Part III. Land and Livelihood

69: All-Fiji Indian Conference, 30 October 1938

The All-Fiji Indian Conference met on October 30 at the Lilac Theatre in Suva, wherein representatives from all parts of Fiji participated. The theatre was crowded to full capacity. The Honourable Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, B.A., LL.D., B.Sc., presided.1

Mr. AD Patel, President of the Indian Association of Fiji, said that the Indian community was indeed fortunate in having such an eminent personality as the Hon. Dr Kunzru to preside over the Conference.

The learned chairman spoke forcefully and dwelt on many problems affecting the Indians in Fiji. He appealed for unity and closer co-operation between the different communities living in Fiji. The chairman further emphasized the greater need for female education. After the chairman's speech, the following papers were read and discussed:

1. Paper on General Economic Position by Mr. AD Patel.
2. Paper on Land by Mr. R Parmeshwar.
3. Paper on the Indian cultivator and his problem by Mr. Ayodha Prasad.
4. Paper on Health and Hygiene by Dr CM Gopalan.
5. Paper on Education by Pandit Amichand.
6. Paper on Commerce by Mr. Hargovan Gangaram.
7. Paper on Indians in Fiji and their rights and disabilities, by Mr. AD Patel.

The Following resolutions were unanimously adopted by the conference:

1. This All-Fiji Indian Conference is strongly of the opinion that an enquiry into the economic conditions of the Indian community in Fiji which was promised to the Government of India several years ago, but has not as yet been carried out, is essential, and urges the Government to appoint as early as possible a Commission of Enquiry, containing representatives both of the Indian community and the Government of India.

2. This All-Fiji Indian Conference requests the Government of India to delegate representatives expert in land matters to assist the Indian community

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1 (1887-1978), elected President of Servants of India Society in 1935, an organization founded by Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1909.
when the Government of Fiji will appoint a Committee for the proposed
demarcation of native reserves and alienation of lands for leasing purposes.

3. This All-Fiji Indian Conference draws the attention of the Government to the
great difficulties experienced by the Indians, who depend to a large extent on
land for their livelihood, in obtaining leases of agricultural land and requests
it to take immediate action to protect Indian interests on the following lines:
(a) Leases of lands at present cultivated should be renewed.
(b) Suitable provision should be made for obtaining fresh land.
(c) Subject to regular payment of rent and the right of the Government
to revise rents after prescribed period, Indians should not be disturbed
in their possession of agricultural land, the system followed by the
Government of India in those provinces where land is directly held from
the Government should be adopted in Fiji.

4. (a) This All-Fiji Indian Conference impresses on Government the urgent need
for legislation to regulate the relations of landlords and tenants and to allow
to tenants the rights and protection enjoyed by them in all civilised countries.
The present position is giving rise to widespread and acute discontent and
unless dealt with fairly and boldly will prove seriously detrimental to the
future development of Fiji.
(b) This All-Fiji Indian Conference is further of the opinion that
Government should take early action to prevent tenants from being
forced to work for any individual or association.

5. This All-Fiji Indian Conference authorises the Indian Association to make
suitable representations to the authorities for the:
(a) Training of more Indian medical students.
(b) Establishment of hospitals in the districts in which there are no
proper medical facilities existing at present.
(c) Establishment of Indian child welfare centres and training of Indian
nurses.
(d) Provision of pure water supply in the districts in which such supply
is not available.
(e) Establishment of a sanatorium for t.b. and such diseases, and
(f) Arrangement for necessary instruction to Indian Dais, mid-wives,
attending confinement cases.
6. This All-Fiji Indian Conference registers its strong dissatisfaction with the present educational facilities afforded to the Indian children and strongly urges the Government to put into effect as soon as possible the recommendations contained in Mr. Mayhew’s report on the following points:
   (a) Introduction of compulsory education.
   (b) Provision for technical and vocational training.
   (c) Establishment of intermediate and secondary schools.

   i. This Conference, while welcoming the fact that the Government have adopted the Mayhew recommendations in principle, is of the opinion that the provision made for carrying them is quite inadequate specially in view of the neglect of Indian education in the past by Government notwithstanding the keenness of Indian parents to educate their children.

   ii. This Conference further records that (1) as in India a prescribed percentage of Indian children should be admitted to the European Grammar Schools and that (2) efforts should be made to obtain trained women teachers from India.

   iii. This Conference, while approving of Mr. Mayhew’s recommendation that scholarships for higher education should not be confined to Europeans only, is strongly of the opinion that in view of an increasing number of Indian boys ready to profit by University education, that adequate provision should be made for giving them higher education outside Fiji.

