disbanded it in 1940, just when it was asking the Indians to enlist. When the issue was raised, the Governor added that the 'disbandment was not due in any sense to [the] unwillingness on the part of the Indians to serve in the armed forces of the colony.'⁶

Soon after the outbreak of the war, the South Indian community approached the government through A.D. Patel and offered a volunteer corps to do first aid work and requested training and equipment for that purpose. The government did nothing. Chattur Singh approached the Governor and offered to enlist his own two sons in the army and navy. Sir Philip Mitchell, the Governor replied: 'I am the Commander-in-Chief, but I cannot rule the army.'⁷ In 1942, 40 Indo-Fijians

4 See Ravuvu, *Fijians At War*, 1974. The following account of the Indian response draws heavily on Lal, 1992, 122-124.

5 CSO 5113/16.

6 *Fiji Times*, 2 May 1942.

7 Personal communication with the late Chattur Singh. I have his letter on the subject. A.R. Sahu Khan's account of difficulties is in the Legislative Council Debates of 20 December 1965.

in Ba offered to enlist, but the European officials turned them down for various reasons. Similarly, when 50 Muslims volunteered for service, without any conditions, refusing to make equal compensation an issue, nothing happened.

One reason was the European opposition to giving the Indians any military training at all. The Indian community's loyalty to the Colony was suspect, not necessarily because of anything it had done but because of events in India, such as the gathering pace of the nationalist movement there, which the Fijians and particularly Europeans did not understand but which they nevertheless detested intensely. Giving Indians military training could conceivably sow the seeds of problems further down the road. On top of all this, the officials thought that Indians would not make good soldiers anyway, unable to submit 'themselves to the control, restrictions and rigours of life in a strictly disciplined force, to accept without complaint the restrictions of individual rights and convenience inevitable in a disciplined communal life, to accept and obey unquestioningly, the orders of superior officers and especially to have the capacity rapidly to assimilate to complicated training which is the lot of modern soldiers.'⁸ The colonial officials conveniently forgot that the Sikhs were regarded as being among the best soldiers in the world, having served with distinction in the British Indian Army since the middle of the 19th century. Given such an attitude, it was no wonder that the government's recruitment drive among the Indians lacked focus and energy.

The truth was that the government did not want Indians as soldiers but as producers of foodstuff. Fiji was an agricultural colony, the Governor said, 'composed of islands which in the nature of things do not produce munitions of war and whose peasant farmers in these circumstances could probably best help the war effort by pursuing their own vocations.' 'I assure you,' he told the Indian Central War Committee, 'and I ask you to carry that assurance back to your Districts when you return—that the efforts of the Indians in Fiji in response to Government appeals for the growing of foodstuffs and the maintenance of essential agricultural interests have been not one of the least important contributions made to the prosecution of the war effort.'⁹ The CSR shared that view. Its manager at the Lautoka mill, E.H. Griffith, wrote to District Commissioner J. Judd that recruitment of Indians was hurting the sugar industry and should be discontinued. The District Officer Nadroga was accordingly instructed by Judd that on 'no account are tenants [of the CSR] to be permitted to leave their farms to join the Labour Battalion.'¹⁰ The Company's

8 Governor's address to the Legislative Council on 23 November 1957 on why he was unable to authorise the enlistment of Indo-Fijians for Malaya. The logic was the same in 1943.

9 *Fiji Times*, 2 May 1942.

10 CSOF8/69.

tenants were bound by an agreement not to be absent from their farms for more than two months a year; so the choice between enlisting for war on the one hand and keeping their farms on the other was no choice at all.

It was often said that the Indian leaders were actively disloyal. A.D. Patel was accused by an Indian agent in government service of being 'hopeful that the Japanese would invade the island' because he, Patel, was 'dreaming of a Japanese wife.'¹¹ This was an amusing invention of a hyper-active mind of a government informer. To be sure, not everyone in the Indian community thought that the membership of the British Empire was a badge of honour. Many were still tied by emotional and cultural ties to India, and followed the news of developments there. That was only to be expected in a colony characterised by communal compartmentalisation which had obstructed the development of a common citizenship. But there was no question of not defending Fiji if it were attacked. As it happened, not a single shot was fired in the defence of the colony. Nonetheless, it is true that Fiji Indians were on the whole reluctant to become cannon fodder in the defence of a 'white race empire.' Poverty, indebtedness, disease, and discrimination were for many ordinary people far greater evils to be fought and eradicated first before shedding blood on alien lands to defend colonialism and imperialism. The Indian community was never disloyal to the colony. Only exuberant Fijian war effort and European propaganda made them appear so.

Patel articulated the interests and aspirations of the Indian community in the Legislative Council which he entered in 1944 and where he remained until 1950. His tenure there coincided with profound changes in Fiji in the immediate aftermath of the war. Some changes were planned by the government as part of its 'post-war reconstruction' policy, to guide Fiji to a new order without losing control of the direction or nature of the changes. These included reforms in social legislation, immigration, the structure and power of local government, native lands policy, education, health and the constitution. Patel's contribution to the debates on these issues demonstrates a trenchant critique of government policy, and provides tantalising glimpses into an alternative vision for Fiji. Among the changes Patel advocated in the 1940s included rapid localisation of the public service, protection of the right of workers to organise, social security and the acceptance of the principle of equal pay for equal work, irrespective of gender, creed or race.

At the core of Patel's vision was the call for an open, equitable and non-racial society. The passion with which he advocated this vision was often rejected with equal passion by Fijian and European members and ultimately by the government itself. There were also issues on which Patel differed from his

11 CSOCF2/19/1.

own Indian colleagues, such as Pandit Vishnu Deo. These differences had deep cultural and ideological roots in the Indian community, and they eventually helped to cause Patel's electoral defeats.

