

Chapter 9: Shaking the Foundations

Of all the people, Indians are bitterly against communal representations because they have seen its painful results in the course of time. It may not be very serious now, but as time goes on, once people get used to the idea of racial separation, racial attitudes harden and people start thinking in racial terms and racial interests which leads not to one nation but, in the course of political developments, it leads to claims of several nations.

A.D. Patel, 1965

Political liberty, equality and fraternity rank foremost among the good things of life and mankind all over the world cherishes and holds these ideals close to its heart. The people of Fiji are no exception.

A.D. Patel, 1965

‘In ten years time, there will be a lot of changes in this country,’ A.D. Patel said to Andrew Deoki in 1960. Deoki looked at Patel and asked, ‘What do you mean? Do you mean that you will be the dictator of this Colony in ten years time?’ Deoki went onto recall the rest of the conversation: ‘And he looked at me and smiled, and he said ‘Yes.’ ‘In other words,’ Deoki informed his listeners, ‘he wants to be a dictator.’¹ C.P. Singh, another opponent and a nominated Indian member of the Legislative Council, called Patel an evil demigod, like Ravana, a man endowed with the intelligence of ten humans, but who always used it for destructive purposes. To his supporters, on the other hand, Patel was like a medical doctor whose diagnosis one never questioned and whose prescriptions one accepted unreservedly. Clearly, Patel aroused strong emotions on all sides. He only had to put up an idea, Semesa Sikivou once said, for Patel’s opponents to close ranks and oppose it. Whether one supported or opposed him, one could not discount Patel’s presence and influence as a political leader. He was the founding father of the independence struggle in the colony. Here we explore the ideas and strategies he employed in that struggle.

By the early 1960s, as discussed in the previous chapter, Britain had already begun introducing a measure of self-government in Fiji, the membership system being the first step in that direction. Everyone acknowledged the inevitability of some form of self-government, but disagreed on its pace and direction. Europeans opposed any constitutional change which might diminish their dominant position in the colony. But they also realised that alone, they could not

1 Legislative Council Debate, September 1965.

justify their privileged constitutional position. So they began forging a closer alliance with the Fijians. For their part, the Fijian people, too, opposed far-reaching constitutional changes. As Ratu Mara told the London constitutional conference in 1965, the Fijian people 'had declared that independence is not our goal because we have never found any sound or valid reason to attenuate, let alone abandon, our historical and happy association with the United Kingdom.'²

His ambivalence and apprehension were understandable, for the early 1960s was a deeply uncertain time for the Fijian people. Two independent commissions of enquiry had both recommended far reaching changes in the structure of the Fijian Administration, which caused great alarm in the Fijian community. In 1959, Professor O.H.K. Spate of the Australian National University was asked to examine the extent to which the social structure of the Fijian people inhibited their economic prospects and potential, and to suggest appropriate remedies. Spate did not mince words in his report. The Fijian people were lagging behind the other communities in economic development; the inherent conflict between custom and money was 'at the root of the problem'; and chiefly leadership, attuned to the needs and requirements of another era, was unable to provide guidance in the changed modern context.³ Spate recommended more independence and social and material support for those Fijians who wanted to pursue economic activities on their own.

A year later, an inquiry into the natural resources and population trends by Sir Alan Burns, a former Governor of Nigeria, also suggested drastic changes.⁴ Fijian land ownership should be secure and unchallenged, Burns said, but the reservation of land for exclusive use by the Fijian people themselves should be completed expeditiously to allay the fears of other sections of the community and to pave the way for investment and development; the independent Fijian farmer should be encouraged; the Native Land Trust Board should be placed under the authority of the legislature, and, most controversially, the structure of the Fijian Administration should be modified to bring the Fijian people more into the mainstream of Fiji society. These sentiments were echoed by scholarly enquiries as well.⁵ If the changes the visiting experts recommended were implemented, they would permanently alter the basic fabric of the indigenous society. The fear of the Fijian people was well captured by the *Volagauna*:

When the wind of change started to blow over us, both the sophisticated and unsophisticated Fijians started looking about them and asking questions on matters quite foreign to their way of life. They think back and visualise what the future has in store for them. They hear so many

2 From the opening statement at the London conference, a copy of which is in my possession.

3 Spate, 1959.

4 Burns, 1960.

5 See among others, Watters, 1969 and Belshaw, 1964.

things said and foreign influences infiltrate their midst. But what can they do in the weak economic condition they are in? They are hastened or rather pushed forward to a money economy; but when they make their sudden transition, the communal way of life grips them and the two are engaged in a tug of war. They have not been steadily and slowly guided along the correct path and have been neglected for a long time. There are so many words directed at the Fijians, but what can they do?⁶

Such words of anxiety and apprehension, the result of deep soul searching in the Fijian community, would continue to echo throughout the 1960s. But constitutional changes could not be stalled as the winds of change were already evident on the horizon. Western Samoa became independent in 1962, and the Cook Islands in 1965, and it was only a matter of time before the tide of constitutional change would lap the shores of the other Pacific colonies. The Fijian leaders realised this, but insisted that any changes would be acceptable only if they were made with the concurrence of the Fijian leaders and on Fijian terms. To that end, the Fijian Affairs Board, the executive and administrative arm of the Great Council of Chiefs, met on the island of Wakaya in January 1963 and drafted what came to be known as the Wakaya Letter. Mara sent a copy to A.D. Patel in December 1964, hoping that he, Patel, would find it 'digestible.' That letter in time came to be seen as the basic negotiating document of the Fijian people in the 1960s.

Addressed to Nigel Fisher, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, the letter reminded the Crown of the special significance of the Deed of Cession for the Fijian people. It was the 'Fijian view that the possibility of severance of this link with the Crown—a link forged in a spirit of mutual trust and goodwill—should never be contemplated.' Before any further constitutional changes were considered, the letter stated, the terms of the special relationship between Britain and Fiji, a relationship similar to that which existed between Britain and the Channel Islands, should be clarified and codified. The letter went on: 'There would have to be a precise restatement of the guarantee on Fijian land ownership. We visualise that the Native Land Trust legislation should not be changed or added to without the prior consent of the Sovereign and the agreement of the Council of Chiefs. We also stand by the expressed desire of the High Chiefs in the preamble to the Deed of Cession that Fiji should be a Christian state and that therefore no constitutional or administrative changes should take place that would deviate from that intention. The provision in the Fijian Affairs Ordinance that all legislation affecting Fijian rights and interests should be referred to the Fijian Affairs Board or, on the recommendation of the Board, to the Council of Chiefs, should be retained, and likewise the Governor's direction

6 *Volagauna*, 16 October 1964.

to the Public Service Commission to work towards a balance of the races in the Civil Service.' If these concerns were addressed, the letter concluded, the Fijian chiefs would consider contemplating further constitutional changes.⁷

The letter was a powerful assertion of the principle of Fijian para-mountcy, signed by all five Fijian members of the Legislative Council, including Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, Semesa Sikivou, Ravuama Vunivalu and Ratu George Cakobau, and by A.C. Reid, Chairman of the Fijian Affairs Board, John Falvey, its Legal Advisor and R.M. Major, the Financial Advisor. The Colonial Office was sympathetic to the concerns raised in the letter but said that any proposed constitutional arrangements would have to take the reality of the situation in the islands into account rather than impose models derived from elsewhere, including the Isle of Man.⁸ Unofficially, the colonial government assured the Fijian leaders that the special position of their people in Fiji as the autochthonous race would be safeguarded.⁹

There is no record of how the Indian leaders viewed the Wakaya Letter; judging by their reaction in Legislative Council debates, it seems very few knew about its existence. Patel knew of its existence and its contents. But from his notes it is clear that he did not accept its preconditions. In a public address at Churchill Park on 24 February 1964 welcoming the new Governor, Sir Derek Jakeway, Patel gave glimpses of his own thinking.¹⁰ He spoke of the peace and harmony which existed among the various cultures and ethnic groups in Fiji, which, he said, 'was a good asset to start the building of a nation. He spoke about the economic needs of the Indian community. 'If Indian farmers are provided with sufficient land and facilities for marketing the produce at an economic price, they can play a very important role in the economic development and in raising the standard of living of the people of this Colony.' And he pledged his community's cooperation 'in any measures which may be devised to promote social and political integration and understanding between all the races residing in the Colony.' Phrases such as 'building a nation,' 'political integration,' 'welfare of the people of Fiji.' were the key words in Patel's political lexicon. Jakeway listened politely, but as former Chief Secretary of Sarawak, his sympathies lay with the Fijians. In this, of course, he was no exception. Much of the colonial establishment also felt that way.¹¹

7 A copy of the letter, though never made public, is available in several places, including the Hansard of the Legislative Council. See also my *Broken Waves*, 189. The Colonial Office rejected the appropriateness of the Channel Islands as the model for Fiji, the Governor telling the Great Council of Chiefs in September 1963 that 'as the circumstances of these islands are in many respects different from Fiji, their constitutional arrangements could hardly be adopted in their entirety.'

