

# Chapter 10: Independence Now

Independence our only salvation.

A.D. Patel, 1968

I do not threaten anybody, and I do not fear any threats. My policy is to live and let live.

A.D. Patel, 1968

This Convention is firmly of the view that this country is fit and ready for political independence and requests the United Kingdom Government to convene a constitutional conference as soon as possible to prepare a democratic constitution based on one man one vote constituencies and transferring power to the representatives elected under such a franchise. The Convention emphasises the urgent need for immediate political independence in order to remove all political, social and economic impediments which obstruct the development of the country and thereby come seriously in the way of raising the standard of living of its inhabitants.

Ratu Mosese Veraeikete and Ratu Julian Toganivalu  
Federation Party Convention, Ba, 29 June, 1968

‘I, for one, believe that Fiji is ready for complete independence,’ said A.D. Patel in late 1965. ‘When we compare Fiji with countries like Samoa, Cook Islands, and other territories, no one can say that we are in any way backward to those countries. If they can shoulder responsibilities well, I do not see any reason why Fiji should not.’<sup>1</sup> That became the standard platform of the Federation Party, and its principal manifesto in the 1966 elections held under the 1965 constitution. Political independence was one of Patel’s main preoccupations. Another development which occupied him during this period was the negotiation for a new cane contract to replace the Eve contract of 1961. Then there were his duties as the leader of his party and his role as Fiji’s first Leader of the Opposition. As if these were not enough, Patel was appearing in the most important criminal cases in the colony. Although his appearances before the Supreme Court had decreased in the 1960s, he was still Fiji’s most successful living criminal lawyer. In addition, Patel was the Banaban people’s chief legal counsel and advisor to the UN Committee on Decolonisation and had drafted their petition for independence to the United Nations. Patel’s fame as a lawyer and as a champion of the underdog had spread throughout the Pacific. Semisi

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1 Legislative Council Debate, December 1965.

Koloamatangi of Nuku'alofa, Tonga wrote to Patel in June 1966 seeking his advice on a constitution for a Labour and Local Producers Union he was thinking of establishing in Tonga. Semisi wrote: 'I have heard a lot about you and your kind help to people who ask for it. You do not know me, but I have heard your name a great deal with your fame mentioned everywhere here in Tonga. That is why I write and ask your help in this matter.'<sup>2</sup>

Such a busy schedule would have taxed the energies of a much younger person, and Patel was in his early sixties. Besides, he was in indifferent health. Since contracting diabetes in the late 1950s, Patel had required daily injections of insulin. In September 1966, Patel became seriously ill, enough for the visiting Secretary of State for the Colonies, Fred Lee, to write to Patel wishing him speedy recovery because 'Fiji needed him.' In some parts of Viti Levu, the rumour spread that Patel had died, while the *Fiji Times* reported that Patel was preparing to leave for India for a visit. Patel was unwell but fully engaged. For his supporters, Patel's determination to continue on despite failing health was inspiring, an example to younger leaders to emulate. But there were others in the party ranks who wanted Patel to slow down, to delegate more responsibility. Perhaps some of them wanted their own little space in the sun, their own share of limelight, but the majority were genuinely concerned about Patel's health; they wanted him to be around and well when the next constitutional conference took place.

The first task for the Federation Party was to prepare for the elections, raising campaign funds, selecting candidates, educating the electorate about the issues. More complications were involved than might be apparent at first glance. The mechanics of voting was one, especially as there were many illiterate people voting for the first time. To assist them, Patel suggested using symbols on the ballot paper. That was the practice in many third world countries. The government refused. Writing to Patel on 19 January 1966, the Colonial Secretary objected on the grounds that a very large number of symbols for individual candidates would be required, making it difficult to distinguish between them if used on ballot papers. Then there was the question of deciding the basis on which to allot the symbols. Furthermore, 'their adoption would be regarded as retrogressive by literate persons and it would be necessary to make their use general and not confine them to Indians, not only to avoid charges of discrimination but to meet the requirements of cross-voting.' If symbols were used on separate ballot boxes for each candidate, an excessive number would be required to meet the needs of every candidate in each polling booth. Also the additional printing work might delay the elections. This was an issue on which the Fijian leaders might have been expected to agree with Patel. But that did not happen. Symbols would be used after independence.

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2 In Patel's private papers.

Another matter of importance was the strength and unity of the party. On the whole, the Federation Party was united, but there were dissidents among its members. This is revealed in an extraordinary, type-written letter a vice president of the party, acting on the instructions of the Working Committee, wrote to Patel on 6 August 1966.<sup>3</sup> It is revealing because it indicates that the party members felt comfortable enough with Patel to approach him directly even though the matter they raised was extremely serious. 'This is the time to take stock of the record of the Party's Legco members without fear or favour,' the letter began. Patel had acquitted himself well of his responsibilities, despite his age and ill health, but they warned him that the 'time was fast coming, if not already come, that your responsibilities should be shared by others and relieve you of overwork.' Madhavan was praised 'for his unflinching work and loyalty,' as was Chirag Ali Shah even though he was a nominated member in the Council. The Federation member who came in for particularly severe criticism was Siddiq Koya whose 'rudeness to his colleagues and party workers and some others has by now become proverbial in the party and his insulting behaviour to some good workers of the Party has had demoralising effects on the Party workers and members.' He was susceptible to flattery. Apparently after returning from the London conference, ahead of Patel, Koya had said that 'we lost all and there should be left-wing and right-wing in the Party.' Comments like this had caused friction among the members. Unless this was corrected, cliquism would paralyse the party. The letter concluded that Koya should not be selected as a candidate unless his behaviour and attitude improved.

What Patel thought of the letter, and whether he was aware of Koya's reported conduct, is not known. However, at least two sources have confirmed a very tense encounter between Patel and Koya at a meeting in Ba, so tense that they feared that party unity would be irrevocably damaged.<sup>4</sup> Koya, who had made no secret of his disappointment with the outcome of the London conference whose failure he apparently attributed partly to his own party's intransigence, wanted to invite Andrew Deoki to a Federation Party meeting in Ra to explain his, Deoki's, position and why he had distanced himself from the Patel group. Patel rejected the request. It was a Federation Party meeting, he said, and since Deoki was not a member of the party, he had no right to insist on being invited. Deoki could call his own meeting to explain his position. Koya exploded and a heated exchange took place between him and Patel. He was not afraid of anybody, Koya said; he would show the people what he was made of. Patel responded in kind. 'No one rides roughshod over A.D. Patel,' he said, and if Koya wanted to challenge his authority, let him try. Koya walked off. But a few

3 This letter is included in the companion volume containing Patel's speeches and writings.

4 Conversation with Vinod Patel; the encounter took place in Ba. Dr Rod Alley of Victoria University of Wellington who talked with Patel at length and has made a fine study of the emergence of political parties in Fiji in the 1960s, has told me that he noticed a certain 'cooling off' in Patel's attitude to Koya.

hours later, he returned and apologised to Patel for his rude behaviour, saying that Patel was like a father to him and that he would do anything for him. The two men were reconciled, but the warmth and closeness of earlier years was gone. Whatever Patel's own feelings, however, given the political realities and cultural politics in the Indian community together with Koya's performance in the Legislative Council, it was hardly likely that Patel would drop his lieutenant from the line up of candidates. It was critical for Patel to win all the nine Indian communal seats to consolidate his claim as the leader of the Indian community. To that end, it was essential to defeat those Indians who stood on the Alliance tickets and others who had opposed him in the past. The Federation team was predictably safe. Of the nine communal candidates, five were lawyers, one a wealthy landlord, one a farmer and two teachers. Looking at it another way, the communal candidates consisted of two Christians, three Muslims and four Hindus.