In 1944, as the war receded from the South Pacific, the colonial government, with the guidance of Whitehall, began planning for a new order in Fiji. It produced blueprints to build or improve the infrastructure of the colony—building bridges, tarsealing roads, improving water supply in urban areas, extending electricity, planning better hospitals. Peoples' horizons had been widened, and the government was keenly aware of the need to act quickly. All these planned changes were 'beautiful and useful things in themselves,' Patel said, 'as important to this new social order as the skeleton is to the human body.' The provision of new facilities and the expansion of the infrastructure were important, but not enough by themselves. What was needed, Patel said, was a broad vision of social security to the poorest sections of society to 'ensure to human beings freedom from want and freedom from fear.' What was required was to fulfil Whitehall's promise to raise the standard of living 'of those whose incomes were not adequate to ensure them a decent standard of living.' The colony had been assured that the labour penal laws, which were 'a disgrace', would be repealed, and the trade union movement and the working classes would regain the right of collective bargaining. 'When will the dawn come that heralds this new era which is supposed to be based on equity and social justice?' asked Patel in December 1944.¹²

The government pointed to the newly-created Department of Labour which was specifically instructed to look into matters relating to workers' complaints. But, argued Patel, the Commissioner of Labour, Stuart Reay, was a second grade official, whose office consisted of just himself and a typist. The employers and the labourers alike saw him as a District Commissioner elevated to the rank of a Commissioner of Labour, with the result that neither side had confidence in him. When Patel criticised the ineffectiveness of the labour department, he was speaking from experience. He had been a member of the National Service Tribunal and seen at first hand how, untutored in industrial dispute resolving procedures, the workers were unable to present their case effectively in arbitrations. He gave an example. Two official inquiries had found that even with the most elementary standard of living on the most meagre budget, the workers were unable to make ends meet. When they struck for better wages, the government asked them to go before the tribunal. But the workers hesitated, not understanding the complications of law and the legal machinery. To begin with, they had to make a case before the tribunal could consider it under the National Service Regulations. Hampered by ignorance of legal procedures, the workers could not distinguish between agitating for a living wage and asking for a wage

12 Legislative Council Debate.

increase due to the increased cost of living during wartime. As the two issues were confused, they ended up with an award that linked their bonus to the cost of living index, with the result that, as Patel put it, 'the present income of a labourer is still less than it was before the war to meet his needs.'

There were some in official circles, not to mention among employers, who thought that the workers 'were very inefficient and slack in their work'. For his part, the Commissioner of Labour accused Patel and others like him of appeasing the labourers. Patel disagreed. The workers, he said, 'had shown an admirable amount of patience and understanding,' but their goodwill could not, and should not, be taken for granted. They were among the poorest sections of the community, furnishing the largest number of destitutes. He pleaded for a minimum wage legislation for the workers. 'Until the people of this colony realise their duty towards the working classes of the colony, until we fix such a minimum wage for the working classes of this colony, we must provide relief to these people not as an act of charity but as a matter of obligation.' The cane crushing season was about to start, Patel warned, and the labourers would naturally be asking questions about their work, wages, conditions of employment and other such matters. Unless the government acted quickly, it might have a major industrial dispute on its hands.

There was something else to consider. Labour relations, Patel said, was not an issue that could be left to the employers and the employees alone. 'Of course we have made promises that the trade union movement will receive every encouragement at the hands of the government but we must also consider the illiteracy and the ignorance of these unskilled labourers.' The workers, Patel said, would need 'some time and some training and some education before they will be in a position effectively to organise themselves and be in a position collectively to enforce a fair and just bargain from their employers.' Until then, he said, the government should treat the workers as their wards, and not act as 'sheep dogs of the employers of the Colony.' The government listened, but refused to act.

In December 1945, the government moved to amend the Residential and War Tax Bill. In doing so, it wanted to remove the war time label, and increase the amount from £1 and ten shillings to £2 annually. The tax was to be paid by 20,000 non-Fijians who 'are not touched to any great extent by other forms of direct or indirect taxation,' exceptions being people with more than five children (or with other dependents), prisoners, students and others suffering from some disability. The government justified the tax on a number of grounds. First, the amount was not excessive and it did not represent a substantial increase on the existing amount, an increase from merely 2 shillings and 6 pence a month to 3 shillings and 4 pence a month. Second, if people wanted improvements in health, schools, settlement schemes and other social services, they had to

contribute. And third, it was not fair to increase direct taxation while retaining the residential tax. The government thus justified the increase on the grounds of fairness and equity.

Patel led the opposition to the Bill. The government's argument about removing the war label on the bill was misleading, he said. There was no question of removing the war label as the War Taxation Ordinance of 1940, levied specifically for the duration of the war, for a definite purpose and a definite period, was to end in December 1946 anyway. The government was simply using the removal of the war label as an excuse to increase the residential tax from £1 to £2. To the argument that the increase was not substantial, Patel replied: 'As a member of the Labour Services Tribunal I had an experience where the representatives of the employers were fighting over not a half-penny but a fraction of a half-penny a day, in the calculation of wages, but now when it comes to the labourer an amount slightly more than a penny a day is considered to be merely an insignificant thing that does not bring any hardship on them. A penny deducted from a daily wage of 4 shillings may not be felt, but every penny counted when it came to saving. Then the deduction becomes 'something which amounts to an ordeal for a poor man who has to live from hand to mouth every week and make both ends meet.'

To the view that everyone should bear the burden of taxation and pay for the benefits they derived from the provision and improvement of social services, Patel reminded the government that 'it was well established principle in all civilised countries of the world that no direct tax should be imposed upon the people irrespective of their means to pay.' There were poor people in England also, Patel argued, who did not pay direct taxation, and yet England had no residential, hut or poll tax. The principle of equity and justice had to be observed, too. Why should a single person earning, say, £650 a year pay the same amount of (residential) tax as a man with an annual earning of £72? Was there any justification why a man, with a wife and four children on an income of £72 a year, should pay £2 in residential tax while a spinster earning £150 was exempt from it?

The government had justified the increase in residential tax on two other grounds. One was the subsidy it had provided for flour and sharp to the tune of £60,000, suggesting that the benefit from the subsidy was far greater than the amount to be paid in additional tax. That was a 'thoughtless generalisation,' Patel responded, because that subsidy benefited all those who consumed products from flour and sharp, including the wealthy. A person benefited from the subsidy not 'according to his means but according to his consumption of flour and sharp.' There were sections of the Indian community which benefited less than others because their staple diet was rice, not flour. So the rhetoric about helping the poor was just that, rhetoric, because if it was to help the poor

than the subsidy would have been limited to the poor only. The truth about the subsidy, Patel argued, was 'that the capitalist wanted to see that the cost of living in this colony did not soar up and form a vicious cycle whereby there would be a spiral rise in the cost of living all the time, a spiral rise of wages and a spiral and vicious cycle of rises in the prices of local agricultural produce, thereby upsetting their industries and their economic set up.'