8 Public Relations Press Release, no. 737.

9 Sir Derek Jakeway's statement in the *Fiji Times*, 2 March, 1965.

10 Address in Patel's private papers.

11 Assistant Colonial Secretary Ray Barker wrote: 'It is probably true to say that most expatriate administrators were at that time pro-Fijian in the sense that we felt in sympathy with their perception of

Patel was aware of the impending constitutional developments. His first priority was to get his own house in order. The Citizens Federation had done well in the 1963 elections, winning all the three Indian communal seats. Soon after the elections, Patel, along with Siddiq Koya and other Indian leaders, decided to transform the Federation into a full fledged political party. From this initiative came the Federation Party in 1963. A formal constitution drafted by Siddiq Koya was adopted on 21 June 1964, making the Federation the first political party in Fiji and among the very first in the whole of the Pacific. The party's founding aim was to create and foster national consciousness 'irrespective of any distinction of community, religion, race or sex;' to bring about economic, social and cultural integration in Fiji by pursuing the ideal of 'Unity in Diversity;' and to 'obtain self-government for Fiji by all legitimate and peaceful means.' The party's head office was set up at Lautoka; Working Committees were established throughout the country, and duties and obligations of the office bearers outlined in nine pages of foolscap size paper. Patel was elected the founding president and party leader and Siddiq Koya the first vice-president.¹²

In late 1964, the government announced that a constitutional conference would be held in London to decide the next step in Fiji's move towards self-government. The Colonial Office informed Fiji that 'The British Government accepts that the time is approaching when the future relationship between Fiji and Britain should be clarified and codified, and will be glad, in consultation with representatives of the people of Fiji, to work out a constitutional framework which will preserve a continuing link with Britain and within which further progress can be made in the direction of internal self-government.'¹³ Following instructions from Whitehall, Governor Jakeway initiated a series of consultations with all the principal political leaders, which in turn led to a series of confidential meetings under his chairmanship. The purpose of the meetings, Jakeway explained, was to get members 'into the habit of exchanging views in a civilised, restrained and courteous manner.'¹⁴ That was the only way compromise could be reached. Members would be encouraged to make suggestions, and agree on issues before proceeding to London for a constitutional conference. Ratu Edward Cakobau and John Falvey thought that the delegates and the leaders should reach a substantial measure of agreement among themselves before going to London. But Patel disagreed, saying that London 'might, after all, be the best place to iron out difficulties, since members would be away from outside pressures,' and the Colonial Office would have experts to guide discussions.

themselves as the taukei—the owners of most of the land but economically backward and overtaken in population by immigrant races.'

12 The concept of Working Committees is a direct borrowing from the structure of the Indian National Congress.

13 Secretary of State for Colonies Despatch no 388 (15 August 1963).

14 What follows is based on Patel's private papers.

Not everyone agreed with this view. *Kisan Mitra*, for one, castigated Patel for accepting the invitation to go to London. How could he justify this decision after criticising Britain all along? It would be far better for a representative of the Colonial Office to come to Fiji, so that all the Indian people of Fiji, and not only the Federation Party, could participate in the discussions.¹⁵ Apisai Tora was opposed to any Indian participation in the conference altogether, whether in London or Fiji. The Deed of Cession was signed by two parties, the Fijian chiefs and the British Crown, and, therefore, he said, 'it is only right that only the signatories to the Deed should take part in the deliberations.'¹⁶ Many Fijians agreed, but the Colonial Office stood firm.

Who should attend the London conference and how delegates were to be chosen, became an issue which nearly derailed the discussions then under way. At a conference in December 1964, the Governor had apparently suggested that each ethnic group would select its own delegates to the conference. On 26 January the following year, Patel nominated himself, James Madhavan, Chirag Ali Shah and Siddiq Koya as the Indian delegates. The Fijian members had selected Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, Semesa Sikivou and Ratu George Cakobau as their representatives. No one objected to the composition of the Fijian delegation, but Ronald Kermode asked Jakeway why the Federation had chosen only its own members, leaving 'a very large section of the Indian community totally unrepresented.' The two non-Federation members agreed. Andrew Deoki suggested that all the 18 unofficial members of the Legislative Council should select delegates. Koya objected, reminding the Governor of his understanding that each group was to select its own delegates. Jakeway rejected Patel's choice of only the Federation members, and said that the Secretary of State for the Colonies would not agree either. As far as he was concerned, the Federation group did not necessarily represent all Indian political opinion in Fiji.¹⁷

Later that day, Patel wrote a strong letter of protest to the Governor. At no time was the Federation told that candidates would be selected by the Legislative Council, Patel said. If such a suggestion had been made, it would have 'been bitterly opposed' by the Federation Party. 'In the proceedings of the Legislative Council and other matters connected therewith, the democratic method of taking decisions by the majority is followed without exception and we fail to see why you should require an unanimous decision on the part of the Indian members on this matter,' the letter said. The Federation Party would resent 'the interference of any member of another racial group in the selection of the delegates from our group.' The suggestion had 'given us the strong impression that this is being done to introduce discord and disunity on the Indian side at

15 *Kisan Mitra*, 13 January 1965.

16 *Nai Lalakai*, 24 June 1965.

17 Jakeway's letter to Patel on 28 January 1965.

the London Constitutional Conference vis-a-vis the Fijians and Europeans. For the conference to succeed in its undertaking, it is imperative that the delegates of each racial group are able to speak with one voice and have the confidence, trust and the backing of the community they represent.' The Federation Party was the representative party of the Indian community, and there were no sectional interests represented by Deoki and Singh that the Federation group itself did not represent. In the 1963 election, the Federation group argued, one of its platforms had been to 'bring about constitutional changes to give Fiji internal self-government and we claim that a specific mandate was given to us on this subject.' If the constitutional conference was to succeed, it was important for London to 'know what the Indians as a whole want and not the individuals or splinter groups.' Whitehall listened, and the Governor relented: all elected unofficial members of the Legislative Council were to be invited to London.

After the initial hiccups, confidential discussions began to take place among the elected members of the Legislative Council and agreement was reached on a number of issues, all paving the way for greater internal self-government. The Crown would be responsible for external affairs and defence but on other matters, the Governor would be obliged to act on the advice of the premier who, in turn, would govern the colony through a cabinet. Civil servants would not be allowed to contest elections, as they had been in the past; nor would there be any nominated members in the Legislative Council. Patel's point about the Speaker of the Council being elected by the House itself was accepted, over some objection. So, too, was the removal of literacy qualifications for voters. Universal franchise for all ethnic groups had been introduced in 1963.