Immediate independence for Fiji on the basis of common roll was the platform of the Federation Party. The campaign slogan was 'Independence Our Only Salvation.' It was an intense campaign with its full share of electioneering fireworks. Once again, Patel was the target of particular attack. If the Federation Party were returned to the Legislative Council with increased majority, there would be violence and bloodshed in the country, because Patel had alienated the Fijians and Europeans. Patel was a dictator, his opponents charged, who wanted to become independent Fiji's first prime minister. Patel's response was Gandhian: 'I seek no power. All powers are corrupt. Whatever I do, I do with the co-operation of my comrades and my party members.' I aspire for one thing,' Patel told an audience at the Century Theatre in August, 'and that is the opportunity to serve humanity. To serve and not to rule.'<sup>5</sup>

Patel was anti-European, Patel's opponents argued, intent on driving the Europeans out so that the Gujarati business community could flourish in Fiji. That, Patel said, was a wicked lie. How could Fiji do without European capital? He was not anti-European; he was against European domination of Fiji. 'We are trying to change them from sahibs into brothers and they resent it. They are all Christians and if they read the Bible sincerely and carefully instead of feeling angry at me or at the Federation Party, they will join hands with me and they will certainly say that this is what should be done.' Patel wanted the Europeans to take a wider view of their role in Fiji. 'The Europeans have to consider whether they are going to exercise these advantages [of better education and economic status] in the interests of the colony and in trying to make themselves leaders of the colony, or whether they are going to keep themselves into a narrow circle, always thinking in terms of their own small community and trying to look upon themselves as the opponents of other communities.' Those Europeans who knew

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5 *Pacific Review*, 10 August 1966.

Patel well denied that he was anti-European. J.G. Rodger, who had worked with Patel when he was the Member of Social Services, wrote: 'If A.D. was anti-European, I do not recall his ever showing it in my presence. But even if he were, why not? There were plenty of Europeans around at that time who made no secret of the fact that they were anti-Indian.'<sup>6</sup>

What Fiji needed most of all for economic development was political stability, and Patel's brand of politics was destabilising the country, his critics charged. But what precisely did political stability mean? 'When they talk of political stability they seem to imply no political change, no change in the Government, no change of the Government. That is not the sort of political stability that anybody would desire or wish for in this country. Whether the outside investors like it or not we have had enough of colonialism in this country—for 90 years. What I understand by 'political stability' is where there is peace and order, where there is security of person and property and where there is rule of law. Governments might change, even constitutions might change, laws would change, fiscal policies would change from government to government and party to party but that does not mean that there is political instability.' The United Kingdom did not have a written constitution but no one accused that country of being politically unstable.

Fiji needed foreign capital, Patel agreed, but added that 'if the people of this country are to be free and happy, capital will have to be muzzled here, too, in the same way as in other countries.' If the foreign capital wanted to come to Fiji to pay lower wages to get higher prices and pay lower taxes, thus wanting to gain advantage from every source, he would rather go without that sort of capital. It would be better to proceed slowly, for the people to rise by their own boot straps. 'We welcome capital which wants to come in a spirit of give and take, in a spirit where both sides could benefit, not just to say that we have come to establish this factory and are giving employment to so many people, when they are paid only feed and breed wages, to tell the people that we have saved this country so much in foreign exchange when they sell their goods at higher prices than what this country would have to pay if they were imported from abroad or pay lower taxes and then say; look how much we are paying, knowing fully well that in their own country they would pay twice as much. When I advocated the rise in dividend tax from 5 per cent to 10 per cent, the vested interests of this country accused me that I was trying to frighten the future investors from outside, but they did not disclose the fact to the people that in their own countries they are paying as much as 30 per cent.' Often people asked the Federation to moderate its criticism because Fiji received aid from foreign countries, especially Australia and New Zealand. People were expected to be grateful for what they received, and indeed they were, Patel said, but they

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6 Private communication.

were 'not prepared to say that it is altogether one-sided. At the best, such an aid on the part of the giver amounts to enlightened self-interest. At the worst, it amounts to self-interest. I will not say that we are not thankful to the Australian Government for giving us this gift of wheat, but I would certainly say that gift is like a cumin seed in the mouth of a camel. In view of what Australia gains and receives from Fiji, this gift is merely peanuts.'

Among Patel's strongest Indian critics in the Legislative Council was Andrew Deoki, who had been in the Council for more than a decade. To dislodge him from his Suva seat was, therefore, no easy task, for Deoki was an experienced politician, with wide social contacts. Putting another Indian male candidate against Deoki might not be enough, Patel reasoned. He gambled by putting up a little known India-born female teacher, Irene Jai Narayan, in the critical Suva seat. The gamble paid off, with Irene Narayan winning 5,676 votes to Deoki's 2,779. In Tailevu, young lawyer Karam Ramrakha won handily (3,220 votes) over K.B. Singh (677) and R.L. Regan (604). Patel's younger brother, also a lawyer, R.D. Patel, triumphed over James Shankar Singh by 4,704 to 4,411; Koya (6,318) trounced Jaswant Singh (2,221) and C.A. Patel (19); M.T. Khan (4,380) won over R.I. Kapadia (1,650) and B.D. Laksman (24); Chirag Ali Shah (3,799) won easily over Alliance's Vishnu Deo (1,955) and V.P. Vajpai (770). In Vanua Levu, landlord Ramjati Singh (2,328) won over lawyer Harish Kohli (1,238) and James Madhavan (5,049) defeated Andrew Gaya Prasad (2,494). A.D. Patel himself won (7,601) easily over his arch political opponent, Fiji National Congress Party and Kisan Sangh leader, Ajodhya Prasad (4,025). Patel emerged from the election with his reputation enhanced and his party as the representative party of the Indian community.

After the elections, Fiji stepped into the next phase of internal self-government. Ratu Kamisese Kapaiwai Tuimacilai Mara, the leader of the Alliance Party, was elected the Chief Minister. Fiji now had a cabinet system of government. Patel became Fiji's Leader of the Opposition. In the three years that Patel occupied that position, a number of issues were discussed in the Legislative Council on which Patel made his contributions. Some of these concerned minor irritations, such as the restriction on women drinking liquor, which Patel opposed not only because such prohibitions were racially discriminatory—European women were exempt from the prohibition—but because they made little sense and were offensive to non-European women. To say that Indian women would start drinking if the drinking restrictions were removed 'is quite absurd and we are underestimating the sense of their responsibility, the sense of their dignity and pride that they take in their ancient culture.'

Patel supported the cooperative movement in Fiji but issued warnings about its pitfalls. The cooperative movement was a good movement, but very few such movements had actually achieved any success at all in Fiji. The idea behind



establishing cooperatives was to prevent the exploitation of the consumer, but 'co-operative stores in themselves are no guarantee that the consumer will not be exploited,' Patel warned. 'If a private storekeeper exploits the consumer, or if a joint stock company exploits the consumer, the people working in the co-operative store can equally exploit the consumers, which they have been doing right throughout all these years in Fiji to the detriment of the movement and this has resulted in the failure of co-operative societies in the field of storekeeping. To make the movement a success, the government needed to give the undertaking that 'the farmers' faith and trust will be honoured,' otherwise 'this is all mere talk which leads to nothing.'