The other justification the government had used in increasing the residential tax was that since it was increasing the direct tax on the Fijians, it was only fair that it increase tax on the non-Fijians as well. But two wrongs cannot make a right, Patel argued. There was a case for abolishing direct taxation on the Fijians, not a case for increasing the tax burden on the non-Fijians. In addition, there was a significant difference between the residential tax levied on the non-Fijians and the direct tax collected from the Fijians. The revenue from the tax on the Fijians did not come into the general revenue. Their direct taxation, he said, was entirely in the nature of their own local rates, spent entirely on facilities for exclusive Fijian use and benefit. The extent of Fijian contribution to the general revenue was marginal, from which the non-Fijians benefited little. Yet, the tax paid by the non-Fijians benefited everyone in the colony, including the Fijian people. 'The roads that we build not only improve their lands and bring them a higher rent but they also raise the value of those lands and make their lives in the villages and their social amenities so much better than they would otherwise be.' So the 'Fijian argument' made little sense. To Patel, the residential tax policy was unjust, iniquitous and unfair. H.B. Gibson called it 'this dirty little brother-in-law of the Taxation Increases family.' Along with four other European members of the Legislative Council (the exception being Hugh Ragg) Patel and his fellow Indian members voted against the Bill while all the official members and all the Fijian members voted for it.

In 1947, influenced by demographic trends, which saw the Indian population overtaking the Fijian, the government moved to restrict immigration into the colony. Previously, immigration matters were handled by the Commissioner of Police who was chiefly concerned with keeping undesirables out along with others who might become a burden on the colony's finances. Now, the Attorney General said, the government was 'concerned with controlling large-scale immigration, that is, the numbers of persons—be they good, bad or indifferent, of any walk of life, of any race or nationality—who may wish to reside in the Colony.' To that end, the Governor-in-Council was given the ultimate control over immigration matters, with the authority to decide the number of migrants to be allowed into the colony as well as restricting the intake by professional occupation or other such criteria to protect the interests of the local residents.

On the face of it, the proposed legislation appeared fair and equitable, but Patel exposed its hidden discriminatory aspects. On the question of future

immigration into the colony, there was no difference of opinion among the various communities, he said. Any immigration policy for Fiji had to strike a happy balance between the interests of the colony, its social and economic needs and requirements, and its obligations and responsibilities in the international arena. He questioned the wisdom of 'giving a blank cheque to the Governor-in-Council in full faith and trust that such a happy balance will be struck and the interest of the Colony as an integral part of this world will be preserved.' That responsibility, he suggested, should properly be vested in the elected representatives of the people.

There were other objections. A resident was defined in the law as a British subject or a British protected person, classified into three sections: those who were born in Fiji, those who were domiciled in Fiji and those, neither of the above, who had lived in Fiji for over five years. But there was no precise definition of what was meant by domicile, its interpretation left to the discretion of an immigration officer 'who will not be bound by any rules of evidence or procedure, and whose decision can only be arbitrary, dependent more or less on what proof he considers sufficient and what he does not.' What would happen if upon re-entering the colony the immigration officer refused to recognise the person's claim to be a domiciled person? He could appeal to the Governor-in-Council, but not beyond him.

That, for Patel, was insufficient. 'The right of domicile is one of the most valuable rights of civilised human beings, and the highest tribunal of the Empire [the Privy Council] must be open for him to enforce that invaluable right if he cannot obtain justice in any other quarter.' Appeals to the Privy Council were allowed on much smaller matters, 'but when it comes to the right of citizenship, this Bill leaves it at the mercy of the executive discrimination of the immigration officer and Governor-in-Council.' He then went on to elucidate the real nature of this body. The Governor-in-Council 'is not a judicial tribunal for people to come openly before and enforce their rights and obtain judgements. It is a body that sits in closest secrecy. All its deliberations come under the Official Secrets Act. The person aggrieved has no access to it. He can only send his grievance in writing. He does not know what factors were taken into consideration by this body before it gave its opinion as to whether the immigration officer was right or wrong. There is no question of the aggrieved person cross-examining the immigration officer or pleading before the Governor-in-Council to substantiate his right; and if the Governor-in-Council decides against him, that decision is final and he has no further remedy left to him.'

There was another aspect of the proposed legislation to which Patel objected. A person who was neither domiciled nor born in the colony but who had lived there for five years had only 12 months in which to re-enter the colony without a permit. A longer period of absence would require a permit. The 12 month

period posed few difficulties for people from places such as Australia and New Zealand because they were nearer, the passage was cheaper and shipping and air services regular. Not so, however, for those who came from the Indian subcontinent. They were disadvantaged by distance, irregular shipping and greater travelling expenses. And because they visited their homeland at long intervals, they might prefer to spend more time with their relatives before returning. 'The man who was going to India at intervals of five or six years had to work and live in this Colony for anything between 10 and 20 years before he could afford to take himself and his family back to India, and naturally at such long intervals he would want to spend at least two or three years before he returned because he is never sure when he will get another trip.' Patel suggested that the time be increased from one to three years. Extending the time limit would not adversely affect the interests of residents from the neighbouring dominions, while it would safeguard the interests of those from the Indian subcontinent 'who have played and are still playing an important part in the development and the maintenance of this Colony's economy.'

Patel's plea for openness and flexibility fell on indifferent ground. Although the Indian members supported him, they did not do so with any enthusiasm, for the Fiji-born business class did not particularly welcome the Gujarati and Punjabi competitors. Nor did the Europeans. Maurice Scott raised the issue of protecting the interests of the Fiji-born first. 'Fiji-born, Fiji-bred, Big in the Feet and Thick in the Head.' A Fiji-born Indian was a hardworking, law abiding person who had the Colony's real interests at heart, he said. It was the India-born who was poisoning his mind, disturbing 'the tranquillity of these islands.' These 'birds of passage' were unwelcome, and if he had his way, Scott hinted, he might ban them altogether. Behind Scott's altruistic-sounding, patriotic rhetoric was economic self-interest: the Gujarati and Punjabi businessmen were their biggest competitors.