Semesa Sikivou asked the Indian members for their views on common roll, the central plank in the Federation Party's platform, and an Indian demand since 1929. It was the one issue which deeply polarised the country. Fijians and Europeans were totally opposed to it though, as Ratu Edward said at the meeting, 'a time might come when the introduction of common roll would be possible.' That time, it was clear, was in the very distant future. Semesa Sikivou told the meeting that 'he had a definite mandate from the Fijian people not to support measures for the introduction of a common roll.' Until his constituents told him otherwise, he would not alter his position even if he were to take part in discussions.' For his part, Patel invited all members to a meeting where he explained his position. His letter is reproduced in full:

You will remember that when the idea was first mooted that unofficial members of the Legislative Council should hold meetings in Fiji among and between themselves on the proposed constitutional changes, it was generally agreed that the sole purpose of such meetings would be ascertain and determine the areas of agreement and disagreement on the subjects under discussion. We have had three (3) such meetings under the

chairmanship of His Excellency the Governor and an additional meeting under the chairmanship of the Honourable Ratu Edward Cakobau. On a close analysis of the matters already discussed at these meetings and those which appear on the Paper circulated to the Honourable Members by His Excellency the Governor, it is abundantly clear that we have now reached the stage that nearly all remaining subjects for discussion are controversial and one on which it is very unlikely any agreement would be reached in Fiji.

Bearing these in mind, I have, nonetheless, decided to give an outline of my views and those my colleagues why we advocate Common Roll and oppose Communal Roll in Fiji. I appreciate that some of you gentlemen would not agree with the views I now express but I assure you that they are being put forward so that you may seriously consider them before going to London.

Our case for African Colonies.

Common Roll as against Communal Roll is as follows:

- (a) It is only through making one nation out of Fiji that we can achieve the sort of future we want for everybody. This goal can only be achieved if we accept a Common Roll system of election.
- (b) Common Rolls have been successful in a plural society. Examples are the former East and West African Colonies.
- (c) Common Rolls will encourage the citizens to organise political parties along national lines and in the long run compel everyone else to think in terms of his country rather than a particular race, community or religion.
- (d) Communal Rolls stand for divided loyalties, inhibit national consciousness among the people; and are generally identified with religious fanaticism or racial separatism or economic or social privilege.
- (e) Communal Rolls can be a serious obstacle to the successful operation of parliamentary democracy. The elected representatives of a racial or religious sub-community cannot afford to subordinate the interests and prejudices of their people to those of the larger community. Whether elected as independents, members of a communal party, or even as members of a party professing to transcend communal lines, they will not accept party discipline in a way to offend the group upon whose support their political future depends. It will inhibit the formation of secular parties. Success in politics will depend upon reflecting exactly the communal interests and prejudices. Compromise will be rendered

difficult and relative party strength may be frozen for long periods because a party can grow only with an increase in the size of the community upon which it is based. In such a case government formed by one, or a coalition of two or more of these communal parties, may not be able to meet the challenge of urgent social problems and a breakdown of representative government may occur because the legislators and executives are prevented by communal loyalties from attacking problems in a common-sense fashion.

(f) Communal Rolls tend to magnify communal differences and new communities discover themselves as further claims to separate representation are lodged.

(g) Communal Rolls, to the best of my knowledge, have been abandoned (with a few exceptions) by all the countries of the world.

I do take into account and appreciate the reasons why some of you gentlemen find it difficult to accept a Common Roll at this stage. On the other hand, it is pleasant to note that generally speaking a number of us have accepted a Common Roll in principle but they only wish to postpone its application till some future time.

I sincerely believe that our salvation lies in making one nation out of Fiji and for this and this reason alone, my colleagues and I commend our proposal for a Common Roll to you for your serious and earnest consideration.

Common Roll was an idea that Patel would advocate tirelessly throughout the sixties. But his opponents rejected it with the same passion with which Patel articulated it. John Falvey outlined the objections at one of the meetings, expressing views widely shared by the Fijian leadership as well. The system of communal representation was well established in Fiji; it had worked well; a system of guaranteed racial representation produced no fears of any one group dominating others; it accepted 'realistically the fact there are differences of custom, language, religion, and to some extent of interest, among the various races of Fiji, and it provides a practical way of harmonising these differences through people working together in orderly good-will.' 'Any major change proposed for Fiji should be judged, and decided upon, only in the light of Fiji's special circumstances and special requirements, and only in accordance with the freely determined and expressed wish of the people of Fiji.' 'We should insist,' Falvey said, that 'there should be as little disturbance of the present situation as possible.'

The average Fijian fear about the Common Roll was expressed by the *Nai Lalakai*. Common Roll would mean:

there will no longer be representatives of the Fijians, as a race, in the Legislative Council. There would be no European representatives, as they are a minority race. It follows that a majority of the members of the Legislative Council, assuming that common roll is applied to Fiji, will be Indians because they are numerically superior. They have the maximum votes in most of the constituencies in Fiji. Decisions in the Legislative Council will be decided by a show of hands which is a situation where Mr Patel will thereby realise his aims concerning lands and the leasing of lands. Moves can also be made to abolish the laws and ordinances of the Native Lands and Fisheries Commission and also the Fijian Affairs Ordinance on which the Fijian Administration is based. These are some of the things which can be done by Mr Patel and his followers if a common roll is accepted. If this is not so then what really lies behind the proposal to have a common roll?¹⁸

‘E na vula se na balabala,’ said many Fijians. We will have common roll when the balabala flowers, which, of course, it never does. Or when the eel grows hair. Patel’s answer was simple. It was precisely this kind of mentality, fostered by the system of racial politics, that fuelled suspicions and anxieties among the people. Common Roll did not mean the tyranny of the majority, nor did it imply the derogation of the rights of the minority. The Sovereign would retain the power to amend, suspend or revoke the Constitution, and disallow certain bills. The Governor would retain the right to reserve bills for assent by the Sovereign; he himself could refuse assent to certain bills; and there would be certain ‘neutral zones’ in the public sector through the creation of independent commissions. If further safeguards were needed, Patel went on, he would like them to be entrenched in the constitution so that Fijian land ownership rights were inviolable and could not be challenged except through the concurrence of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Indeed, he was ready to endorse ‘any other safeguards which would not be incompatible or infringe the principle that each citizen has one vote, one value, in a single member constituency under the future constitution.’

Battle lines were thus drawn. This became apparent in the submissions various groups made to Mrs Eireen White, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, when she made a fact finding visit to Fiji in May 1965. Basically, the Fijians wanted the principle of Fijian paramountcy reiterated as a precondition for any further constitutional changes. Indian groups demanded some honourable form of power sharing based on universal and equal franchise, and Europeans asked for the retention of their privileged position on account of their dominant position in the colony’s economy. In the country at large, there was an atmosphere of apprehension and anxiety. The uncertainty about the outcome of

18 Nai Lalakai, 29 April 1965.

the negotiations fuelled fears and suspicions on all sides. Making matters worse was the appearance in the daily media of selected portions of the discussions which were supposed to be confidential.

On 26 April, the Federation group decided to terminate its participation in the informal discussions, which caused much controversy. The boycott decision was taken at the Federation Party's annual general meeting at Lautoka on 25 April. The party accused the *Fiji Times*, the Public Relations Office and the Fiji Broadcasting Commission of being anti-Federation, distorting translations of the party's views on the proposed constitutional changes in Fiji, and generally creating 'animosity, misunderstanding and disharmony' among the people.¹⁹ For these reasons, it was 'inconceivable that any good purpose would be served by holding further discussions in Fiji between the Honourable Members of the Legislative Council on constitutional matters.' Patel, Shah, Madhavan and Koya were empowered by the meeting to 'make all such representations and submissions which they may think fit and proper in their absolute discretion on all matters to be discussed at the said conference with a view to obtaining fair, just and equitable rights for the Indians in Fiji and with a view to making a nation out of the several communities who live and belong to Fiji.'²⁰

The boycott decision was not taken lightly. There was deep anger among the Federation supporters over their real or imagined sense that the media was deliberately fostering anti-Federation feeling in the country. The way the *Fiji Times* had covered the 1960 strike as well as other events, suggests that, at least against this newspaper, that feeling was not unjustified. Patel detected a clear strategy to derail his common roll platform. He suspected an orchestrated effort by his opponents to undermine his campaign for political independence. At a meeting at the Lilac Theatre in April 1965, he said: 'A common method of forcing a tiger out into the open from its hiding place is to create as much noise by beating and banging whatever comes handy. When the din brings the animal out, he becomes an easy target. I hope that the Indians here will not find themselves in the same situation someday.'²¹ There was no dispute between the Fijians and Indians, Patel said; there was no reason for it. 'But we certainly have a right to decide for ourselves as to what is best for us. By deciding not to enter into further discussion here on political changes, we are not doing anything against the interest or security of anyone else. We have been compelled to take this step because much of what we say is distorted to a dangerous level.'