Patel spoke, as he had in the 1940s, on the right of the workers to unionise and strike, rights which the Alliance government acknowledged but tried to constrain through legislation. For Patel there was nothing wrong in unions resorting to political action to redress their grievances. 'It is well known throughout all countries that under the capitalistic system, the working class has to make great sacrifices resulting in continuous and constant agitation to assert the rights of the workers and have their share in all industrial undertakings. There is not a single instance in the world where they have managed to do it without resort to political actions. In this country, that seems to be the only remedy.' In India, which had often been criticised for its various real and alleged shortcomings, the workers used various tactics—gherao, dharana, bunds—lay siege and surround the management, until their demands were considered. If the workers did that in Fiji, the special constables would be called in, black-legs would be brought in to replace the striking workers, who themselves would be threatened with coercion and imprisonment. The workers had no minimum wage, and the conditions of employment were often appalling. So, 'to strike is a very important and valuable right of the worker,' but it was a right they exercised only when all other options had failed and not recklessly as the employers argued. If labourers in Fiji had not struck more in the past, it was 'not because they are contented, it is not because they are satisfied with the conditions and the wages they get, but it is because they feel helpless.' Employers frequently resorted to calling trade union leaders militant, but in Fiji, Patel said, a 'militant leader is a leader who stands for and insists upon fair play and justice, who refuses to be a tool in the hands of the employer and who stands firm. Whatever the colonial vested interests say, the salvation of the working class in this country will largely depend on the so-called militant and irresponsible leaders.' Ratu Mara disagreed. Economic development was of paramount importance, and he wanted maximum investment in the shortest possible time. As for trade unions, Mara said his government could not be accused of being against them. Still, labour is getting a fair share of capital investment here in Fiji, and while we are

attracting capital we leave it to the trade unions themselves to argue their case and see that a fair share of the returns from the capital invested are shared by them.'

Throughout the 1960s, important changes were taking place in the system of Fijian administration. Partly as a result of outside pressure, among them the recommendations of the Burns Commission, the findings of academic experts, and partly out of internal re-thinking, the Fijian Administration of Ratu Sukuna's time was being reformed, and aspects of it rejected. In May 1966, Ratu Penaia Ganilau as Secretary for Fijian Affairs and Local Government, moved a motion in the Legislative Council to abolish many aspects of what by then had become a retrogressive institution. Gone now were separate Fijian courts, a Fijian magistracy, a Fijian constabulary, a Fijian divorce court, a Fijian Criminal Offences Code, sets of Fijian regulations applicable only to Fijians, separate Public Health Regulations, Provincial Prisons Regulations, and the like. Ganilau explained the reasons behind the change. The Fijian people did not want to be regarded as anthropological curiosities and a community different from the broad community in which they lived. They wanted to play a fuller part in the modern life of the colony, which could be achieved only through a thoroughly reformed and more democratic system of Fijian administration. Fijians objected to what Ganilau called 'cotton-wool legislation;' they wanted 'to tackle modern life by being allowed to face the hard facts of such life, free from paternalism, however well meant, and from especially protective legislation.'<sup>7</sup>

Patel was cautious but direct. When the Fijian Affairs Board was established, the hopes of the Fijians had been raised high. They thought that they were the lucky section of the population because they were granted real self-government. It was hoped that in a decade or so, the Fijian people would gain valuable training 'in the arts and responsibilities of self-government.' But that hope was dashed. 'The taukei has not progressed very far, has not gained self-government and what is more, with this system he is not able to make very much headway in social, political and economic spheres.' The separate Fijian Administration and the Fijian Regulations had not only kept the Fijian people isolated from the rest of the population and from the mainstream of economic life of the colony, but had also placed on them 'the onerous burden of having to serve three masters—the Government of this country, separate Fijian Administration and the traditional rule of chiefs.' This Patel felt was counterproductive at a time when many Fijians were keen to enter not only the field of commercial agriculture but also the world of industry and commerce. This desire had always been there, though 'strained for a long time.' He urged the government to do something constructive.

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7 Legislative Council Debate, 24 May 1966.



Patel alluded to the Fijian Development Fund, created by Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna. Patel had congratulated the Fijian leader then. But the dream had vanished and the money wasted. 'I would have thought that with a Fund of that magnitude [£100,000 a year] the first thing that anybody would do would be instead of buying things locally and building houses, they would establish a house which would import materials directly, establish small scale industries which would process local material for utilisation and for the implementation of a development scheme, thereby not only saving money, not only making profits but also giving an opportunity for gaining necessary know-how and necessary skill in the fields of commerce and industry. We have a saying in our language. "That what the owner can see even in a broken piece of an earthen pot his neighbour cannot see in a clean mirror." I being the neighbour, if I cannot see what you can see, I would say good luck to the scheme; if you can make a success of it that way, do it. But I honestly feel there are better and more practical ways, and more profitable ways, of employing and using that Fund in the economic development of the taukei.'

Fijians had everything, yet they somehow remained poor, Patel said, like a man standing on the shores of a beautiful freshwater lake and complaining of thirst. They had capital which came from the Fund, collected from cess. They had land which was controlled by the Native Land Trust Board. And they had labour which was regulated by the Fijian Affairs Board. 'All these three, when properly adjusted and properly used, can lead a community to progress and prosperity. When all these three resources are neglected or not properly utilised, it leads to backwardness.' Sufficient land was placed in reserve for the Fijians, yet most of it had reverted to bush or was re-leased to Indian tenants under tenuous arrangements.<sup>8</sup> Patel pleaded with the government to assist Fijians enter these fields, and offered cooperation. Why could not the Fijian landowners be given the title to their own land, to do with it as they pleased within some form of government oversight to check abuse and corruption? Why couldn't the Fijian landowners sell some of their land and buy out the CSR, thus gaining a valuable stake in an industry which was the mainstay of the colony's economy?<sup>9</sup> What could be better than for the Fijians to become the millers of sugar cane and the Indians to be its producers? That would be true partnership between the two major communities.

To those who balked at embracing change, Patel responded that change was inevitable. 'Tomorrow will be different from today, because we already find that amongst the taukei now there are two schools of political thought emerging; one the conservative, the other progressive. One wants to hold on the past, the other wants to reach out for the future.' 'You cannot block the progress of

<sup>8</sup> See Patel's contribution to the Legislative Council Debate on ALTO in 1966 and 1969.

<sup>9</sup> *Pacific Review*, 28 January 1969.

a people indefinitely. Everything changes; things will have to change in this country, and it will be the people who have vision, who have imagination to see that in the modern world only those can survive who have the ability to modernise. Those who have not will find that history is merciless and it cannot help them.' Patel contributed his own bit towards fostering change. In the 1960s, he provided legal advice to the fledgling Fijian Chamber of Commerce headed by Viliame Savu. Patel hoped that the Chamber would provide the launching pad for entrepreneurial Fijians, and even talked of forming a major Fijian company called the Taukei Pacific. But he died before much could be achieved. His successors did not continue Patel's unfinished business.

On a related note, during a Legislative Council debate on the Interpretation Bill in August 1967, Patel suggested that there should be a common name for all Fiji citizens, an issue that other leaders would champion later. This is what he said:

The Fijian under this definition does not connote the original inhabitants of Fiji. It is not an ethnic description of the Fijian people. It is widened to include people of other races who originally migrated from islands of the South Pacific. The Banaban is very much a Fijian under this definition as an original inhabitant of Fiji, so is a Rotuman, so is a Samoan, Tongan, Gilbertese, Ellice Islander, New Hebridean, so it is not a question of whether the word 'Fijian' designates any particular member of a particular race. It is a political designation given to a part of the Fiji population. Now, that creates a serious complication in my mind. If merely a section of the population is to be described as Fijians, how are all inhabitants of this country, as a nation, to be described. Whatever race a person belongs to—an inhabitant of New Zealand is called a New Zealander, whatever his race; an inhabitant of Australia is called an Australian; and of Great Britain, Briton. There are so many races in India but anybody belonging to India or an inhabitant of India is called an Indian. How shall the inhabitants of Fiji be described? I think it is high time now that the word 'Fijian' is kept for the inhabitants of Fiji irrespective of their race. If the original inhabitants of Fiji want to have a separate designation, I believe Fijian is not their original designation but their designation as they themselves described in their own language is taukei with pride. I would have thought that taukei would have been more appropriate for the Fijians as an ethnic description than calling them Fijians and including them with a number of other immigrant races who have come and settled in Fiji debarring the Chinese, Europeans and ourselves. There is a danger in this: once people

get accustomed to the use of the word 'Fijian' as applied to certain races inhabiting Fiji, it psychologically comes in the way of the nation-building of this country.<sup>10</sup>

Two years later Ratu Mara resurrected and supported the idea. Patel was pleased hoping that agreements such as this might help 'create a peaceful and harmonious climate' at a tense time in Fiji. Thirty years later, however, Fiji still does not have a common name.