Ratu George Tuisawau agreed, saying that 'if we do not shut the door to new comers now, all of us will regret it later on when there will be no solution.' The Indians were trying to control Fiji, making a bid for supremacy, Ratu George said. Getting carried away, craving the indulgence of the Council, he wanted 'to say what I want to say without pulling any punches.' Unless the Europeans and the Fijians were careful, they will be swamped, he said. He gave a warning: 'To the Europeans I say this: you are our superiors intellectually, numerically we are yours. Therefore, to afford our future salvation, you should give us your unstinted assistance. We are in the same boat and for sentimental reasons, we do not want to disassociate ourselves from you: united we stand, divided we fall.' That a motion to extend by a further two years the stay of Fiji residents abroad

without jeopardising their right of automatic entry into the Colony could be turned into an issue of such doom and gloom is a stark reminder of the realities of communal politics in colonial Fiji.

There were other issues, some of even greater importance, which met a similar reception. Localisation was one. Patel urged the government to accelerate the recruitment of local people into the civil service. This was what international conventions, to which the colony was a signatory, were advocating. It was consistent, too, with the Colonial Office's policy to prepare colonies for eventual self-government. 'We have been told time and again that the aim and object of British colonial policy is to make every colonial territory fit for self-government, and no territory can be made fit for self-government until that territory can become self-sufficient as far as the personnel of the Administration is concerned.'¹³ Some departments of government could be localised immediately, Patel said, the Education Department being one prime candidate. The colony already had enough experienced primary school teachers who could become inspectors of schools, for instance. Indian schools were self-sufficient in teachers; it was only the Europeans who were importing teachers from outside, which was rather surprising, Patel said, in view of the European community's privileged economic and educational status in the colony. Expense was a consideration in favour of localisation, Patel argued, but there were others, such as stability and continuity in the system. He said: 'So far, education in this Colony has remained in the hands of people from outside: by the time they get a correct picture and first hand experience of the problems that they will have to solve in Fiji, they are already due for their first leave overseas. When they return back they might have a few ideas to put into practice or some new policy to introduce into the Department. While that is being started or their mind [is] being made up, they are transferred to another country and the education of the people remains where it was before. That has been the position and that has been the cause of our tragic delay all these years.' Patel also pointed to the Medical and the Lands departments where localisation could begin immediately. The important point was, he said, that a start had to be made so that when the time came for self-government and eventually, independence, Fiji would have trained personnel to assume the reins of the country's administration.

But Ratu Sukuna objected, saying that localisation would in effect mean Indianisation. In any case, he preferred the English to continue ruling because their approach was based on 'the humanities, refined by Christianity, steeled by economic and political encounters, tempered by defeats and victories.' The English approach for Sukuna was 'the only effective approach to life.'¹⁴ Patel was advocating the recruitment and training not only of Indians but members

¹³ Legislative Council Debate, December 1945.

¹⁴ Legislative Council Debate, November 1947.

of every community. And if the Fijian people were not yet ready for senior posts in government administration, that was all the more reason to accelerate their training. As Patel used to say, the Fijian community would progress only when it produced not only great chiefs like Sukuna, but also great commoners. But the government resisted. With such a powerful person as Ratu Sukuna on its side, the government could easily afford to ignore Patel.

Many of Patel's other proposals went unheeded, among them the introduction of a system of social security requiring an employer to 'contribute his share to such a fund so that in any contingency of being either permanently or temporarily disabled or in the case of old age, [the worker] will be provided for.' In 1945, Patel moved a motion to introduce Destitute Allowance and Minimum Living Wage legislation for Fiji.¹⁵ Social security would become a reality two decades later. He advocated open, common roll election for the municipal councils, and the abolition of the system of nominated councils altogether to pave the way for an equitable and proportional system of representation for all ethnic groups.¹⁶ Patel questioned the logic of reserving Native lands. Here was the government asking people to plant more food crops to reduce imports, but on the other hand the same government was sanctioning the reserving of productive land. 'We call a man who steals com from land a thief and punish him but when people steal land from corn, we call it Native Reserve.' 'Spare a thought for the dispossessed tenants,' he pleaded. 'They should be paid compensation for the improvements that the landlords took over. The public was not right in not helping the farmer when he is dispossessed and when we expect him to live somewhere else and go on developing the virgin lands of the Colony.'¹⁷ He urged the Fijian chiefs to adopt a more progressive attitude to the changes taking place in Fiji (and Fijian) society, and to prepare their people for future developments on the horizon.

One issue that was bound to come up in the post-war debates on the colony's future was the constitution. The constitution of the Legislative Council had been framed by the Letters Patent of 1937 which provided for a Legislative Council of 15 unofficial members (three elected and two nominated members each from the European and Indian communities, and five nominated Fijian members), 18 official members, and an Executive Council consisting of the Governor and his official advisers. Under this system, the official members had a permanent majority so that any policy the government proposed was assured of a successful passage through the Legislative Council. The Governor, of course, retained the veto power over everything, which he exercised with the consent and authorisation of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Aime Ragg called

¹⁵ Legislative Council Debate, 30 August 1945.

¹⁶ Legislative Council Debate, 20 November 1947.

¹⁷ Legislative Council Debate, 25 November 1948.

this a 'submerged autocracy,' and Patel labelled it 'impotent legislature,' for, in the ultimate analysis, no matter what their opinion, the unofficial members could not initiate any policy unless it was supported by the government.