What the country did not know was the extent to which Patel had gone to try and find a common ground with the Fijian leaders.²² When the discussions

19 See also Alley, 1973, 179.

20 In Patel's private papers.

21 *Pacific Review*, 12 May 1965.

22 Based on a tape of an interview with A.D. Patel (by Robert Norton).

began, Patel wanted to have direct talks with Ratu Mara, the principal Fijian leader. If only the two could talk together, face to face and honestly explore each others' fears and concerns sincerely, most of the problems would be resolved, Patel believed. According to Patel, Mara was lukewarm to the idea, and sent John Falvey to talk to him instead. Patel was disappointed. He believed that these intermediaries, who had vested interests of their own, were themselves a part of the problem. He listened to Falvey but did not respond. Later, he asked Ratu Edward, whom he trusted and liked, to arrange a meeting with Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Mara. Ratu Edward Cakobau organised an informal dinner at his place in Domain for the four of them, but Ganilau and Mara did not turn up, which embarrassed Cakobau and confirmed to Patel that the two were not prepared to have serious face-to-face discussions, without the presence of their European colleagues. Hence, Patel concluded, it was fruitless to conduct further discussions in Fiji.

Nonetheless, Patel's decision was widely criticised. M.V. Pillay called Patel a petulant man reminding him that at the London conference he was representing not only the Federation Party but the entire Indian community, and not all Indians were members of that party. 'The future of every man, woman and child is in the balance,' Pillay argued. 'We want the fullest disclosure. We want to be able to study and learn the views of the leaders and offer suggestions when necessary.'²³ That was fine, but the Federation Party's views were already well known. Others rejected the common roll in favour of the communal roll as the best option considering the realities of Fiji politics and asked Patel not to push the point too far. Ajodhya Prasad's National Congress of Fiji passed a resolution at Ba in mid-June rejecting common roll. K.S. Reddy agreed. Fiji had the communal roll since 1929: why not carry on, why risk suspicion and mistrust, he asked. *Kisan Mitra* added: 'How could all the people of the various races get together and conduct elections peacefully when the Federation does not desire to discuss the matters with the other races.' Patel, it said, 'is always trying to obtain rights by displeasing others, which is impossible in a multi-racial country such as Fiji.'²⁴ Patel would not budge on the common roll issue.

But it has to be said that given the Fijians' and Europeans' almost visceral opposition to the idea, little more could have been achieved by further discussions in Fiji. Even the government itself seemed unsympathetic and unwilling to listen to alternative views. Sir Derek Jakeway had showed his hand when he made a remark that was widely condemned in the Indian community. In March 1965, he had said: 'I thought it was common ground that the Fijian people—the autochthonous people—have a special position in Fiji because they belonged here first, long before anyone else came here. It was inconceivable

²³ *Fiji Times*, 3 May 1965.

²⁴ *Kisan Mitra*, 4 August 1965.

that Britain would ever permit the Fijian people to be placed politically under the heels of an immigrant community.²⁵ With the Governor taking sides, there was little hope for open and genuine exchange of views which might produce compromise. Patel hoped to persuade the Colonial Office to put pressure on the Fijian and European delegates to at least think seriously about the idea.

The deliberations of the United Nations General Assembly Committee on Decolonisation in the early 1960s coincided with the constitutional discussions and aroused great controversy in Fiji. As far as the government and Fijian and European leaders were concerned, the UN had no business discussing Fiji's political situation, and they derided its deliberations in stinging terms. The people of Fiji knew little about the UN and its views on decolonisation. Patel's *Pacific Review* had published the mandate of the Committee on Decolonisation in full. The Committee had rejected the delaying of independence to colonial or dependent territories on account of their social, economic and political preparedness, urging the colonial powers to expedite the process of self-government which would, in due course, lead to full independence. In November 1964, Afro-Asian members on the Committee drafted a resolution, asking Britain to reaffirm 'the inalienable right of the people of Fiji to self-determination and national sovereignty,' and to take 'immediate steps to hand over power unconditionally to the people of Fiji.'²⁶ Questions were asked about European over-representation in Fiji's public life and the inordinate amount of power exercised by the executive authority.

Not surprisingly, the local establishment was furious that Fiji's internal problems should be discussed in such an open way. Ratu Penaia Ganilau criticised the Committee for ignoring the 'repeated expressed desires of the native Fijians to retain British protection.' 'We know Fiji, they don't. We know of the kind of future we want. They don't. We treasure our trust that was expressed in the signing of the Deed of Cession. They have never heard of the Deed of Cession.' The *Fiji Times* editorialised Macbeth's celebrated observation on life as 'a tale told by an idiot...full of sound and fury signifying nothing,' which might be aptly if unkindly, applied to much of the twaddle talked in the United Nations Committee on Colonialism about Fiji.²⁷

Many suspected Patel of instigating the Committee's unusual interest in the affairs of Fiji and its condemnation of the slow pace of its political progress. I have not been able to discover Patel's direct link or involvement with the Committee, but would not be at all surprised if there were one. The UN's declarations confirmed to his supporters that Patel was not the dangerous and irresponsible radical his

25 *Fiji Times*, 2 March 1965.

26 *Pacific Review*, 16 December 1965.

27 *Fiji Times*, 6-14 November 1964.

opponents made him out to be. His ideas and philosophy found resonance in the international arena as well. Fijians and Europeans might ridicule the United Nations, but Patel knew that Britain could not. When it was suggested that the UN Committee on Decolonisation send a fact-finding delegation to Fiji, Patel welcomed the idea. He told H.M. Lodhia that a Fijian village would be first place he would take the mission to show how little progress Britain had made in improving sanitation in the rural areas, how backward the conditions of life in the *koro* really were.²⁸ But whatever his plans, the UN's deliberations hardened Fijian and European attitudes towards the Indian leaders, especially Patel.

For some Fijians, all this was yet another sign of Patel's intransigence. Among them was Apisai Tora. The co-leader of the 1959 strike and self-styled Fidel Castro of the Pacific, Tora was the founder of the Fijian Democratic Party. In May 1965, addressing a party meeting at the Kisan Hall at Lautoka, he called for a commission to investigate the possibility of re-settling the Fiji Indians in some other parts of the world. 'If Fiji's and Fijian interests are to be protected then the quickest possible way should be found to send the Indians to other countries.' Burma and Ceylon were doing it, he said, and Fiji should learn from their example. The Europeans were alright, Tora said; it was the Indians who were the problem. 'We know the Europeans and we can get along with them. We also know what they will advocate in the coming London conference. As for the Indians, we do not know what they want or what they are going to say in London. They are keeping quiet, and we don't like it.'²⁹ Indeed, as already mentioned, Tora was among those who wanted Indians totally excluded from the conference. A *Volagauna* correspondent agreed, but for another reason: 'The Fijians and Europeans are benevolent and patient and are not greedy [like the Indians]. They can evenly distribute things so that peace and harmony can prevail in Fiji. Both belong to the Christian faith. They act like Christians and they will never wish to deprive anybody else of what is rightfully theirs.'³⁰ For its part, the Colonial Office rejected the demand; this was a conference to decide the future of all the people of Fiji, not the future of the Fijian people alone.

The Fiji delegation left for London agreed that the question of land ownership would not be touched at the conference and that immediate independence was not the goal for Fiji, but divided and unclear about the most contentious issue of all, the method and nature of election to the Legislative Council. The conference was held at the Marlborough House from 26 July to 9 August. Anthony Greenwood, Secretary of State for the Colonies, chaired the first session, and the remaining fifteen were chaired by Eireen White. All the three principal leaders made opening statements. John Falvey said that 'there are many people

28 Personal communication.

29 *Fiji Times*, 17 May 1965.