7. This Conference authorises the Indian Association to make necessary representations to the authorities to facilitate importation of Indian patent medicines and matters connected therewith and to remit import duties on foodstuffs.

8. In view of the fact that the Indian community has vast interests in this Colony, this Conference strongly requests the Government to appoint an Indian elected member to the Executive Council which consists of Europeans only at present.

9. This Conference requests the Government to expedite the publication of the report of the committee appointed to consider the question of passports and domicile and urges the Government to remove the disabilities under which Indians labour at present.

10. This All-Fiji Indian Conference considers that the time is opportune for the appointment of an Agent of the Government of India in Fiji and urges the
Fiji Government to give facilities for the purpose in the interests of both the Government themselves and the Indian community.

11. This Conference strongly urges the Government to repeal the Masters and Servants Ordinance and to introduce legislation to facilitate registration of agricultural and trade unions in Fiji.

12. This Conference is of the opinion that the provisions of the Workmen’s Compensation Ordinance be extended to the Indians and Fijians in this Colony at an early date.

13. This All-Fiji Indian Conference records its emphatic protest against the racial discrimination made in the Fiji Civil Service against Indians and Fijians and urges the Government to take immediate steps to give equal opportunities to the members of different communities for careers in the public service of the Colony on the ground of personal [merit].

The Chairman, in his summing up, said that he was grateful to the audience for their contribution and patience. He was particularly happy to find that none of the resolutions will do any harm to the Fijians. The Government of Fiji had promised to pass an Ordinance giving equal rights to Indians. Fiji was their home where they wanted to live as free men, equal in every respect with those of other [communities] residing in this Colony. While exhorting the Indians to serve not merely their own community, but also the Fijians and others with whom they live in this Colony, he said, in conclusion, that through the Indians this Colony had benefited to a great extent, and their contribution to the Colony’s present position entitled them to enjoy equal rights and privileges to those enjoyed by other subjects of His Majesty.

Mr. AD Patel then moved the following resolution, which was seconded by Mr. JF Grant, and was carried unanimously:

‘This Conference records the thankful gratitude and appreciation of the Indian community to the Hon. Dr Hriday Nath Kunzru for the trouble he has taken in enquiring into the conditions of Indians in Fiji and for presiding over this conference.’

70: Economic Condition of Indians in Fiji Paper read at the All-Fiji Indian Conference by AD Patel, 30 October 1938

I hope you will understand that the subject which I am supposed to deal with is one on which books may be written to do it full justice. In the short time which is at my disposal, I can only give you a general outline of the economic
problems that face the Indian community in Fiji and their possible solutions. It is not claimed, however, that the solutions which I may venture to suggest are infallible.

The Indian community may be classified into three groups, namely labourers, peasants and traders. The labourers, as is the case all over the world, form the majority of the population. The ordinary Indian labourer in this Colony receives a wage of 2/- to 3/- a day. The biggest employer of Indian labour is the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited. Labourers working under the CSR get 1/8 a day and free quarters in the labour lines. Those that are signed under the Master and Servants Ordinance by the Company receive a small bonus at the expiry of the terms of the contract. The new labour lines are certainly a considerable advance on the old ones as far as accommodation and sanitation are concerned, but the daily wage of the worker has remained unchanged. The wives of the workers in the lines have no occupation and they and their children are entirely dependent on the meager wage that their husbands earn. An income of 1/8 to 2/- or even 2/6 a day would be in this Colony just hardly sufficient to satisfy the primary necessities of life, such as the cheapest goods and clothing. There are no facilities provided for the education of the children of workers at the mills.