To change that situation, Harold Gibson moved a motion in the Legislative Council in December 1945 to amend the constitution to 'increase the number of elected representation of the people so that a significant measure of control be exercised over the raising and spending of those comparatively huge sums of money which the people of this Colony will be called upon to provide.'¹⁸ Unless the membership of the Council was widened and peoples' elected representatives were given real power to make decisions on important issues, Gibson warned, discontent in the community would increase, with unforeseen consequences. He proposed to increase that the membership of the Legislative Council to 28, made up of 18 elected representative (six from each of the three principal communities), seven nominated members and three ex-officio members (Attorney General, Financial Secretary and the Colonial Secretary) with the Governor as the President.

Aime Ragg agreed, saying that 'it makes one almost sick when one reads in the papers and hears over the air how we are going to have freedom from this and freedom from that and yet when it comes to a showdown those fundamental principles of freedom which are supposed to inhere in our constitution are denied to us.' The view that the Fijian people were not ready for change, which was often invoked to block any constitutional change, was simply untrue. For Ragg it was almost impossible to imagine ordinary Fijians not wanting the right to vote. 'To say that Joeli cannot choose between Sakiusa and Toganivalu or anyone else is just nonsense.' Equally nonsensical for him was the idea that 'if we give this system of representation to the Indians it will be a first step to a common roll/ and eventually Indian domination. The Indian people were not 'so bereft of commonsense as to think they can play in this Colony the role of running the Colony' The talk of Indian domination was a 'red herring.' But if the Indian people did make such a bid, the Imperial Government was still 'there to control us.' Ragg was no friend of the Indians; he devised plans and pleaded with the Colonial Office in London to have Indians deported from Fiji; but at least on this occasion, he spoke the truth.

Patel agreed that the Legislative Council was indeed an impotent body. For him, the whole set up was 'artificial and hollow.' Official members attended the Legislative debates, listened to 'boring and uninteresting dissertations from the unofficial side, knowing full well that the unofficial side cannot influence their minds in any way because they have no minds of their own to be influenced.' They voted the way the government directed them to. It would be more

18 Legislative Council Debate, 21 December 1945.

productive, he said sarcastically, if the official members, who were all heads of departments, 'remained in their offices and attended to their duties.' There was only one mind in the Council and that was the Governor's. Everything else was a charade.

Even on the unofficial side, the situation was equally hollow, Patel continued, for how many people did the six elected members of the Legislative Council—three Indians and three Europeans—actually represent? The three Indian members were elected by a total roll of just 5,000, when the total population of the Indian community was around 100,000. A similarly disproportionate situation applied to the European electorate (counting the part-Europeans on the roll). And the commoner Fijians had no direct say whatsoever in the selection of their representatives to the Council. In short, the composition of the Council left much to be desired. 'If we are to have a genuine council,' Patel said, 'where the public opinion can be genuinely and properly reflected, the first condition is the widening of the franchise. Every adult member of the population, whatever race he belongs to, must have a vote; it must be a question of universal franchise.'

To those who thought the Fijian people were not ready for universal franchise, Patel replied that they perhaps had the pre-war Fijian populace in mind, isolated and out of touch with the outside world, though he himself was convinced that the common Fijian knew his own mind just as well as others knew theirs. The war had enlarged the horizon of the Fijian people who had come into contact with soldiers and social influences from the outside. The Fijian had 'certain democratic ideas, political viewpoints, ambitions and aspirations as regards his political rights, and we cannot pour that wine into old bottles: we must make sufficient provision for them.' The matter should not be left in the hands of the government or the Department of Fijian Affairs alone, Patel argued. He suggested a referendum among Fijians to gauge their political aspirations. But the Great Council of Chiefs opposed any extension of the vote to their people; the Council was itself in the process of reverting to its old chiefly-dominated social and political order through the newly-passed Fijian Affairs Act. It was not until 1963 that the Fijian people were finally given the right of universal franchise. It was not simply a question of extending the franchise, Patel argued further; the nature of that franchise was an equally important issue. For Patel, common franchise, the principle of one person, one vote, one value, was the only way forward for Fiji. 'I would not mind being represented in this Council by my honourable colleague Mr Aime Ragg, although I am an Indian. It is a question of mutual trust and confidence.' Common franchise had another advantage: 'a common denominator of political outlook will be developed in this Colony. As it is we are all thinking in narrow terms, of our racial interests, but if we take that bold step forward, we would all be thinking in general terms, the interests of the people of this Colony. Would not that be an ideal worth striving for?'

For many, the common roll was like a red flag to an angry bull. Two fears were particularly strong among those who opposed the idea. One was that the Indian leaders would do everything to have common roll imposed on the colony, over the objection of other communities. And the second was that common roll would eventually lead to Indian domination of the political affairs of the colony. Common roll would not be thrust on any community, Patel assured the representatives of the other groups. 'I personally believe that if we are all going to be common voters and common workers in this Council it will only be through voluntary consent. There is no question of dominating or forcing one's views on another.' And Indian domination was out of the question because each of the three groups would have guaranteed equal representation in the Legislative Council. The only difference under a common franchise would be that racial rolls would be abolished and replaced by a multiracial electorate. Asked Patel: 'Would not that give in the future the assurance and security to everyone in this Colony that even when those six European members sit in this Council they are not going there as the sole representatives of a small microscopic minority but they are going there as the representatives of the people in their constituency?'

Fijian leaders opposed any change. Ratu Edward Cakobau likened the prospect of reforming the political system to a box fish, dangerous and deadly poisonous if not handled properly. 'If we begin tampering with our constitution it will soon extend and poison our political life.' What guarantee was there that an expanded Council would attract good people, assuming that there were some who 'were not only willing but fitted to become such legislators, and whose views and influence will be real influence for good.' If we accept change now, Ratu Edward continued, 'what is there in the next ten years to prevent the demand for a new form of democratic government,' or block the introduction of the dreaded common roll. In view of all these uncertainties, Ratu Edward concluded: 'The only thing that can stop it [common roll] would be to hold on to our present constitution. The Fijians have every confidence in the Crown and we look to the Europeans, whom we have always supported, to ponder and not to give way too easily to democratic ideals that are unsuited to a country containing three major races who differ in language, culture and religion; and these races will never combine to unite as one people.' Was this realism or reactionary resignation? Whatever it was, the motion was defeated.