30 *Volagauna*, 22 January 1965.

in Fiji who are well content with our present and quite new constitution,' and there were 'few who are seriously critical of the administration of our country since 1874.'³¹ Not one member of the European delegation was there to ask for immediate independence for Fiji. 'We might rather be said to be in the forefront of the smaller British territories which, not unnaturally, aspire towards a system of internal self-government, but which insist upon a continuing link with the Crown.' That form of constitutional association was, said Falvey, both sensible and realistic. Ratu Mara said: 'We have declared that independence is not our goal because we have never found any sound or valid reason to attenuate, let alone abandon, our historical and happy association with the United Kingdom.' He spoke warmly of 'mutual trust and abiding loyalty' between the Fijian people and the people of the United Kingdom, and of 'enduring faith and loyalty in the British Crown and in British institutions.' Instead, he expressed the hope that the UK 'will share with us our prosperous future as she has always willingly and unstintingly shared our past and our present.' So, for Falvey, and Mara, a minor alteration in the direction of modest self-government perhaps, but no fundamental redirection of policy or re-structuring of the relationship between Britain and Fiji.

Patel couldn't disagree more. As agreed in Fiji, he did not ask for immediate independence, but expressed the hope that the conference might set in motion a train of events which would lead eventually to full independence. Here is his speech in full:

I thank you and the United Kingdom Government for the kind invitation and welcome extended us to this historic conference which is called to smelt the existing system of government in the Colony of Fiji and to forge and mould a new constitution in the not too distant future.

Political liberty, equality and fraternity rank foremost among the good things of life and mankind all over the world cherishes and holds these ideals close to its heart. The people of Fiji are no exception.

Without political freedom no country can be economically, socially or spiritually free. We in Fiji, and in many underdeveloped countries of the world, are faced with the three most formidable enemies of mankind, namely, poverty, ignorance, and disease. We need political freedom to confront these enemies and free our minds, bodies and souls from their clutches.

Needless to say that when I refer to political freedom, I mean democracy under the rule of law, the sort of freedom which the British people and the people of the United States enjoy. We need freedom which will

31 Brief reports are in *Fiji Times*, 27 July 1965.

politically, economically and socially integrate the various communities living in Fiji and make out of them one nation deeply conscious of the responsibilities and tasks which lie ahead.

I call this Conference important and historic because it is the first Conference of its kind in the history of Fiji and it may very well prove the beginning of the end of a form of government which stands universally condemned in the modern world.

I have come to this Conference with faith and trust in British people and their government which has set people of other colonies free and has led them on the path of economic and cultural development. After all Fiji's problems are not as difficult or formidable as those which some of the Colonies which are now independent have had to face and solve.

We from our side promise you full co-operation and serious consideration in the deliberations which lie ahead in this Conference.

We have all got to guard ourselves against avoiding right decisions because they are unpleasant or run counter to our ingrained habits of pre-conditioned thought, or taking wrong decisions because they appear advantageous in the short run.

We must appreciate the fact that we owe great responsibility, not only to the people of the present generation but also of generations to come. We have to resist the temptation of driving the boat on the shallow waters because of the fear that it will rock heavily if we steered it on the right course. Bearing all this in mind, let us bend to the tasks before us.

In the end I pray to the Almighty God who led the Crown colonies like Australia and New Zealand to full independence, may He also lead us and our country to the same destination safely and in good heart.

The record of the conference proceedings remains confidential, but Patel's private negotiating notes indicate the direction of his thinking. It is clear that Patel wanted not only the spirit but also the substance of full internal self-government entrenched in the constitution. 'The constitution should empower the local government to conclude trade agreements with other countries and provide for further delegations of authority to be made by the British government.' As far as possible, Fiji should have a 'full international personality' and 'Statute of Westminster legal status.' Britain should give explicit assurance that the 'field of self-government [would] be inviolable' and that therefore 'it would be improper to encroach upon it.' The real power should reside with the elected representatives of the people, the Governor, as the Queen's representative, acting on important matters on the prime minister's advice. The Governor should not

summon, preside at, or attend cabinet meetings, which should come under the control of the prime minister. The independence of the judiciary must be secure and free from political interference, and special independent commissions should be set up to advise the government on matters relating to the public service, the police and the judiciary. In other words, the power of the executive should be severely restricted and, wherever possible, made subordinate to the power of the elected legislature.

On the election to, and composition of, that legislature, which was perhaps the most contentious issue at the conference, Patel argued that there should be a single chamber parliament, with no ex-officio or nominated official or unofficial members. There should be no communal and non-communal members elected on separate, mathematically weighted rolls, nor should there be specially elected and nationally elected members. There should be no multi-member constituencies. Was there a case for proportional representation? The best system was common roll, one man, one vote, one value, elected on the basis of universal franchise from single member constituencies using the first past the post system. The Legislative assembly should be a wholly elected one, with the Speaker coming from among its members. And the delimitation of electoral constituencies should be left to an independent electoral commission.

Patel had done his homework. The thoroughness of his preparation, his attention to and mastery of the detail, somewhat in the manner of a barrister preparing a case for appeal, is impressive. Nothing of importance escaped Patel's notice. As it happened, many of his points were incorporated in the final report.³² For instance, the new constitution provided for a Public Service Commission, a Judicial and Legal Services Commission and a Police Services Commission, each advising the Governor on matters under their separate jurisdictions. There were safeguards against the abolition of the office of any judge during his tenure. The new constitution had a Bill of Rights to guarantee freedom from discrimination without derogating from discriminatory sections of existing legislation, a point the Indian delegation fought hard but unsuccessfully to eliminate from the constitution. The people of Fiji had universal franchise without any property qualification. A full ministerial system of government was to be introduced. The nomination of unofficial members in the Legislative Council was discontinued, but the government, with the support of Fijian and European delegates, retained four nominated official members in the Legislative Council (that is, the Colonial Secretary, the Financial Secretary, the Attorney General and the Secretary for Fijian Affairs).

The Legislative Council itself was expanded to 36 members: 14 Fijians (nine elected from the communal roll, three from cross-voting roll, and two nominated

32 Fiji Constitutional Conference Command Paper, 2783, The House of Commons.

by the Great Council of Chiefs); 12 Indians (nine communal and three cross-voting); and ten Europeans (seven communal and three cross-voting). The introduction of cross-voting, where multiracial electorates voted for candidates of different ethnic groups, was seen as a compromise by the United Kingdom and an important concession by the Fijian and European delegates. That was the furthest they were prepared to go, encouraged by messages from Fiji to walk out of the conference if the 'Colonial Office *wallahs*' (Apisai Tora's phrase) insisted on the introduction of a common roll. Some Fijian leaders threatened to boycott the conference if the UK delegation demanded any further concession. The Europeans made much of their gift of two seats to Fijians, though, in truth, they had very little choice in the matter. The UK government was ready to whittle the European numbers down even further but baulked when the Fijians advised against it. The Europeans also claimed credit, for which they wanted praise not criticism, for opening up their electorate to Chinese and Rotumans who were enfranchised for the first time. Pacific islanders were put on the Fijian roll.