Two industries which came under serious scrutiny in the late 1960s were the gold mine and sugar. The Federation Party moved a motion in the Legislative Council to nationalise the gold mines, as the Fiji Labour Party would do two decades later, both unsuccessfully.<sup>11</sup> His contribution to the debate shows Patel at his best. First he dissected the arguments against nationalisation. If the mine were nationalised, critics held, all prospecting would cease and the industry would be severely hampered. Patel disagreed. 'If gold industries were owned and run by the State instead of by private corporation, this State could carry on with the prospecting in the same way as a private corporation and perhaps much more effectively.' To the Attorney General's argument about difficulties in government acquiring the ownership of the industry, Patel responded: 'We are aware but once we agree and once we make up our minds that the gold industry would and must be nationalised, then I say, where there is a will there is a way, and constitutions all the world over are not so rigid and inflexible that they cannot be amended to meet the requirements of the country to a particular circumstance.'

Nationalisation would scare capital, the opponents of nationalisation argued, but Patel disagreed. Capital was not shy or timid, as his opponents argued. Shyness ordinarily arose from and was the offspring of morality and modesty. But, in truth, 'capital is a shameless, immoral, brazen dame who would travel and go to any length if there was monetary gain at the other end. Nothing is going to discourage it.' Britain had industrialised many industries yet that did not discourage hard-headed American investors from investing in that country. More British capital was pouring into India after India had nationalised several important industries. The gold mine was paying taxes and wages and employing people, it had even created a special town at Vatukoula. That was all true, said Patel, but 'I would be interested to hear how much of this profit they [the mining company] had ploughed back into the enterprise.'

Sakiasi Waqanivavalagi said that if the mine were nationalised the workers would be seriously affected, and they might even refuse to work for a state-controlled mine. But Fiji had experienced several changes of ownership of

<sup>10</sup> Legislative Council Debate, 29 August 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Legislative Council Debate, January 1969.

major companies and nothing had been said against them. Brown and Joske had been taken over by Carpenters, along with Morris Hedstrom. 'Now if nationalisation was effected in this industry all that it would amount to would be this. Instead of a small limited liability company, which in modern parlance is called a corporation, will be the largest and the strongest corporation in the country, namely the Government.' If the employees of Brown and Joske had no objection to being taken over by Carpenters, then Patel could not see any reason why the employees of the Emperor Gold Mines had anything to fear from government ownership of the gold mine industry. If anything, the workers would be in a better position 'because it is the duty and will remain the duty of Government to be a good employer. It will not be dominated by profit motives all the time at the expense of the employees. There will be no discrimination and the dissatisfaction which prevails in the working force would not arise because the Government would always see to it that there was no discrimination. And since it is the duty and the onerous obligation of the Government to provide as much employment for as many people as it can by economic development and the extending of those operations in the economic sphere as well as controlling and directing the existing ones with a view to better employment advantages they will be securer in their employment than at present.'

Patel then turned to why the gold mines ought to be nationalised. The central question was what was in the best interests of Fiji: to have gold mined by a private company for its own profit or by the government for the benefit of the tax payer. Gold was an important commodity in determining a country's political and economic position in international affairs. Its value might fluctuate, but as a commodity it would always remain important. 'It is one asset that is most important in international trade, both in times of peace and in times of war, and I for one would not call the Government of the United States of America or of the United Kingdom or President de Gaulle if they looked with alarm if there is some depletion in their gold reserves.' What phosphate was to Nauru, gold was to Fiji/ Patel said. Even before it became independent, Nauru had decided to nationalise the phosphate industry, a decision which benefited its people immensely. In the very first year of independence (1968), the Nauruans were in a position to financially help their neighbours in the South Pacific, including Fiji.

Unlike sugar and copra, the two other major exports from Fiji, gold was a limited, wasting asset. If the industry were nationalised, the Government could regulate its operations in such a way 'that the future generations are not totally deprived of the benefits.' Fiji could learn much from what was happening on the Ocean Island where a private concern, the British Phosphate Commission, was mining phosphate at such a rate that within a few years time, the island would

be reduced to a 'desert of rocks completely unfit for human habitation. So one has got to be very careful about a very important and precious asset which is in the nature of a wasting asset, which cannot be grown or replaced again.'

One crop which could be grown and replaced again was sugar cane, the backbone of the colony's economy. Like gold, the sugar industry, too, was owned by an Australian concern. Since the 1960 strike, it had been organised along the lines suggested in the Eve report. The ten year contract between the Company and the kisan was about to end in 1970. Consequently, the new contract to be negotiated between the two parties became a matter of considerable debate and discussion in Fiji. The sugar industry had enjoyed a mixed fortune throughout the 1960s. In the early years of the decade, the weather conditions were good, production was high and cane prices went up as high as £4.17.6 per ton. Then things took a turn for the worse. In 1964 and 1965, Fiji was visited by two devastating hurricanes, and there was a drought in the sugar belt between 1964 and 1966. Earning from sugar declined, bankruptcies increased by 50 per cent, and sugar cane production declined by 30 per cent, while land rents increased dramatically, sometimes by 400-500 per cent. Petitions and motions were presented in the Legislative Council on behalf of farmers, pleading distress and hardship. Whatever their political affiliations and personal differences, almost everyone in the farming community agreed that the Eve contract was a killer as far as the growers were concerned. The impact and implications of the Eve contract would be brought before the Denning arbitration in 1969.

There were other related questions in the sugar industry as well which created much resentment among the growers.<sup>12</sup> The machinery created to deal with the supervision of the sugar industry, the Sugar Advisory Board, was a facade of democracy, Patel argued, inefficient, ineffective, partial toward the company, distrusted by the growers, and 'designed to secure a strong representation of the millers and a weak sabotaged representation of the growers and workers.' The Governor would appoint five representatives of the millers in consultation with the General Manager of the CSR in Sydney, while he would select five from a list of ten submitted not by the growers' organisations, but by the foremen of cane harvesting gangs. It was absurd, said Patel, that a man elected for one particular purpose, to act as the foreman of the cane cutters and to see that the cane was properly harvested, loaded and delivered according to the program, should be presumed to represent the growers' voice in all respects in the industry.<sup>13</sup> Lawyers and candidates for and members of the Legislative Council were ineligible for appointment to the Board. But this provision was nothing more than a tactic 'to create a false impression of impartiality.' Patel wondered

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<sup>12</sup> Legislative Council Debate, 8 May 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Legislative Council Debate, May 1969.

why such individuals were eligible to serve as Government representatives, but not as the representatives of growers and workers? Surely what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander.<sup>14</sup>

The ultimate effect of the Sugar Industry Control Bill, Patel argued, was to weaken the growers' position in the industry. Events proved him right. The chairmen of the Board were people who had little or no knowledge of the sugar industry at all. The first chairman, retired Air Marshall Sir Arthur Sanders, was appointed in January 1962, but left a year later. His successor, Justice C.C. Marsack, formerly the Chief Justice of Samoa, had no previous experience of Fiji or the sugar industry. Consequently and in the circumstances naturally, the officials of the Board relied on the Company for their knowledge of the industry. The growers paid the piper but they did not call the tune. In 1969, Patel moved a motion in the Legislative Council to have the Bill repealed. That paved the way for an independent arbitration into the sugar industry to settle the terms of the new contract.