Defeated but not forgotten, for the constitutional issue reared its head again three years later when Ragg introduced an almost identical motion in September 1948, demanding an expanded Council 'in view of the increasing population of the Colony and the advances made in the social, educational and economic spheres by its peoples.' His proposed Legislative Council would consist of six nominated and four ex-officio members (Colonial Secretary, Financial Secretary, Attorney General and the Secretary for Fijian Affairs), and 18 elected members,

six from each of the three ethnic groups. The Executive Council would have, in addition to the four ex-officio members, three elected members chosen by the governor from a panel of six submitted by the elected members of the Legislative Council and one nominated member chosen by the Governor to represent special interests.

Ragg was in a combative mood, promising to pursue the matter of constitutional reform in 'vigorous and realistic manner,' not 'in a dilettante manner, and approached from an academic point of view.' He had an added authority to speak on this motion, as the president of the newly formed European Electors' Association. He informed the Council that he had already petitioned the Secretary of State of the Colonies with the substance of the motion in February 1948, which had been rejected on the grounds that there was no evidence of widespread support for a constitutional change in the colony. His proposal for a plebiscite to test the opinion of the people had been rejected. He had taken the advice of the European nominated member to present his case in the Council, though he knew 'as sure as I am standing here' that his proposal would be defeated 'because the government has the whip hand and does not want any change from the status quo.'

Ragg traversed the familiar opposition to the system of official majority in the Legislative Council which, he said 'will preserve dictatorship and obstruct the attainment of the people's legitimate political demands.' He then raised the issue of enfranchising the Fijian people. He deplored the 'archaic control' of the Fijian Administration, which gave the government 'an easy way of controlling the Fijians and to appear to give them control of their own affairs.' Not only the government but the chiefs also wanted to retain the present system because they feared that 'any departure from it [would] weaken their power and impair their privileges.' He implored the Council to emancipate the Fijians from a system 'which is barbaric in origin and outmoded in time,' which if it was continued any longer would 'lead to their domination and ultimate elimination by other races.'

What about the Indian community in Ragg's proposed scheme of things? The Indian threat, which to Ragg was real enough, should not be used to delay political reform. The Indians were a menace, he agreed, but the Imperial government was committed to preserving the paramountcy of Fijian interests, Europeans had certain prior rights—after all they had discovered, colonised and civilised the islands—and consideration of 'Imperial prestige demands that the European element in the population should be preserved.' No British government, whether Labour or Conservative, could 'ever be so base as to repudiate the solemn promises made in the name of Queen Victoria by giving political ascendancy to a section of the our population whose fatherland is India and whose first loyalty is to that country.'

European members of the Council opposed Ragg's motion. They questioned Ragg's credentials and his authority as well as the timing of the motion. The government had not abused its numerical strength in the council which Hugh Ragg thought was 'unbiased, unprejudiced, with many years of experience in such matters.' Any change toward democracy was unwise, indeed disastrous. Maurice Scott agreed, as also did the Fijian members. Ratu George Toganivalu asked: 'Why change the system of government when that system is working satisfactorily?' Ratu Tiale Vuiyasawa was more pointed. He thought Ragg was in some kind of a trance whose divine injunction was 'Change the Letters Patent, change the constitution, and all will be well.' His own people were not ready for change. Joeli Ravai opposed the motion on the grounds that a more democratic system 'does not yet suit the Fijian taste.' Ratu George Tuisawau thought Ragg's suggestion of universal franchise for the Fijian people 'open to abuse and corruption because there is nothing to prevent undesirable members of my race from standing for election and, when they succeed, playing fast and loose with Fijian politics to the detriment of my race.' Although he did not realise it, Ratu George had reinforced one of Ragg's contentions that Fijian chiefs were afraid to let commoners have a taste of democracy for the fear that their own position might then be undermined.

Vishnu Deo agreed with the basic principle of the motion, but not with its supporting arguments, especially the extraneous anti-Indian material Ragg had introduced in support. He reminded the Council that even though they found the system of communal representation abhorrent, the Indian members had not, since 1937, moved a motion for constitutional change. 'All the resolutions that have been brought up in this Council were brought up by the European members and they find pleasure in bringing up such a resolution in order to throw dirt at us, the Indians in Fiji.' The bogey of Indian domination was just that, a bogey. The Indians, Deo said, wanted equal representation, not proportionate representation, despite the fact that they were numerically the dominant community in Fiji. Deo then moved an amendment that 'in view of the progress made by the increasing population of Fiji, a committee be appointed to consider and report on the desirability of granting the peoples of the Colony a greater measure of political control over their own affairs and to recommend amendments necessary in the constitution providing the Government of Fiji and the representation of the peoples on the Legislative and Executive Councils thereof.'

A.D. Patel seconded Deo's amendment, devoting a large part of his speech to Ragg's remarks and fears about the Indian community. He emphasised that the 'three races were thrown together by destiny and by the logic of history' It was to the credit of the three groups who had thus far 'worked and co-operated and made this paradise of the Pacific that is Fiji.' So why raise the 'unnecessary bogey

that will suddenly make us start flying at each other's throats and turn these islands into an Armageddon?' Indians were not intruders in Fiji, Patel reminded his listeners. They had been brought to Fiji under a contractual agreement with the promise, given by the Imperial government that 'those Indians who came here would have rights no whit inferior to those enjoyed by other subjects of His Majesty'.

He was referring to Lord Salisbury's Despatch of 1875. According to that document, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies had promised that if the Government of India agreed to facilitate the emigration of Indian indentured labour to the colonies, the migrants would enjoy rights equal to that enjoyed by the other British subjects. As it happened, the Government of India referred the matter of emigration to the provincial governments, which declined to take an active role in promoting emigration. So the matter rested there. Was the Despatch then a dead letter? Hardly, for emigration continued, with the understanding that those time-expired migrants who settled in the colonies would enjoy all rights accorded to British subjects.