On many important issues the Indian delegation lost out. The principle of parity which Indians had enjoyed with the Fijians since the 1930s was now gone. Politically, the Indians were even further isolated. While Fijians had other Pacific Islanders on their rolls and Europeans had Chinese and Rotumans on theirs, the Indians were by themselves. As Patel said in a speech at Albert Park, a speech which provoked considerable comment, why were Chinese who ate 'rats, bats and cats' placed on the same roll as Europeans when culturally and historically the Indians and Europeans had more in common with each other? Putting it another way, while the Europeans and Fijians had common roll among themselves, it was the Indian community which was now confined to the communal ghetto. Patel pressed hard for a common roll. When it became clear that the Fijians and Europeans would not budge beyond conceding a few cross-voting seats, Andrew Deoki made a compromise proposal that attempted to bring together the communal, common and cross-voting rolls into one system. Deoki proposed that 12 seats, four each from the three ethnic groups, be elected on communal roll; 18 from cross-voting seats (six Fijians, six Indians, three Europeans and three (one each) from Chinese, Rotumans, and Pacific Islanders. The remaining six seats, Deoki proposed, should be elected from a common roll. Deoki explained: 'We made it very clear that compromise proposal was being put forward for the purpose of discussion by all members of the Conference. We also made it clear that we were not going to stick rigidly to the details of the compromise proposal; that was a matter for discussion amongst the 18 of us. So long as, in principle, there was an acceptance of the common roll idea in part, and the cross-voting, with reservation of seats idea in part, and the system of communal election in part, the details could be discussed and

agreed upon by the 18 members of the Conference.³³ Deoki thought the UK delegation was impressed with the proposal, but when Europeans and Fijians refused to consider it, the proposal was dropped because, the Colonial Office said, it had come too late in the discussions, at the end when the conference was about to close. The Federation group then returned to their original common roll platform.

When the conference ended, Patel and his group rejected the report and recommendations of the conference. Indeed, they had nearly boycotted the last session of the conference but had held back, in Koya's words, 'out of respect for the Crown and in the belief that the British Government will not impose on any community in Fiji a constitution which is unfair, unjust and undemocratic.' The Indian group was 'bitterly disappointed' with the results. 'Since the conclusion of the Conference we have given serious and anxious consideration to the proposals and after a long deliberation we have come to the view that we must reject them.' In a public statement, Patel wrote: 'The Indian group unanimously rejects the proposal that there should be two more Fijian members of the Legislature than the Indian members. They reject the argument of the Fijian and European groups that this additional representation is justified by a 'special' position occupied by the Fijian community in Fiji. They also reject the argument of the UK delegation that two extra Fijian seats are justified by the inclusion of the Rotuman and other Pacific Island communities in the Fijian electorate. The Indian view is that they represent the majority of the community in Fiji and that they are therefore entitled to at least as many seats as the Fijian, Rotuman and other Pacific Islanders command.'

Britain was not entirely free from blame for the way it had conducted the conference. The UK delegation had 'made no serious effort to impress upon the Fijian and European delegations of the efficacy, practicability and the need to reach a compromise. Such a compromise was, in our view, highly probable if only the United Kingdom delegation had not committed themselves at the onset to its proposals for cross-communal system of voting and had cared to spend more time in the negotiation with various groups separately and collectively at the Conference.' Britain's attitude had led to the Fijian and European delegates to believe 'that the rejection by them of constitutional proposals to the unreasonable detriment of the Indian community would be adopted by Great Britain without due regard to the requirements of fair play and justice to all communities.'

On 12 August, a week after the conference ended, Patel wrote to Anthony Greenwood, explaining his objections to the final report, the effects of entrenching the communal system, and his intention to oppose the recommendations by

33 Legislative Council Debate on the constitution, 1965.

all constitutional means. The full letter is at the end of this chapter. Patel reminded Greenwood of the British Government's promise over the years that the Indian community in Fiji would enjoy the same rights and privileges as other communities in the Colony; he referred to the Salisbury Despatch and argued that 'the proposal to give two extra seats to the Fijians constitutes, in our view, a clear breach of Lord Salisbury's Despatch on the part of Her Majesty's Government.' He said that 'the United Kingdom Delegation's proposals relating to the composition of the Legislature and the method of election are so unjust, unfair, impracticable and undemocratic that they will harden the existing racial divisions and make political integration extremely difficult, if not impossible.' He accused Whitehall of not making a serious effort to consider the compromise proposals put forward by his side. It had been agreed that land would not be discussed in London, and yet it was. 'We cannot for one moment accept the proposition that the existing Native Land Trust Board Ordinance ought not to be changed. On the question of Native land, we cannot help saying that neither the Government of Fiji nor the architects of the relevant Bill in 1940 have honoured their undertakings which were given to the Legislative Council.' The Ordinance contained 'unjust and iniquitous provisions and its operation has not helped the country, let alone the Fijian owners and Indian tenants.' Patel told Greenwood that he was deeply disappointed with the proposals for constitutional reform. Their implementation 'would create a grave racial disharmony leading to undesirable results. In this process an irreparable harm would be done to the country as a whole and we fear that goodwill, harmony and understanding, which has existed among all the races in Fiji over the last 90 years, would disappear forever. The responsibility for any course of events arising out of the implementation of these proposals would rest, in our view, on Her Majesty's Government.'

Greenwood sympathised with Patel, but in his reply of 9 September, said that it was not 'possible for the British Government in all the circumstances to impose an a priori solution of this type [full internal self-government based on the common roll]. The British Government took considerable pains before and during the conference to ascertain the views of all groups and communities in Fiji and the proposals put forward by the British Government and eventually accepted by a majority of the delegates at the conference constituted an attempt to make progress towards the general objective in a way which took into account the interests of all concerned.' Patel could, of course, oppose the report, though Greenwood asked him to remember the consequences of outright opposition. 'In my view, it is far more likely to increase the suspicions of the other communities, particularly the Fijians, than to win them over to support your point of view, which must surely be your objective. I believe that a much more fruitful course of action and one which would be far more likely to lead to the political integration and racial harmony which we all want to see achieved,

would be to co-operate fully in the introduction of the new constitution and, by showing that the measure of inter-racial voting which it will introduce does not adversely affect the interests of any race, to pave the way to further constitutional progress.³⁴ Patel accepted the constitution but only under protest.

Fijian and European delegates were delighted with the conference's outcome. A tiny minority in the population, the Europeans had managed to retain their privileged position, with the added bonus of renewed Fijian support. The principle of Fijian paramountcy had been explicitly recognised in the constitution with the allocation of two extra seats, which was as it should be, according to Ratu Edward Cakobau, because Fijian interest was 'fundamental and it must be given priority.' Ratu Mara cabled Fiji: *Na yalovinaka ni kakua ni taqaya, na veika kece koni taqayataka e seqa ni yaco, sa nomuni na lagilagi* [Don't be concerned. All that you were concerned about, did not materialise. The victory is yours].³⁵ The Fijian delegates returned to grand traditional ceremonies of welcome, jointly organised, at the suggestion of Adi Litia Lalabalavu and Ratu Naulivou, by the three confederacies of Kubuna, Tovata, and Burebasaga. It was the first time in modern Fijian history that the three groups had come together to perform such a ceremony. The symbolic message of Fijian unity could not have been more forcefully expressed. Mara expressed his gratitude to the Europeans for their magnanimity. 'I am very pleased indeed particularly at the way the Europeans have behaved,' he said. 'We have gained two more seats in the outcome at the expense of the Europeans. This proves to me that greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for fellow men, and this is what the Europeans have done for the Fijians at this conference.' Turning to the Indian leaders, he said: 'This constant pin-pricking, the constant endeavour to drive a wedge between Fijians and Europeans is not only stupid but fruitless. Speaking as a representative of the Fijian people, I can say that [the Federation Party] will never achieve its end.'

Patel stayed back in London for a few weeks, spending time with his children, and sightseeing. On his way back, he spent a few more weeks visiting relatives in India. Patel's absence aroused suspicion, enough for the *Volagauna* to write an editorial headed 'Is He Back?' 'Patel's long stay in India has given rise to speculation by a majority of the people of Fiji, particularly Fijians. Does anybody know what his intentions are?' Was Patel seeking the Government of India's assistance for his party? That was hardly the case, with India engaged in a tense stand off with China and Pakistan, but the editorial says something about how many Fijians saw Patel. He was just too clever, too crafty to be trusted; Patel was always seen to have a card hidden up his sleeve. They feared his political cunning.