It will be recalled that the Federation Party had accepted the 1965 constitution under protest, acceding to Anthony Greenwood's request to give it a fair trial. As it happened, the constitution produced the desired result for the colonial officialdom. A Fijian-dominated government with multi-racial trappings and image, headed by a high chief, had been elected into office. If things proceeded in the manner expected, Fiji would eventually be led into independence by the 'right' people, and Britain could honourably withdraw from the colony having fulfilled the terms and conditions of the Deed of Cession. In February 1967, Herbert Bowden, Britain's Secretary of Commonwealth Affairs, visited Fiji and said that the colony would not be hustled into independence. Britain would consider the request for independence only if it was the agreed wish of all the people of the colony. Fiji had a new constitution which was working well and should be given a fair trial. All in all, said Bowden, 'it is impossible to put down a time table. It is very much a matter for Fiji.'<sup>15</sup> Patel saw the trap that lay ahead. He told a meeting in Tavua: 'If we had gone on with the present undemocratic, unjust, iniquitous constitution, Britain would have played the same game with Fiji as it played with Rhodesia. When the time came for granting self-government, Britain would have said: "The 1965 constitution has worked well in Fiji." We would thus have been saddled with the present constitution forever.'<sup>16</sup>

Then, making matters worse, or rather rubbing salt on a deeply felt wound, the Alliance government began making unilateral decisions on important matters without consulting the opposition or even the Legislative Council. For Patel, the

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14 *Pacific Review*, 30 November 1961.

15 *Pacific Review*, 15 Feb. 1967; *Jagriti*, 29 August 1968.

16 *Pacific Review*, 13 January 1968.



same old pattern of racial imbalance existed. In the Council of Ministers, there were nine Europeans, two Fijians and only one Indian. This was no progress: 'This in a country in which Indians and Fijians are 94 per cent of the population and the European a mere 5 per cent? Is this democracy? Indians who are 50 per cent of the population are completely denied any share in the new government and are reduced to a permanent minority in the Council.'<sup>17</sup> The Federation Party, Patel said, had not been consulted by anybody about the introduction of the ministerial system of government which, contrary to what he had been told, was now beginning to acquire a seemingly permanent status.<sup>18</sup>

Unless there was definite progress toward a better constitutional framework, Patel said, his party would boycott the Legislative Council. His threat was taken seriously enough for Ratu Edward Cakobau, a man trusted and loved by both sides, to indicate to Patel through a Federation member (possibly S.B. Patel) the possibility of a meeting between Mara and Patel. Cakobau also mentioned a proposal that he had broached with someone on his own side. His proposal, a pro-tem compromise for the transitional period leading to independence, was that the Legislative Council should consist of 35 members of whom 15 each would be Fijians and Indians, and five Europeans, all elected on the communal roll. Patel discussed the proposal with his colleagues. Reportedly, Ratu Mara contacted Patel at his Nadi home. When the two met in Suva, Patel made a counter offer of a 40 seat Council, 15 each for Fijians and Indians, five for Europeans and five common roll seats with no racial reservation for either the voters or the candidates. Mara reportedly promised to give Patel a reply in due course, but that reply never came.

So on 1 September, 1967, Patel moved in the Legislative Council that:

undemocratic, iniquitous and unjust provisions characterise the existing constitutional and electoral laws of Fiji and their operation have caused alarm in the minds of right thinking people and have hampered the political advancement of Fiji along democratic lines and this House therefore is of the opinion that Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom should call a constitutional conference immediately to ensure that a new constitution is worked out and based on true democratic principles without any bias or distinction on the grounds of colour, race, religion or place of origin or vested interest, either political, economic, social or other so that Fiji may attain self-government and become a nation with honour, dignity and responsibility as soon as possible.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Pacific Review*, 5 July 1967.

<sup>18</sup> Rod Alley 1973, 181-182.

<sup>19</sup> This quote and the others that follow are from the Legislative Council Debate, September 1967.

Patel reminded the Council of his party's position at the London conference, and drew attention to the lop-sided composition of the House and flaws in electoral provisions and voting procedures all of which had worked to his community's disadvantage. Instead of bringing people together, fostering a feeling of compatriotism, it was widening the gulf among them. Patel said: 'Time has come when in the interests of democratic freedom, we have called for a halt. If this continues any longer attitudes will harden, difficulties will be created, the real aspirations and wishes of the overwhelming number of people in this country will be misrepresented abroad as is happening now, everybody who comes from outside will be told that we in Fiji like colonialism, we do not want freedom, nobody wants freedom. Racial attitudes will stiffen, the divisions will become still more rigid and defined and when the real time comes, people of this colony will find it almost impossible to break all these rigid barriers in order to unite the various communities of this country [and] lead them to nationhood.' Just how penetrating this prognosis was, subsequent history of Fiji would tragically confirm.

Patel's motion provoked one of the most intense debates in the annals of Legislative Council of Fiji. The constitution which Patel was rejecting was not undemocratic, said Ratu Mara; 'it was unassailable because of what it has achieved.' It was not iniquitous; it was inspiring. It was not unjust; 'it is unparalleled amongst emerging countries in the world today.' The Federation's behaviour, Mara said, was 'wild, unreasoned, unfounded and childish.' But the main attack on Patel's motion was led not by Mara, or any other Fijian or European member, but by Vijay R. Singh, Minister for Social Services, signatory to the 24th of July document and a well known, implacable foe of Patel's. Singh was a member of a prominent Ba landowning clan. London-trained barrister, he was a sharp and eloquent, perhaps the best debater on the Alliance benches. Singh was at his fiery best. Patel was wrong and misguided, Singh said, and his fears about the deleterious effects of the communal roll vastly exaggerated. Despite the system of communal election, leaders of the different communities had been able to 'work in peace, harmony and in goodwill for the sake of the country and for the sake of the people.' The Federation preached one thing but practised another. To underscore his point, Singh told a joke about John and Mary. John asks, 'Mary, if you wasn't what you is, what would you be?' Mary: 'Why John, I would like to be an American beauty.' Then she asks John: 'If you wasn't what you is, what would you like to be? [puppet, puppet, interjected opposition members.] 'I would like to be an octopus.' 'Why would you like to be an octopus?' 'So I could put all my hundred arms around you.' 'John, you ain't even putting the two arms you already got.'

Singh pressed on. Patel was a stubborn prisoner of his own prejudices. 'He has this idea of common roll and with this idea he is in search of guinea pigs.' But the

Alliance was 'not willing to allow the people of this country to be made guinea pigs so that [Patel's] ideas may be experimented with.' The Federation Party had called Singh a traitor, but the real traitor was A.D. Patel, Singh said. While others had risked their lives to defend Fiji, Patel was fighting the enemy from the 'security of his living room.' Patel was a wrecker. He talked incessantly about nation building but 'twice within the last quarter of a century he has brought this nation to the brink of economic disaster by running away from a conference table.' In the midst of this speech, the Federation members walked out of the Legislative Council chambers. As the Federation team were leaving—chased out by Singh's eloquent refutation of the Opposition's argument, according to Mara—Singh homed in. 'They were absent in 1943, they were absent in war and they are absent in peace. I wonder where they propose to fight the battles, the constitutional battles.'