The lot of the agricultural labourer on the farm is hardly better [as] he receives about the same wage as his fellow worker in the mill. He and his family, however, have some scope of supplementing their income by keeping a cow or growing a few vegetables, and if they possess a small plot of suitable land of growing paddy or some other food crop. His children in some places attend school and acquire a bare knowledge of reading and writing. The skilled Indian labour, which forms a very small part of the working class, manage to obtain better conditions of life. Their wage, however, is considerably less than the half caste or the European worker of the same class.

Though the wage is meager and the general conditions are unenviable, there is no unemployment or starvation. It may, however, be observed that even a little unemployment or starvation for a few, if most of the workers are well fed and gain better conditions of life, is preferable to a whole class having to live and work on a small wage and bring up under-nourished and uneducated children. The employers of the Colony hardly realize that they not only exploit the peasant workers but also drain the future manpower of the Colony. Fiji is perhaps the only country in the civilized world where the State has so far done almost nothing by way of legislation and administrative measures conducive to the welfare of labour.

The next largest portion of the Indian community is the cultivators. A great majority of these are engaged in the cultivation of the sugar cane. A small number grow paddy, maize, cotton, tobacco, etc. More than half of the cane
growers are the Company’s tenants. The average size of their holdings is about 10 acres and the net annual income about 50 pounds. The terms of the tenancy are stringent. Rest of the growers are mostly tenants of the Fijians. A small number hold land from European landlords of Indian tenants. There are very few Indian cane growers who are the owners of freehold lands. The land of the Colony is entirely owned by non-agriculturalists while the entire agricultural population consists of the tenants. One would naturally expect in such a country legislation to safeguard and promote the interests of the tenants. While the rights of the landlords and tenants in other countries have undergone a revolution, the landlords of Fiji in this fourth decade of the twentieth century enjoy the same absolute rights and privileges enjoyed by the landlords of England prior to 1875.

The Indian peasants of the Colony are mostly in debt. The indebtedness of peasants is a world-wide problem, and Fiji is not immune from it. The causes of the Indian peasant’s indebtedness in Fiji are as follows:

1. The smallness of the holdings.
2. Purchase of cane growing land at reckless prices under sale and purchase agreements
3. Heavy rate of interest for expenditure on marriage and other social functions.

The cane growers appear to me to be more in debt than other peasants. That may be due in most cases to reckless buying of land and easy facilities of credit.

The Indian trading class of Fiji mostly consists of small shopkeepers and artisans. They are most industrious and thrifty and careful enough to provide for a rainy day out of their moderate income. Most of them carry on trade on borrowed capital. A substantial portion of their earnings go to the landlord and the money lender. It is through the enterprise of this class that the imports from India not only of food stuff but also manufactured articles increase from day to day. Their thrift and industry enables them to sell their wares at competitive prices and thus benefit the previous two classes whose means are always limited.

The greater part of the revenue of the Colony is derived from indirect taxation in the form of import and export duty. The incidence of export duty on sugar indirectly falls on the growers and labourers engaged in sugar cane cultivation and sugar manufacture, which also to some extent contributes to their poverty. Duties on imported foodstuff for Indian consumption are mostly charged on a quantitative basis instead of ad valorem. Such method of taxation falls equally on the poor as well as the rich. An ad valorem duty on the other hand falls on the consumers in proportion to their means. A consumer who has to live on cheap food stuffs and clothing would have to pay less duty if it is charged
ad valorem than one who lives on an expensive standard of life. The present system of tariff seems to have been devised to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Amongst direct taxes, the Residential Tax is another instance.

Lack of education is another cause contributing to Indian poverty. You cannot improve the economic conditions without efficiency and you cannot acquire efficiency without education. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, nor can you make an illiterate and ignorant community wealthy. The causes of Indian poverty are:

1. Lower wages.
2. Smallness of holdings.
3. Unrevised law of landlord and tenants.
4. Reckless buying of land.
5. Expensive social customs.
6. High rate of interest.
7. Lack of education and training.
8. Lack of opportunities for those who get education and training.
10. Lack of social and industrial legislation and lack of planned economy on the part of the state.