But Salisbury's Despatch was not all, Patel reminded the Legislative Council. 'Even after the system of indenture was abolished,' Patel noted accurately, 'a high official and one of the heads of the Christian churches here was sent to India to persuade the government and the people of India to send more people to come and settle in Fiji, telling them that they would get lands, that they would get the same privileges and the same treatment as other peoples resident here; the people who had fulfilled their contracts under the indenture were given similar promises and were encouraged to settle down here, and an overwhelming number of the present Indian community are the descendants of those people to whom those promises have been made.' Even before then, the Crewe Commission in 1910 had concluded that 'the whole tenor of the correspondence between India and the colony shows that it was on this condition [equal civil rights] that indentured immigration in Fiji has been allowed in the past, and any measures leading towards lowering the political status of the immigrants or reducing their economic freedom would, in our opinion, involve a breach of faith with those affected.'¹⁹

Ragg, in the course of his speech, had remarked on the danger that the 'Asiatic religious concept' posed for the Fijian people. But what was there in Asiatic religious concepts that threatened the central tenets of Christianity, asked Patel? 'I look upon envy and hate as evils which, if one cannot eradicate altogether from one's nature, one must at least learn to suppress. Is Christianity going to preach any ideal which is contrary to that?' he asked. Did Christianity have any quarrel with his belief, as a Hindu, in the fatherhood of God and the

19 Tabled in the Legislative Council in 1965.

brotherhood of mankind, or with the view that as all rivers flow into the same ocean, all religions lead to the same truth? 'Is there anything in our life here or in the way we socially and culturally mix with our neighbours belonging to the other two great communities, is there anything in which you can say that we have done any harm to the Christian principles of life?'

The Indian community had made progress and increased in numbers, Patel agreed, but how did that constitute a menace to the other communities? Indian leaders had long accepted the view that Fijian interests should be paramount in Fiji. They had accepted that 'the rights and privileges of the minorities ought not to be and must not be an iota less than the rights and privileges enjoyed by the majority' By the same token, however, Patel argued, the minorities had 'also to appreciate and realise the fact that they cannot expect or hope for privileges and rights in excess of those enjoyed by the majority.' Yes, he believed that a common franchise was the way forward for Fiji, but he reminded the Council that common roll could not be imposed on anyone; it could only come about 'when we will be fortunate enough to win the confidence and trust of the other two communities, when they themselves will freely and voluntarily come and say, the time has arrived when we are all one; we are not afraid of you because you are predominant in numbers and we can willingly come together under a common franchise.'

Those who opposed democracy showed only one thing, Patel said: 'We are afraid of our own fellow beings.' But the world was marching on and 'however much we might like to stop where it would serve our individual interests and purposes, it is not going to stop or give us any consideration.' A new spirit had been created in Fiji as a result of the war and increased contact with the outside world, and it was time that 'we provide new bottles for new wine.' The Fijian community could not forestall change forever. The present set up had created 'an admirable type of cultured and level-headed leadership,' like Ratu Sukuna 'who in any community anywhere would be an ornament.' Nonetheless, he urged the Fijian leaders to realise that 'the time has come when they should produce not only great chiefs but great commoners' as well, whose aspirations, whetted by the post-war influences, could not be ignored indefinitely.

Patel implored the unofficial members—the official members were barred from taking part in the debate and voting upon it—not to be carried away by the heat and emotion generated during the debate. 'We have got to consider the possibilities of constitutional changes having due regard to all problems and difficulties that the presence of three racial groups in this Colony entails.' He urged his fellow councillors to 'put our heads together and to try in all sincerity to find a solution for the present problems.' Dialogue and dispassionate discussion among them was the only way to achieve this. It would be another 15 years before the constitution would be revised and the franchise expanded.

Aime Ragg assured everyone that in moving the motion for the expansion of the Legislative Council, he was 'actuated by the highest motives.' Sowing the seeds of discord in the community was furthest from his intentions. But Ragg was a master of double-speak. He was not anti-Indian, he assured the Indian leaders, yet in the 1950s, he repeatedly petitioned the Colonial Office in London with strange proposals to limit the Indian population. Among his more dramatic proposals was his plan to repatriate Indian people. His colleague, retired inspector of Indian schools in Fiji, A.W. Macmillan, wanted to resettle a large part of Fiji's Indian population in the Highlands of New Guinea, a strategy which would help solve Fiji's 'Indian problem,' bring an undeveloped area of New Guinea into production of cash crops with Indian labour and, in creating an Indian settlement in the Highlands, erect a useful buffer between the hungry masses of Asia and the white dominions of Australia and New Zealand.²⁰

But perhaps the best, certainly the most public, example of Ragg saying one thing and meaning something else was his motion in the Legislative Council in July 1946 regarding the future of the Fijian people. This self-appointed guardian of Fijian interests argued that Britain had neglected its obligations to the Fijian people. The terms of the Deed of Cession had been neglected, and were now in need of reassertion. His motion read: 'That in the opinion of this Council the time has arrived—in view of the great increase in the non-Fijian inhabitants and its consequential political development—to emphasise the terms of the Deed of Cession to assure that the interests of the Fijian race are safeguarded and a guarantee given that Fiji is to be preserved and kept as a Fijian country for all time.'²¹

The wording of the motion was uncontroversial enough, but it soon became clear that by non-Fijians, Ragg actually meant the Indian community. Europeans, in his view, were saviours of the Fijian people, the co-trustees, with the Imperial Government, of the Fijian 'race.' The Europeans had 'colonised and transformed Fiji from a barbarous country into a civilised one; they instituted a stable Government; they are responsible for the economic development of the Colony.' But the Indians? They were a 'distinct menace to the Fijian race.' They wanted to 'usurp the heritage of the Fijian people.' They desired nothing less than total racial domination of Fiji. Numerical domination apart, there was another feature that was repugnant about the Indians, Ragg went on. They were 'an alien race which, due to heredity, customs, religion and environment, has not assimilated and will not assimilate with the Fijians.' Their aspirations had to be checked, and government obligations to the Fijian people reaffirmed before it was too late.

²⁰ See *Broken Waves*, 143.

²¹ Legislative Council Debate, 16 July 1946.