Singh moved a counter motion of his own, expressing confidence in the 1965 constitution, expressing 'gratification [with] the repeated assurances of Her Majesty's government in the United Kingdom that there is no constitutional impediment to the progress of this country towards full internal self-government,' and noting that 'the transition to a ministerial system of government less than ten months after the introduction of the 1966 constitution is plain evidence of the ability of the Alliance Government to govern the nation with honour, dignity and responsibility and on democratic principles.' Singh was applauded by the Alliance for his spirited attack on the Federation Party. But Patel accused Singh of allowing himself to be 'used by his white masters to create a false image of the Indian community before the world.' Europeans in Fiji never soiled their hands with dirty work, they always employed Indians to do it for them. He was not a coward, Patel said of himself; he had never flinched in the face of threat or violence; he had even courted incarceration in gaol for his struggle on the growers' behalf.<sup>20</sup>

Patel wanted to test the strength of his stand in a by-election. He hoped to return to the Council with an increased majority, and a strong mandate for his common roll platform, which neither the colonial government nor the Colonial Office could then ignore. For a start, the Federation sent a long petition to the Colonial Office expressing no confidence in the Governor and asking for his recall. The petition outlined what it saw as collusion between the Alliance party and the colonial secretariat, the abuse of the public relations office engaging in 'obnoxious, misconceived and mischievous' propaganda against the Federation Party and the failure of the Governor and his senior staff to restrain vilification and provocative statements against the opposition.<sup>21</sup> The reaction of the Colonial Office is unknown, but locally both the Alliance government as well

20 *Pacific Review*, 27 September 1967.

21 In Patel's private papers.

as the colonial administration thought that boycott of the Council was a public relations stunt and that the Federation would eventually return to the Council of their own accord. They were mistaken. Patel was intent on going to the polls for a fresh mandate.

To succeed in that endeavour, Patel had to ensure two things. One was that the Federation should remain a united party and present a united front to the people. The bulk of the supporters were with Patel and behind the boycott decision, but there were others who differed with him. Among them was M.T. Khan, who had entered the Legislative Council in 1966 on a Federation ticket but who had subsequently resigned to stand on an Alliance ticket against the Federation's C.A. Shah. Others in the Indian community dissatisfied with Patel's style of politics joined the Alliance camp as its candidates, among them K.N. Govind, R.D. Mishra, M.V. Pillay, P.K. Bhindi, Dr Shaukat Ali Saheb, Andrew Gaya Prasad and Albert Jayant. The Alliance already had in its camp Abdul Lateef, Vijay R. Singh and K.S. Reddy. It was as formidable a line up of Indian candidates as the Alliance would ever get, but as we shall see, it was still no match for the Federation.

While consolidating his constituency, Patel also worked hard to bring more Fijians into the party to make it more multiracial. It was an uphill battle given the history of racial separation in the country. Patel was 'greatly mistaken,' said one Fijian letter writer to the *Nai Lalakai*, 'if he was under the impression that it would be an easy matter for the Fijian people to embrace the Indians and kick the Europeans aside.'<sup>22</sup> They would never do that, said a contributor to the *Volagauna* because it was the Europeans 'who have guided, educated and brought Christianity to our people and have patiently lifted our minds to a more enlightened state.'<sup>23</sup>

The alliance between the Fijians and the Europeans was not simply an exercise in expediency, a temporary marriage of convenience; its roots went very deep. Perhaps Patel did not sufficiently recognise the depth of the feeling against the Indian community among powerful sections of the European and Fijian communities. But he was not one to give up. In 1968, he launched what came to be known as Operation Taukei to recruit more Fijian members into the Federation Party. Among those who joined the party as a result of this initiative were Ratu Mosese Veresikete, Ratu Mara's brother-in-law, the disenchanted half-brother of Adi Lala Mara; Apisai Tora, and Ratu Julian Toganivalu who became the party's organising secretary. Varasikete and Tora were charismatic characters with chequered pasts. Varasikete, for instance, had been a signatory, along with David Toganivalu, Emosi Vuakatagane, Peniame Naqasima and

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<sup>22</sup> 22 April 1965.

<sup>23</sup> 23 April 1965.

Serupepeli Naivalu, all studying in England in 1960s, to a hard-line Fijian letter to the 1965 constitutional conference which had proclaimed 'as emphatically and unequivocally as possible our desire that in such an event [self government] we, as the indigenous race of the Colony, must be granted the greatest share of political power.'

That was the only basis upon which the system of self-government would be acceptable to the Fijian people. Now, he was a part of the struggle to make Fiji independent. Whether it was a genuine conversion to the Federation philosophy, an act of personal rebellion against the Fijian establishment which had discarded him, or simply an act of opportunism, it is difficult to tell. But once in the Federation camp, Varasikete became an energetic and ardent member. Tora, likewise, had a chequered anti-Indian past; he, too, was a rebel with a mixed bag of causes, a loose cannon. Repudiated by the establishment, he sought succour in the Federation, injecting the word National into the Federation Party when his National Democratic Party merged with the Federation in November 1968.

As the country waited for by-election, tension mounted, exacerbated by certain incidents which only served to harden feelings on both sides. Some of these do not seem important with the passage of time, but they had their effect in the tense atmosphere then prevailing. One such incident involved the membership of a Fiji delegation to the Geneva Conference on Sugar in 1968. Mara wrote to Patel on 4 February inviting the Leader of the Opposition to accompany him to the conference, an invitation which Patel accepted on 21 March (a delay caused by Patel's hospitalisation from a heart ailment), and which the Governor formally announced on 29 March. Mara issued the invitation when the Federation Party was still out of the Legislative Council. According to Harish Sharma, the invitation was not genuine. 'It was not an invitation, it was a bait, it was an inducement for the nine members of the Federation Party to return to the Legislative Council.' When Federation stuck to its original plan, Mara withdrew the invitation. Mara's letter of 19 April read:

Dear A.D.

I am writing in connection with the International Sugar Conference in Geneva to which I invited you to accompany me in your position as Leader of the Opposition.

Indeed, the whole object of our discussion earlier this year was to re-establish the line of communication which should be maintained between the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and to try to get a bi-partisan approach on important matters like sugar.

Government has now been officially informed by the Speaker of Legislative Council that you did not attend the last two consecutive

meetings of Legislative Council and that you have vacated your seat and are no longer an elected member of the Legislative Council and consequently no longer Leader of the Opposition.

In these circumstances it would be inappropriate for you to attend the International Sugar Conference at Geneva as part of the Fiji Delegation and I shall not therefore expect you to accompany me as had been previously intended.

Patel replied the following day.

Dear Kamisese

Received your letter of the 19th April, 1968 cancelling your invitation to me to accompany you to the International Sugar Conference in Geneva. I am not at all surprised.

To be candid, let me tell you that I had my doubt about its genuineness when you personally came to the Hospital to give me the invitation. I wondered whether it was given merely as a sop to induce me and my fellow members of the Opposition to give up our cause, to throw our principles overboard and attend the Council, when it was a matter of public knowledge that the Opposition was not going to attend.

So, to test your bona fide I accepted the invitation. I hope that you and the Colonial Alliance Government are now convinced that we are not out for sale. I am, on my part, satisfied that my suspicion turned out to be correct.

By cancelling the invitation you have relieved me from the strain involved in travelling by air to Geneva and carrying out duties and responsibilities of a prolonged conference which I would have felt in duty bound to undertake as the leader of the sugar cane farmers, in spite of my present state of ill-health. It has also saved me from considerable expense and loss of income during my absence from the Colony.