34 Greenwood's letter in Patel's private papers.

35 See Lal, *Broken Waves*, 199-200.

Patel's defiant stand had won him the admiration of his followers, but it also deepened bitterness against him in his opponents. Andrew Deoki, the architect of the compromise proposal, distanced himself from the Federation platform and Singh laid all the blame for the Conference's failure at Patel's door. Ajodhya Prasad revived his anti-Patel and anti-Gujarati rhetoric. C.P Singh called Patel a petty, selfish man, a wrecker of Indian unity, a man whose conduct at the conference had disgraced the Indian community. Throughout his life, Patel had not been able to 'achieve anything but disunity.' Patel told his audiences that the Indian people should be proud, rather than feel disgraced, at standing up for their rights. There was no disgrace in fighting against racialism and racial isolationism and discriminatory legislation. All should be equal before the law. There was no point in giving up hope and losing heart, there was no point in bowing to what appeared to be inevitable. Truth would triumph in the end, he would say, paraphrasing the philosophy of the *Bhagvada Gita*. Nonetheless, the Indian community was dispirited and divided, anxious about the future.

In December 1965, Fred Archibald moved a motion in the Legislative Council to accept the conference report as a 'satisfactory basis for future political progress in Fiji along constitutional lines.'³⁶ The motion provoked a long, wide ranging and often bitter debate in the Council. Patel opposed the motion, and in the process, explained his objections to the communal and cross-voting rolls which, he said, perpetuated 'division of people on racial lines and prevented them from integration into one nation.' Patel repeated points noted earlier in this chapter. Then, he went into specific issues. The constitution was fair only to two communities, Patel said, the Europeans and the Fijian chiefs. The Council of Chiefs, a small body of men, got two separate seats in the Legislature, while the Fijian commoners and Indians, the two largest communities in Fiji, had only nine seats each. Europeans, even with a few thousand Chinese thrown onto their rolls, were the 'smallest political unit in Fiji,' yet they had seven seats. Numerically, Europeans had one seat for 1,200-1,500 people, Fijians had one for 8,000-9,000 people and the Indians one for 10,000-12,000 people. 'This roughly means that the European vote is equivalent, as far as representation in this House is concerned, to roughly about eight or nine Fijian votes to ten Indian votes. What could be more unfair than that? How can anybody call that equality of status for all the racial groups in Fiji?' The European group held the balance of power in the House; even the fourteen Fijian members of the House could not form a government on their own without the support of the Europeans.

But not everyone wanted equality, said Josua Rabukawaqa, and nor was that possible or desirable. He quoted Disraeli in support: 'There are two kinds of equality. There is the equality that elevates and creates, and the equality that levels and destroys. You give leadership to the one who has proved himself to

36 The following is based on the debate in the Legislative Council, December 1965.

the world to lead. He will elevate and create [sic] the others to enjoy the same status that he has.' Britain provided the first kind of equality, Rabukawaqa said; Britain was unique in that it had 'created and elevated all her colonies to enjoy the same status she enjoys.' So any criticism of the 'mother country' was unfair and unwarranted. Ratu Mara made the same point. Fijians admired English culture. 'It is only through aspirations to adopt the best of western culture that the Fijians will abandon some of their own culture.' It was the only culture to which 'we will submit, as Fijians, and to no other culture.' Remove the buffer of European presence and culture, and there would be 'a conflagration in this country because we will have to come to a decision [sic] which culture dominates in this country—will it be a Fijian culture or an Indian culture.' Mara's argument echoed a recurring theme in Fijian thinking: respect for things British, a strong, conservative predilection for law and order, and a sanguine view of colonialism. For them, colonialism was not the malignant disease that was wrecking the Fijian body politic, as Patel argued; British colonialism, Fijian leaders said over and over again, had given them unity, progress and a moral and political order they had not enjoyed before.

Asking for common roll in the context of Fiji society was like putting the cart before the horse, said many Fijian leaders. Rabukawaqa: 'To achieve common roll we must, first of all, achieve common grounds, and by common grounds, I mean common language, common beliefs, common religion, common culture. In Fiji we have different religions, different cultures, different languages which must be moulded first before we can achieve common roll.' Patel disagreed. Political integration should precede and not follow racial and religious integration. He argued that 'neither integration in schools nor racial miscegenation is necessary for political integration.' The United Kingdom, with its myriad of so-called races—Scots, Welsh, English, Irish—had a system of political representation based on common franchise. England had Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and Muslims, but one common franchise. Closer to home, how come Rotumans, Banabans, Solomon Islanders and other Pacific Islanders, with separate racial and cultural identities, were on the Fijian roll? How come the Chinese were on the European roll? 'As far as they are all concerned, common franchise and common roll is accepted.' Rabukawaqa's argument was hollow, said Patel, and cited the examples of Australia and New Zealand and the United States to show that racial and cultural integration was not a necessary precondition for political integration. 'If these can politically integrate with immigrants who come to their countries and if they can integrate as soon as they set foot into that country and they can be accepted as Australians and New Zealanders, even when they do not know a word of English, I do not see any difficulties when three races who have lived together in this country for nearly 90 years being brought together politically.'

Common roll would lead to Indian domination—that was the greatest fear that Europeans and Fijians had. There were more Indians of voting age than other groups, and it was an instinctive tendency, whether you were European, Fijian or Indian, to vote for your own kind, said Ronald Kermode. Patel didn't agree. The notion that common roll would lead to Indian domination started on the wrong premise that 'if there is common franchise all will necessarily vote on racial lines.' If that were the case, Patel went on, 'there would not be any meaning in forming alliances under the cross-voting system because you would expect every voter to vote with his racial interest in mind and not with common interest.' There was no such thing as a permanent minority, Patel said. 'Under a democratic form of government, the minority today may be the majority and the government after the next election. The Bill of Rights protected the rights of minorities, the individual being the smallest minority. If individual rights are adequately safeguarded, minority rights are automatically safeguarded because minorities are composed of individuals. Nobody can claim to be entitled to special privilege in a democracy by reason of race, colour, creed, birth or sex.' At the London conference, Patel reminded his critics, he and his group had argued that 'there should be no saving for existing laws which were in conflict with the right to freedom from discrimination and which could not be brought within one of the specific exceptions set out by the Constitution,' but he had been prepared to let them exist for a specified period of time.

Even his sternest critics respected—and said so publicly—Patel's passionate commitment to the principle of common roll. Indeed, they all agreed, including Ratu Mara, that the common roll was a noble ideal; they disagreed with the timing of its introduction. As Mara said, it was an ideal, like going to Heaven was the ideal for Christians. The important question for him was when and how common roll was introduced. Mara was perplexed by Patel's impatience for common roll. His fear of the consequences of communal roll leading to disharmony was unreal, or perhaps simply the projection of his experience of disunity in the Indian community. 'He has put this fear of disunity on a pedestal and lives in dread, practically the whole of his political life, of this disunity.'

When Mara reminded Patel of the communal conflicts in India and Pakistan, Patel responded that the experience of the sub-continent was in itself a very good reason to avoid the system of communal representation. The communal system had exacerbated tensions between the Hindus and Muslims. 'That is why of all the people, Indians are bitterly against communal representation because they have seen its painful results in the course of time. It may not be very serious now, but as time goes on, once people get used to the idea of a racial separation, racial attitudes harden and people start thinking on racial terms and racial interests which lead not to one nation but, in the course of political development, it leads to claims of several nations.' It will divide the

country, Patel predicted, and bring destruction in its wake. Just how far-sighted Patel was in his prognosis was to become evident two decades after his death. Meanwhile, those who had argued that common roll was an ideal striving for, but not immediately, turned their back on the idea once they came to power.

By 1965, with the Federation Party already well established, it became clear that other groups would sooner or later have to form political parties of their own. Ironically, the lead in this direction came from Sir Derek Jakeway. In his address to the Legislative Council in November, he said that the London constitutional conference, and especially the provisions for cross-voting in the new constitution, had laid the foundations for a greater degree of internal self-government. So 'the way is now wide open for leaders of imagination, who have the interests of all the people of Fiji truly at heart, to build political alliances with the object of contesting elections on a common racial platform and then, if they win a majority of seats, forming a broad base administration which will be effectively self-governing. I shall only be too happy to co-operate with such an administration and give it maximum freedom of action.' And then, with Patel in mind no doubt, he said that the claim that the Indian people had been reduced to second-class citizens was entirely without foundation. Patel's plan, as stated in his letter to Greenwood to oppose the constitution through all constitutional and peaceful means, was, in Jakeway's view, a 'retrograde step.' For him, there was no room for an 'attitude of mind which is intent on wrecking it and has no alternative to put in its place.' Jakeway's attitude was not surprising, but it does show what Patel was up against.