When the causes are known, one is naturally tempted to ask: ‘What is the remedy?’ The remedy, to my mind, lies in the hands of the state, the owners of the land, the employers of labour, and last but not least, in the hands of the people themselves. The state can help by:

1. Fixing a reasonable minimum wage.
2. Bring the law of landlord and tenant in line with other countries, such as England.
3. Opening up more land for settlement.
4. Controlling rate of interest and establishing credit societies.
5. Providing good education and opportunities.
6. Re-adjustment of the present system of taxation.
7. Planned economy.

The owners of the land and the employers can help by:

1. Payment of better wages and improving general conditions of labour.
2. Enlarging the holdings.
3. Affording security of tenure.
The people themselves can improve their conditions by:

1. Careful purchase of land.
2. Reforming social customs.
3. Education.
4. Cultivating a sense of social solidarity.

We must not forget that God helps those who help themselves.

71: The Misadministration of Land, 20 August, 1945

The land policy of the Government of Fiji has fluctuated over a number of years. No grower and, for that matter, no tenant in the Colony, has felt sure or secure as regards the land policy that the Government may at any moment adopt. As to the native lands, first we had an old Ordinance under which, if anybody required a lease of native lands, he had to approach the native owners, and if the native owners consented to the grant of the lease, he would have to put in his application to the Director of Lands. That is how he obtained the lease of these lands from the owners. Under that Ordinance, there was a safeguard to the effect that it was made illegal for the lessee or the owner of the lands either to pay or accept a premium, but in spite of that legislation, this evil grew as there was more demand for land and there was so much pressure on the agricultural areas of the Colony. It assumed such proportions that in 1935, when a large number of leases were about to expire or had already expired, the lessees approached the native landlords for the renewal of these leases and higher premia were asked and had to be paid. The evil grew to such an extent that both the Indian growers and the Fijian owners had a problem to face.

Fijian owners who were tempted by high premia recklessly disposed of their land, irrespective of any consideration of their own personal needs, present or future, and the Indian tenants recklessly paid premia by borrowing money at a high rate of interest. They borrowed recklessly without ever thinking whether they would be able to repay the amount. Representations were made by the Indian growers to Sir Arthur Richards when he was Governor and a new policy was enunciated. First, the leases that were to expire and the existing 21-year leases were extended for a further period of nine years and so all those leases were made 30-year leases. There was a provision made that if the native owners...
declined to renew the leases, then they had to pay the value of the improvements effected by the tenant on the land. Even that did not turn out to be satisfactory and in the end the Native Land Trust Board was created with three main objects, firstly to safeguard an adequate area of Fijian lands for the present and future needs of the Fijian community, secondly to confer a security of tenure to the tenants of the Fijian lands, and thirdly to keep up the fertility of the lands. There was a spirit of give and take on both sides. The Fijian owners agreed that after reserving the areas that would be necessary for their own immediate or future use, the balance of the native lands would be handed over to this Native Land Trust Board to be let out on leases. The Indian tenants, on their part, also agreed that as the security of tenure was acquired, there was no further need for a provision that an Indian tenant must be entitled to payment for the permanent improvements effected on that land.

Consequently, after the passing of the Native Land Trust Ordinance, the tenants lost their right of claiming compensation for all improvements effected on the land in the event of a non-renewal of the lease. All the while, there was a clause existing in the leases, as it exists at present, that no lease shall be transferred, assigned or sold without the consent of the Director of Lands. The Director of Lands, all these years right up to the year 1944, even four years after passing the Native Land Trust Ordinance, has gone on approving and giving his consent to the transfers, no matter how grossly excessive the consideration was. Through this shortage of land and the acute demand on the part of growers for land, right up to 1940, the Fijian landlords made gross profits by way of premia. Since 1940, moneylenders and other people profited from it, but all throughout, right from the beginning up to 1944, the Director of Lands and the Government of Fiji were a party to this exploitation. The Director always gave his consent and made it possible. Now, suddenly the Government awakens to this very difficult situation, but it is not as if no warning had been sounded by the growers or their leaders previously.