Further, your letter cancelling the invitation has afforded me sufficient proof of your credibility, for which I am thankful.<sup>24</sup>

If the Alliance leader had hoped to outmanoeuvre Patel and marginalise him in the discussion of an industry vital to Fiji's economic well being, he failed. His action only convinced the Federation followers of Alliance's unilateralism. The fact, as Koya said, that the Federation Party was outside of the Legislative Council did not mean that the party had ceased to exist. Whether inside or

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24 Letter in Patel's private papers.



outside the Council, Patel was without doubt the most knowledgeable man on sugar matters in the country. The Alliance had further rubbed salt into the Federation's wounds by appointing Andrew Deoki as the Vice Chairman of the Sugar Advisory Board. Deoki, based in Suva, had little direct experience of sugar cane farming, was a known Patel foe and had been defeated by the Federation in the 1966 elections. Relations between Mara and Patel, never really warm, cooled considerably.

On the hustings, the Federation explained why they had boycotted the Legislative Council. In meeting after meeting, the theme was the same. 'Smash the Constitution Before it Smashes You.' At a typical meeting at the Lilac Theatre, Patel said:

Our walk out from the Council and evacuating the seats under the Constitution has been the first step in that struggle. Some people called us cowards, some people called us runaways, some people just said that we forfeited, we lost our seats. We did not lose our seats. We willingly gave up our seats for one and one reason only, and that was to realise our goal as quickly as possible. You know the happiness and misery of the people of a country depend on its constitution. If you have got a just, democratic constitution, you are all happy because then every individual citizen, however small or insignificant he may be, is a sovereign in his own right. On the other hand, a loaded, lopsided, undemocratic constitution subjugates all the people for the benefit of the few and we have by now clearly seen what kind of constitution has been imposed on us. Our misgivings and our fears turned out to be true and now we are determined to smash that constitution to pieces. We are not going to rest until we achieve our goal.<sup>25</sup>

On the eve of the by-election, the Federation Party held its annual convention at Ba from 28 to 29 June. There, for the first time, the party launched its full manifesto. It is a document, written by Patel himself, outlining the programs and the philosophy of the Federation. Patel outlined the history of events, promises made and broken, that led to the boycott of the parliament. 'For 300 days we worked in the Legislative Council discharging faithfully our responsibilities as the guardians of the rights and interests of the people against the encroachments of those rights and interests by a government of despotic and greedy colonialists. Afraid to face us squarely in the debate, the Colonial Alliance Government made a practice of hastily using the guillotine. The Government thus deprived us of the basic and most important privilege of a legislator, namely the right of free and unfettered speech. Intoxicated with the power derived from a docile brute majority of yes-men in the Legislative Council, the government did not

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25 See also *Fiji Times*, 31 August 1968.

bother to consult the Opposition even on any important issue of bi-partisan national interest. The Governor, who enjoys ultimate, absolute power under the Constitution, ignored the Opposition completely even in such important matters as the introduction of the ministerial system. Without consulting or even mentioning to the Opposition, the Governor decided to set up a Council of Ministers on the 1st of September, 1967 which consisted of seven Europeans, two Fijian chiefs and one Indian in a Colony where Fijians and Indians form 94 per cent of the population and Europeans barely 6 per cent and the majority of whom are temporarily resident in the Colony in course of their employment in the Colonial Government and foreign European concerns.' With the Federation's 'cup of disillusionment full to the brim,' the Opposition staged its walk-out.

So what had the Federation Party to offer the people of Fiji? It looked 'upon the preservation and promotion of Fijian and Indian solidarity and unity as one of its most important tasks.' The recruitment of Ratu Mosese Veresikete as editor of *Pacific Review* and of Ratu Julian Toganivalu as Organising Secretary of the party, was a step in that direction. The Federation's aim was to create a national consciousness among the citizens of Fiji irrespective of race, religion, place of origin or sex and to make Fiji a democratic nation in which all citizens will be equal in the eyes of law, in which all citizens will enjoy equal political rights and have equal opportunity to advance according to their abilities. The Federation stood for a secular state and would 'follow the ideal of 'Unity in Diversity' by respecting cultures, customs and traditions of all races and through a secular state it will foster equal respect for all great religions of the world represented in Fiji as we firmly believe that all religions are various ways to reach the same God. The party was not anti-European 'but it is most emphatically against colonialism and supremacy of any racial group.'<sup>26</sup>

The Federation Party wanted a justiciable Bill of Rights to protect individual and minority interests, would encourage rapid localisation of the public service, encourage local capital formation, control monopolies, abolish basic tax and other duties on the necessities of life, nationalise the gold mines. 'The basic ideal of the Party is to make Fiji a welfare state in which no citizen however poor or incapable would have to go without food, clothing, shelter and medical care.' To that end, a Federation government would introduce old age pension and unemployment benefit schemes, and free education for primary and secondary levels. Trade union rights would be secured and local self government introduced in towns and townships. And, last but not least, the Federation Party would work for immediate independence for Fiji as a democratic republic within the British Commonwealth. In order to maintain the link with the past, an ethnic

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26 See also *Pacific Review*, 3 September 1968.

Fijian would be elected as the Head of State by a plebiscite every five years. To preserve connection with Great Britain independent Fiji will seek membership of the British Commonwealth.'

The Federation Party's manifesto was an important document because it was the first time in Fiji that a political party had outlined its vision for the country's future. For its part, the Alliance rejected Federation's program as unrealistic and unreasonable. Independence was premature. Ratu Mara set the tone. Leading a delegation on a goodwill tour of New Zealand in April 1967, he had said that except for a section of the Indian community, most people in Fiji were not keen on independence. 'We have a great deal to develop in our economy before we can successfully attain independence.' Mara warned the Indians to ponder carefully about their future. Voting for the Federation and embracing its policies would isolate the Indian community even further from the Fijian people. Less responsible Fijian leaders predicted violence if the Federation Party was returned with increased majority because Patel was against the Fijian people, especially their chiefs. Said Viliame Saulekaleka of Nakorotubu, Ra: 'Why hate our Ratus? Don't other people know that they are still our law. I do know some of us are against them some of the time, but don't be mistaken. They are Fijian.' Saulekaleka was not the only one who felt that way.

Patel's response was equally forthright. How could he be against Fijian chiefs when prominent chiefs, such as Ratu Mosese Veresikete, Ratu Julian Toganivalu and Adi Litia Lalabalavu were with the Federation? He added: 'One thing we all have to remember. If a Fijian chief, or for that matter any citizen of this country, wants to remain in the sanctimony [sanctuary?] of his own position, un-assailed by any public criticism, the political arena is the last arena he should think of entering. Once any person enters the political arena, he has got to learn to take the rough with the smooth as we all are doing.' One could not have it both ways. K.N. Govind, a sharp young Ba lawyer and Alliance candidate, summed up the feeling of those Indians who supported the Alliance. He, too, wanted to change the constitution, but instead of smashing the constitution he wanted to build it up and improve upon it. 'If one's kitchen is leaking, one does not smash the whole house to cure the leak. One merely repairs the leak.' Govind had got the whole thing wrong, Patel retorted. A constitution of a country should be likened not to a kitchen but rather to its foundational structure; even if the house had the best roof, the best kitchen and the best furnishings, if its very foundation was defective, it was better to demolish the house and start afresh rather than tinker with it and court certain disaster later.