Jakeway's exhortation encouraged the leaders of the different groups to accelerate efforts already underway to form political parties. By 1965, a number of quasi-political parties were already in existence, including the National Congress of Fiji, formed by non-Federation Indians, the Rotuman Association, the Chinese Association, the General Electors Association, the Fiji Minority Party, the Tongan Association and, of course, the largest and most important of them all, the Fijian Association. They all shared broadly the same political agenda of gradual, minimalist constitutional reform, with communal representation at the heart of their platform. They all came together in the Alliance Party under the leadership of Ratu Kamisese Mara on 14 March 1966. In the elections for the 1966 elections, then, for the first time in Fiji's political history, two political parties were contesting for supremacy in the colonial legislature. We shall see the result of that contest in the next chapter.

Here, let us return to the issues raised at and by the London constitutional conference. As already seen, Patel was dissatisfied not only with the rejection, in effect, of his common roll proposal, but also by the United Kingdom's reluctance to persuade the Fijian and European delegations to move further along the path of full internal self-government. His opponents castigated Patel

as an irresponsible leader bent on wrecking the fragile racial harmony of the country. But independent observers were in fact closer to Patel's thinking than to his opponents'. Among them was Professor Jim Davidson of the Australian National University and a scholar of wide experience in Pacific constitutional matters. Davidson had been involved in Samoan decolonisation process as an advisor. For Davidson, the British Colonial Office had shown:

...only an intermittent and unimaginative concern with the process by which this change [internal self-government] should be brought about.

In the colony itself, senior officers of government have largely retained an attitude of benign, but out-dated paternalism. To these men, there has seemed little need for change. When London has required them to discuss constitutional development with representatives of the local people, they have done so without any deep sense of commitment to self-government and, partly as a consequence, without much political sensitivity or skill. The leaders of the Fijian and European communities have been wary of change lest, in particular, it should enhance the political influence of the Indians. The old technique of 'divide and rule' has thus been maintained, not primarily for the reasons that anti-colonialists are wont to assume, but because it has been supported by those groups in the colony that are in closest touch with the official establishment.³⁷

The official propaganda surrounding the achievements of the conference was just that, Davidson argued. Insofar as the conference had been a success, 'it had thus been so in terms of short-term political management, not in relation to the resolution of fundamental political problems. There is reason for believing that the Fijians could have been persuaded to abandon their demand for greater representation in the legislature than that of the Indians and to accept a simple common-roll procedure for the election of the nine members to be returned by voters of all communities. The initiative in proposing such concessions would have to come, however, from the British government.' That, of course, did not eventuate. Down but undefeated, Patel continued his by now almost lonely struggle for what he regarded as a more just and fair political system for the remaining three years of his life.

A.D. Patel's Letter to Anthony Greenwood, Secretary of State for the Colonies:

We must point out that the basis of the Indian Delegation's complaint is that their community were at all times led to believe that by becoming settlers and adopting Fiji as their permanent home, they would enjoy rights and privileges no whit inferior to those of other races residing in Fiji. In this connection, we beg to remind Her Majesty's Government that such a guarantee and undertaking was given in Lord Salisbury's

Despatch in March 1875. The undertaking given in this Despatch has never been withdrawn or contradicted. Indeed it was accepted and confirmed by the Crewe Commission in 1910. This Despatch was a subject matter of public discussion in 1963 on the eve of the arrival in Fiji of Mr Nigel Fisher, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. At the conclusion of Mr Fisher's tour and on the eve of his departure, he made a public statement in which he categorically said that Her Majesty's Government considered that this Despatch was binding on her. He further said that the Indians rightly regarded that the Despatch conferred on them rights and privileges as the Fijians regarded the Deed of Cession in respect of their rights and privileges. In Mr Fisher's view, the Indians could not be regarded as second-class citizens and that he considered that their rights and privileges were equal to those of other communities in Fiji. May we say without hesitation that the proposal to give two extra seats to the Fijians constitutes, in our view, a clear breach of Lord Salisbury's Despatch on the part of Her Majesty's Government.

We sincerely believe that political integration of the different communities living in Fiji is vital and necessary to the building of a politically homogeneous democratic nation. We assume that Her Majesty's Government accepts this view. However, the United Kingdom Delegation's proposals relating to the composition of the Legislature and the method of election are so unjust, unfair, impracticable and undemocratic that they will harden the existing racial decisions and make political integration extremely difficult, if not impossible.

You will note that at the outset the Indian Delegation asked for the immediate introduction of full internal self-government based on the Common Roll of system of election at the Conference. Nonetheless, our Delegation for the sake of peace and harmony and to avoid a deadlock submitted an alternative proposal. The substance of this proposal was that there should be part-communal, part cross-communal and part common roll method of election. This proposal would have accommodated the views of the United Kingdom Delegation and that of the Fijian Delegation as a whole and thereby satisfying the demands of all races. Unfortunately the United Kingdom Delegation made no serious effort to impress the Fijian and European Delegations of the efficacy, practicability and the need to reach a compromise. Such a compromise was, in our view, highly probable if only the United Kingdom Delegation had not committed themselves at the outset on its proposal for cross-communal system of voting and had cared to spend more time in the negotiation with various groups separately and collectively

at the conference. We are more than alarmed to note that along with the Bills concerning special subjects which would require more than two-thirds of the votes of the Legislative before they may be passed, it is in contemplation that the existing laws relating to Native Lands, namely, the Native Land Trust Board Ordinance would be included in this category. We venture to say that in spite of the agreement reached between all the delegates in Fiji in April 1965, the United Kingdom Delegation indirectly brought the question of ownership of land and other allied matters for discussion before the Conference. The agreement was to the effect that the question of land should not form part of the Agenda of the London Constitutional Conference, that the ownership of land, be it native or otherwise, would not be challenged, and that as the solution to the problems concerning the security of tenure, renewability of leases was vital from the viewpoint of the economic life of all the communities in Fiji, these matters should be discussed freely in Fiji and agreed upon.

The substance of this agreement was, in our opinion, brought to the notice of Her Majesty's Government through His Excellency the Governor, and yet land was discussed at the Conference. We cannot for one moment accept the proposition that the existing Native Land Trust Board Ordinance ought not to be changed. On the question of Native land, we cannot help saying that neither the Government of Fiji nor the architects of the relevant Bill in 1940 have honoured their undertakings which were given to the Legislative Council. In addition, this Ordinance contains unjust and iniquitous provisions and its operation has not helped the country, let alone the Fijian owners and Indian tenants. If Her Majesty's Government proceeds with this aspect of the proposal as contained in the Final Report of the Conference, we can see nothing but ruination for Fiji. For this reason, we feel we must advise Her Majesty's Government that the question of the ownership of Native land may well have to be raised again.

We note that the purpose of the Conference was to bring constitutional changes in Fiji towards internal self-government. These proposals, in our view, move the Colony away from that goal and they are not in keeping with the United Kingdom's declared policy of leading her Colonies towards democracy and political independence.

Since the conclusion of the Conference, we have given serious and anxious consideration to the proposals and after long deliberation we have come to the view that we must reject them.

It is our intention to oppose these proposals by peaceful and constitutional means. The implementation of these proposals, in our view, would create a grave racial disharmony leading to undesirable results. In this process an irreparable harm would be done to the country as a whole and we fear that goodwill, harmony and understanding, which has existed among all the races in Fiji over the last 90 years, would disappear forever. The responsibility for any course of events arising out of the implementation of these proposals would rest, in our view, on Her Majesty's Government. In the circumstances, we make this plea: that Her Majesty's Government take necessary steps to amend these proposals in consultation with the remainder of the Delegation and make an earnest effort so that a solution may be reached acceptable to all concerned.