As early as 1937, we asked the Government for the appointment of an Economic Commission to go into the economic conditions of these people, because the Indian community, and the leaders of the community, even at that time, knew that the grower was slipping deeper and deeper into debt and it was high time something was done. Unfortunately, without making any enquiries, the Government somehow denied that request on one excuse or another and men were found in this Council in the year 1937 to make a remark to the effect that the Indian growers were quite happy, quite wealthy and that they were coining money out of cane. If you consult the figures given in Professor Shepherd’s report, you will find that in 1935 the indebtedness under crop liens amounted to £189,446. By the time the Indian Members in this Council had asked for the appointment of an Economic Commission to go into their conditions, the
indebtedness had increased to £271,898. By the time the Native Land Trust
Ordinance was passed, the indebtedness of the growers had increased to the
tremendous figure of £330,321. Of course, it is difficult to ascertain now how
much of this £330,321 went into the pockets of the Fijian landlords by way of
premia and how much went into the pockets of those intermediaries who were
friendly with these landlords and who were always ready to take lands and pass
them on to some unfortunate bona fide grower.

That is how we have got into the position in which we are today, and let no one
think that he had no part in contributing a share to it. The whole question is
that we have got this problem to face; what is the solution? What is the way out
of it? The Director of Lands and the Government of Fiji say: ‘We will stop the
speculation in prices and reduce the price of land.’ It is quite logical. In fact it is
so logical that it falls in the same class as if, for instance, I went to my hatter and
complained to him that my hat was too small and did not fit and he came to my
aid and gave me a very precious piece of advice—that the problem was simply
solved; all that had to be done was to chip a bit off my head and make it small
and it would then be found that the hat would exactly fit the head. Of course
the argument is quite logical, but it defeats the very purpose for which we
are trying to prescribe this remedy. By reducing the prices of the land, are we
helping the grower to reduce his debt? Are we helping the grower to improve
his economic condition? The land has been an asset to him; not only has he
borrowed money on it but he has put in his own savings without which the
original loan would have been impossible. He put all that money in the land and
now we say that the £100 which the land is worth to him is an extravagant price,
an unproductive price, and that the productive value would come to only £20.
‘You were a fool to buy that land for £100 and spend so much on improvements,
but we will allow you to sell that land for £20.’ What would be our reaction if
we were in the place of those growers? Would we not say: ‘What happens to my
debt under your new policy? I am losing all my savings, but I do not lose my
liability for payment of my debts.’

On the face of it, it might look as if we are now going to harm these so-called
speculators and exploiters, and these rapacious moneylenders, and help the
growers. But does it not amount to this, that even when the grower is sold up,
if the Director of Lands does not allow him the full market price whatever it
fetches, if there is a balance of debt that is left unpaid after the sale of the land,
it is still on the head of the grower? The money-lender has got his remedy in
law even if the security is extinguished or exhausted as a simple contract debt.
He could sue the man and obtain a judgment for the balance of the debt at any
time within six years. After obtaining that judgment for twelve years, he will
be flourishing over the head of the farmer and that judgment will carry a rate
of interest of eight per cent which means that by adopting this policy we are
impoverishing the grower without giving any relief to him from his debts. After making him penniless, we leave his debt hanging over his head like the sword of Democles, at least for a period of 18 years. Perhaps it may be said that while he may not be able to help those who have made the mistake, we will save the occupants of the lands from committing or repeating the same mistakes if the buyers of land were to come from outside, if they were of a class separate and apart from the sellers probably it might mean the policy of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

As it is, the buyers and sellers are all in the same boat. They are in the same boat because the Director of Lands insists—and here I say quite rightly insists—that the buyer should be a bona fide grower. And where are we going to get these bona fide growers from, from the same existing lot that is in the Colony, already under this heavy burden of debt? It might only amount to, as we say in Hindustani, the changing of turbans. I carry my debt with me but when I sell my land to ‘B,’ he also carries his unpaid debt from the other block to this block and I carry on mine which the Director of Lands has been good enough to help me in buying at a cheaper rate, and the debt, this ever increasing burden of debt, still remains. If anybody can convince me that you can help a man and make him rich by making him poorer than what he is, only then would I understand that something good might result from the policy that the Lands Department has adopted.