To those who opposed immediate independence, and there were some in Patel's own community not to mention the Fijian and European community, Patel responded in a meeting of about five hundred in Nadi:

Who does not want independence? Even the birds and animals want freedom. People who don't want independence are influenced by whites who do not want Fiji to become independent. The whites do not want the coloureds to be given equal rights. We want to make them brothers from masters and we will make them so. Some whites say that Patel wants to drive the whites out of Fiji. I do not accept this but do say that whites do not want to live with us with equal rights. When they live in this country, they will have to live with other races. They cannot be masters and we cannot be slaves.<sup>27</sup>

It was a tough and bitter campaign, marred occasionally by minor incidents of violence, but in the end, the by-election returned the Federation Party with all its nine seats with increased majority in all the constituencies. The Federation Party captured 46,960 of the total votes (59,786) cast, while the Alliance managed only 12,826, with two of its candidates losing their deposits (by winning less than ten per cent of the votes cast in their constituency).<sup>28</sup> The election was a personal triumph for Patel, who was returned with the biggest majority (5,131) of the election. He won 7,903 votes to the Alliance's M.V. Pillay's 2,772. In the 1966 election, his majority was 3,576. The message was clear. 'The people have given their verdict in no uncertain terms, that the people of this Colony want freedom and equal political rights.' Patel could not be dismissed, dislodged or disregarded. The colonial government and the Colonial Office would have to deal with him. Mara was deeply upset; he felt betrayed. At first he had considered not contesting any of the seats at all, but had been advised by his Indian political confidantes that the Alliance stood a good chance of winning at least three Indian communal seats in Western Viti Levu. Unfortunately, this was not the last time that Mara was misled about his prospects in the Indian communal seats.

On the day the election results came out, Mara invited the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Frank Rennie, to a game of golf at Vatuwaqa. Rennie recalled the event: 'The Chief Minister, always a long hitter, belted the ball even further, and seemed to relish getting in behind it and striking it with vehemence. I wondered, as he smashed yet another ball almost out of sight, whether he was identifying each one with the personalities foremost in his mind.'<sup>29</sup> There was a lot on Mara's mind that morning. Fijian reaction to the Federation victory had been immediate: it was uniformly hostile. Protest marches were threatened, with what consequences no one could predict. When Rennie asked Mara what he intended to do, the Alliance leader replied: 'We might let things take their natural course for a while.' Then he departed for Lakeba and remained

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27 *Jagriti*, 17 August 1968.

28 *Fiji Times*, 9 September 1968.

29 Frank Rennie, *The Regular Soldier*, 286.

incommunicado. Even Government House could not contact him. But with 'superb timing' he reappeared on the scene and seized the middle ground, 'stressing the vital importance to independent Fiji of multi-racial development.' It was a style and a tactic that the Alliance leader would use to great effect in later years.

While Mara was on Lakeba, Fiji seemed poised on the brink of racial confrontation. Three days after the results came out, Ratu George Cakobau convened a meeting of some 2,000 Fijians to gauge their response to the latest political developments. The Fijians did not want independence, the meeting heard.<sup>30</sup> All laws connected with leasing of native land should be tightened, the Indian tenants should be asked to vacate all Fijian land upon expiry of leases, and the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance should be abolished. Another meeting in Suva on the following day, again some 2,000 strong, issued a statement that 'the control of the country should be returned to the Fijians, by force if necessary, and resolved unanimously against independence and common roll.' This sentiment was applauded thunderously at Vatukoula on 16 September and a resolution passed that 'ways and means should be sought to deport all Indians from Fiji.' The following day, some 6,000 Fijians attended a meeting of the Fijian Association, headed by William Toganivalu, Sakiasi Waqanivavalagi and Alipate Sikivou, all members of the Legislative Council, which reinforced the sentiments of the other meetings but added specifically that Patel should be deported.

On 27 September, Mara weighed in with his own assessment. The Fijian people, he said, felt 'betrayed and alarmed and intended to have their interests safeguarded.'<sup>31</sup> Fijians had made so many concessions over land and other issues to the Indian community, at the expense of their own security. 'These moves were all made in the hope that they evoke a response which would compensate them by creating a society of mutual tolerance and respect. The Fijians now feel that their conciliatory attitude over the years will lead eventually to their relegation to the category of second class citizens in their own country. Let there be no violence, but let it be clearly understood that the Fijian people have spoken in no uncertain terms and they cannot and must not be ignored.' Three days later, the same message was conveyed in Ba when western Fijian chiefs, their faces daubed in black paint, led a procession through the sugar town. Waqanivavalagi dramatised the occasion by appearing in black (funeral) attire, 'to bury all his relationship to the Indian people.' Ratu Edward Cakobau regretted the incidents of threatened violence and offered this assessment which captures the dilemma facing the Fijian people in the 1960s succinctly:

30 For reports of these, see the *Fiji Times*, 12-17 September.

31 *News from Fiji*, XXI (40), 2 October 1968.

I do not question the need for change for to stand still means stagnation. What I do suggest is that we have been carried along at too fast a pace—a pace not of our choice; a pace which has not given us time to take accurate bearings; and I suggest that it would not be a bad thing if all of us, Fijians and others, found out exactly where we are; become familiar with our present surroundings and try to chart some of the hazards ahead before pressing too quickly into the unknown. The Fijians have been overtaken by events which moved faster than was ever envisaged. Instead of gradual change, there has been rapid change. Many of the changes have come not in the past 90 years, but in 20 years, and most of them in the last decade. In particular, they have caught the Fijian people economically, educationally and politically unprepared.<sup>32</sup>

Fiji had come as close to the brink of racial confrontation as it ever had, and it is tempting to hold Patel responsible for it. But confronting entrenched habits of thought is never easy or without cost. It took a massive struggle to send the message to the colonial establishment that the Indian community would not acquiesce nor tolerate enforced political subservience. It took enormous courage to take the stand that Patel did. The Indian demand for political equality could not be ignored. But as if to emphasise the point that he personally had nothing against the Fijian people, only against a system that had kept the two groups separated all these years, Patel moved a motion at the first sitting of the Legislative Council after the election, to 'provide ways and means to start the renovation of the island [of Bau] and to preserve its historical relics and monuments.' Mara supported it. It was a symbolic gesture of reconciliation that helped to heal wounds.

The by-election prodded the government to reconsider the timetable for the next constitutional talks. Jakeway encouraged both Mara and Patel to talk among themselves and to develop a common agenda. An Indian emissary, a Mr Hathi, had met all three during the course of a short visit to Fiji, and had encouraged the resumption of dialogue between the two leaders. In a letter to his son Atul on 11 August 1969, Patel wrote: 'I am meeting Mara tomorrow to find out if there is any area of agreement between us. If we come to some understanding, it is not still too late to have a conference in London perhaps in October. But let me not hastily predict. It is all in the laps of gods. Mara is the blue-eyed boy of the British. He is very cunning, as all Fijians usually are, perhaps more so, but our simpletons in Delhi are too obtuse to understand this or too indifferent to find out. Indians in Fiji and other colonies used to get some assistance from the Viceroy in their hour of need but since India has become independent, we

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<sup>32</sup> Cession Day address, 10 October 1968.



have received no help or backing from India. From Indira downward, all are selfishly absorbed in the rat race for personal power and God help India! In such circumstances it would be idiotic of us to expect any help from that corner.'

The meeting did take place on 12 August 1969 under the chairmanship of Ratu Edward Cakobau. The Alliance Party was represented by Ratu Mara and Ratu Edward Cakobau, Vijay R. Singh, K.S. Reddy, H.W. Yee, David Toganivalu and W.M. Barrett, and the National Federation Party by Patel and Koya. At that confidential meeting, Patel dominated the discussions and set its tone. He reiterated the points he had been making throughout the 1960s. The constitution had failed, Fiji was ready for complete independence, there should be a strong Bill of Rights in the constitution, election should be on the basis of common franchise with some temporary reservation of seats to allay fears of the different communities; links with Britain should be maintained but an independent country had to secure its own security. Membership of the Commonwealth was no guarantee of permanent defence. 'Even Australia with a link with Britain during the second world war, felt Britain did not help her and after that as far as defence was concerned she looked more to the US.' It was a cordial meeting, an airing of views, though the gulf between the two sides remained. Patel wanted complete independence while Mara wanted 'full internal self-government.' By the time the committee met again on 3 November, Patel had died.