The motion provoked heated debate. All the Fijian members of the Council supported the motion, expressing alarm at the prospect of total subjugation by the Indian community. 'We Fijians have heard of King Canute,' said Ratu Etuate Mataitini, 'and we do not propose to follow his example nor can we, as representatives of the Fijian people, sit idly by.' W.G. (Tui) Johnson agreed, faulting the government for not dealing severely enough with self-seeking agitators in the Indian community, who were poisoning the minds of their people with strange notions of political equality, and for not reminding the community of their good fortune to be in Fiji where they had made progress they could only dream about in their ancestral homeland.

A.D. Patel listened intently as speaker after speaker rose either to oppose or support Ragg's motion. Then, in his contribution to the debate, he made a remarkable speech. It was A.D. Patel at his best: sharp, eloquent, clinical, withering in his attack. It was a speech that was to be widely remembered in the Indian community, long after the debate itself had been forgotten; even Aime Ragg, the mover of the motion, complimented Patel on his 'very able speech,' commenting that 'we must admire the sincerity with which [Patel] has put forward the claims of the Indian people.'

Patel began by noting the obvious, that in Ragg's construction, 'non-Fijian inhabitants' actually meant 'Indians.' Ragg's motion, Patel suggested, implied three things: that because the government had either forgotten or overlooked the terms of Deed Cession, there was an urgent need for a reminder, that the time had arrived to look to the Deed to safeguard Fijian interests, and that on account of the increase in the population of the non-Fijian inhabitants, it was felt necessary to reiterate the terms of the Deed. But which terms and how many of the terms were in need of reiteration? asked Patel. He went systematically through the document. The preamble, he pointed out, simply said why the Fijian chiefs had ceded Fiji to Great Britain in the first place. They had done so to promote civilisation and Christianity in the islands, increase trade and industry, and foster good and orderly government. Upon receiving these guarantees, they ceded the islands unconditionally. All these conditions had been 'scrupulously fulfilled,' Patel argued.

He then dissected the covenants of the Deed clause by clause in the manner of a trial lawyer in a court of law. The first covenant merely handed over the sovereignty and the possession of the islands to Queen Victoria, her heirs and successors. The second covenant handed over full and unlimited powers to Queen Victoria and her heirs and successors to determine the form and the constitution of the government and the administration of the laws of the colony. No one could argue that there had been any departure either on the part of the government or the non-Fijian inhabitants in respect of that provision. Covenant three, which provided for a temporary and provisional government pending

the establishment of the British administration of Fiji had been fulfilled and finished. That covenant was now a dead letter. There was no reason to quarrel with the fourth covenant of the Deed which vested all surplus lands of the Colony into British hands, for that had already been accomplished. Surplus land was all non-alienated land and others not in actual possession or occupation of the Fijian people. Covenant five authorised the Crown to acquire, upon payment of compensation, any land from the owners for public purposes. No one, including Ragg and the Fijian members, had complained that the government had acted unfairly. Covenant six merely transferred the public buildings, stores, and other such property to the British Crown. That had already been fulfilled, and a matter of the past.

Similarly, promises in covenant seven had been fulfilled. The government had already recognised the rights and interests of the Tui Viti and the other high chiefs 'so far as is consistent with British sovereignty and colonial form of government.' Their financial liabilities and engagements had already been examined and dealt with 'upon principles of justice and sound public policy' Equally, the government had already 'investigated and equitably adjusted' the claims to titles of land, pensions and allowances of the Tui Viti, other high Fijian chiefs and others holding office under them. 'So what in God's name is left in the Deed of Cession that [Ragg] wants to be specially emphasised under this motion?,' Patel asked. 'He may throw dust in the eyes of others but I refuse to be blinded by any emotion or feeling or allow my reason to be carried away by prejudice. That is the Deed of Cession that has been the subject of all this mud-slinging and hot air in this Council.' If the worst that could be said about the Indian people was that they did not intermarry with the Fijians despite the shortage of Indian women, that in the face of all the adversities they had increased in numbers, that they were corrupting Fijians because they, the Indians, were paying high rent to them—'if this is the worst that our adversaries can say about us, thank God we have acquitted ourselves well in this colony.'

All the Fijian signatories to the Deed of Cession were alive when Indian immigration began, but did any of them complain that the introduction of Indian labour broke the covenants of the Deed or committed a breach of faith with those who had handed over the Colony into their hands? The truth was that the Fijian people and the government understood and appreciated why the Indians were brought to Fiji. Patel continued: 'They worked here for those people who gobbled up half a million of acres of freehold land from the Fijian owners and we came and undertook to work under a system which, thank God, saved the Fijian race from the infamy of coming under. My community worked under that semi-servile state. As a matter of fact, if anything, the coming of my people to this country gave the Fijians their honour, their prestige, nay indeed

their very soul. Otherwise I have no hesitation in saying that the Fijian people in this Colony would have met with the same fate that some other indigenous races in parts of Africa met.'

Fijian and Indian communities had rather more in common than many in the colony thought, Patel continued. Turning to the Fijian members of the Council, he said, 'We have lived with you and mixed with you, hobnobbed with you all the time. We have never looked upon the Fijians as our inferiors because they are Fijians.' The Indians paid rent for the land they leased, and from the income they produced everyone, including the Fijians, benefited. And he reminded his listeners that it was the Indian leaders who had fought for legislation to improve the condition of the ordinary workers of the country, and for the removal of the 'obnoxious and odious racial discrimination in Government service.' Indians had never advocated taking land away from Fijians. All they wanted was security of tenure. 'We ourselves have advocated the principle that the interests of the Fijians must always remain paramount in this Colony, that where those interests come into conflict with our interests, we readily agree to make our interests subservient to theirs.' Indians had never aspired to dominate over any group, but Patel warned, 'let it be remembered that we will not tolerate domination from others as well.'

Between moving his motion and Patel's speech, Ragg had diluted his motion to read that 'in the opinion of this council the time has arrived to emphasise the terms of the Deed of Cession to ensure that the interests of the Fijian race are safeguarded.' Patel was unsatisfied. Why the phrase 'time has arrived,' he asked? Ragg then further amended his motion to read that 'the Government and the non-Fijian inhabitants of this Colony stand by the terms of the Deed of Cession and shall consider that document as a Charter of the Fijian people.' Thus amended to an innocuous form, the motion was passed unanimously. But the bitterness and hostilities generated by the debate lingered on.