Dr. Shepherd recommends that any grossly excessive price charged for land should be prohibited. There is a considerable difference between grossly excessive price and speculative price. What we can do is to prohibit profiteering, as we have done in the case of commodities, for instance. We may not allow any vendor to charge more than a certain percentage of profit, or no profit at all, but to turn around and say that he must sell at a loss and then to tell him that he has been a fool and so must bear the loss. The vendor would be quite entitled to say that in that folly the Director of Lands and himself are accomplices and partners. At the time when he bought the land the Director gave his consent to the transaction and did not warn him; now he wants to ruin him and call him a fool. I appreciate that there is a sincere desire behind the policy to help the growers; but are we really helping the growers? Mere sincerity is not enough; the cure that we prescribe should be an effective cure that will not hurt the patient.

The Director of Lands also quoted from Dr. Shepherd’s report that there are unmistakable signs of lands being flogged as a result of this heavy indebtedness. It is very difficult to distinguish what is the real cause of the flogging of such areas. For instance, it is well known that all the contractors do not leave a portion of their land fallow every year, just as the Company’s tenants do, but they also follow the rotation of crops: they harvest the crop from the whole area for three
years and in the fourth year leave the whole area fallow. If they are flogging the
lands unnecessarily to pay their debts, the production of sugar cane from the
lands owned by contractors will not be so much as it is at present. Everybody
in this Colony knows that the Company has got the best lands, rich, fertile,
and nice flat continuous areas, while the contractors took leases of second class
and third class lands, mostly hilly lands or lands that were under thick bush.
They cleared the land of stones and boulders and bush and persistently went on
cultivating it in spite of the failure of several consecutive crops, and built up the
fertility to that pitch where it is at present, just slightly less than the productive
fertility of the Company’s lands.

No doubt in some particular instances, land has been flogged, but there is
another reason that we have got to consider and to my mind this is the reason.
Several leases have expired or are about to expire. People apply for the renewal
of those leases but owing to circumstances created by the war, consideration of
the application was postponed. We, by passing legislation, extended the term
of the leases by small installments and those growers whose leases had already
expired or were about to expire, especially the leases in the neighbourhood
of Fijian villages, were naturally concerned and anxious as to whether their
leases would ever be renewed. As they had no claim against the Native Lands
Trust Board for permanent improvements done and there is a probability that
these lands might fall within native reserves, these farmers think that instead
of putting more into the land they should now try to get the utmost out of
what they have previously sunk into it, and to my mind that is the real cause of
flogging in several cases.

72: Post-War Agricultural Development, 20
February 1946

The Government presented to the Legislative Council its policy on agricultural
development in Fiji, the course of action it proposed to realize those policies,
and the capital and recurrent costs involved in the project. There has been a
difference of opinion between the official and the unofficial side of this Council
in regard to experimental stations. The question that comes uppermost, to my
mind, is what could be the scope of experiment that should be carried out at
such stations. I agree with the Director of Agriculture that the experimental
work should be limited to those problems of practical utility, not matters of
mere academic value or concern. In considering the question of establishment
of experimental stations and in deciding the nature of experimental work, we
have to refer back to the sugar dispute, which has been already referred to by
many members in this debate. I am not surprised at the reference to the dispute
because, as a matter of fact, this debate and this new policy is the offspring of
it. The dispute gave birth to the Shepherd enquiry which in turn gave birth to
Shepherd’s Report on Agricultural Policy, which again brought Messrs. Paterson
and Dodds to this Colony to implement the work done by Professor Shepherd,
and this led to the appointment of a committee to consider those reports. Thus
this Statement of Policy has been brought before the Council now.

It has been suggested that the experimental work should include all crops except
sugar cane. I would like to remind this Council that when Dr. Shepherd made
his recommendations as regards the investigation work by the Department, the
need that was uppermost in his mind was the system of cane cultivation in this
Colony, which is embodied in paragraph 86 of his Report. I would like to read
out that paragraph: ‘Only half the area under cane cultivation is cropped in
each year and the system cannot be considered a highly productive one. During
the war, part of the cane land has been planted in food crops, particularly rice.
Normally the cane farmer either grows rice on swampy land unsuited to sugar
cane or buys his supplies from rice farmers. The planting of rice on cane land is
 justified by the war emergency but the cultivation of swamp rice at least should
be discontinued when this emergency has passed, for conditions favourable to
swamp rice are not suitable to cane production. The reaping of a second ration
of cane is considered by the Company’s agricultural experts to be undesirable
even on the most fertile soils because of the danger of disease. Experiments
should be conducted to ascertain whether a food, cash or fodder crop can be
obtained from the land between successive plantings of sugarcane. The first
problem than will be to define and study, scientifically, various rotations of
crops retaining sugar as the principal cash crop.

If the proposed experimental station or stations are going to be of any practical
use, they must undertake the investigation work suggested by Dr. Shepherd.
Reasons have been advanced as to why the Government should not undertake
any experimental work in sugar cane, and why it should be left entirely to the
C.S.R. Company. Before coming to the reasons why it should be taken over by
Government, I first propose to examine the reasons put forward by the Director
of Agriculture against Government undertaking to conduct research work in
sugar cane. The first reason put forward is that the C.S.R. Company has better
facilities, capable technical staff, knowledge, experience and finances. It has also
been put forward that work of that nature in other parts of the world, such as
Jamaica and Hawaii, has been conducted by the industry itself and has shown
remarkable results. I would be first and foremost to congratulate the C.S.R.
Company for the splendid achievements they have obtained in their research
work, but I would like to point out that until Dr. Shepherd came to this Colony
and mentioned this fact in his Report, very few people, if any, knew that the
C.S.R. Company was conducting experimental work in various types of sugar
cane, and had a breeding station of a first-class order in Ba. It was all right when
the C.S.R. Company was both the producer and processor of the cane. In those
days, it was entirely their own concern. They were conducting experiments
from the producer’s point of view, as well as the processor’s; but of late the
C.S.R. Company has ceased to be the producer of cane and is now merely a
processing Company. Consequently, the experiments they are conducting are
with a view to gaining information that would be useful and profitable to the
processor.

I would like to give one instance in which the interests of the processor and the
producer are in direct conflict. I refer to the variety of cane known as Badila
in this Colony. The planting of that variety has been a continuous source of
friction between the Company and the cane growers and for a very good reason:
Badila has a high percentage of sugar content, but tonnage per acre is low from
the producer’s point of view. Another aspect that discourages the producer is
that that variety is susceptible to weather conditions; it suffers if there is too
much moisture and it suffers if there is too little, but from the Company’s point
of view and the way that contract has been drafted, if the whole of the Colony
was producing Badila the producers would be suffering a loss, but the margin
of profit to the processor would be even larger than it is now. The Company
insists all the time that a certain percentage of Badila is grown by the growers:
they have offered an additional price of one shilling a ton, which is not sufficient
inducement to the growers. They are therefore pressing some of the growers to
make up this difference between Badila and other varieties of cane, and to plant
Badila.

This was one of the demands put forward by the growers before Professor
Shepherd, that the growers should be allowed to plant varieties of cane
according to the types of land, that is, considering the suitability of land. In one
instance, at Tavua, while this enquiry was proceeding, Professor Shepherd had
to intervene as a conciliator between one cane grower and the Company because
the Company was pressing him to plant Badila on his land. Professor Shepherd
inspected his farm during the course of the enquiry and there was a compromise
between the Company and the grower that, in order to save the face of the
Company, the man should plant at least one acre of Badila and the balance of the
land could be planted in any other variety that would be suitable. Therefore it
is not right to say that as far as the varieties of cane are concerned, the matter
should be left entirely to the C.S.R. Company. Interests have changed and the
growers naturally expect some sort of independent organization to undertake
these experiments and provide necessary information for their guidance.

It has been pointed out that the Agricultural Society of Jamaica and the Sugar
Cane Planters Association of Hawaii are carrying on splendid experimental work.
I am acquainted with some of their work because I get their journals regularly.
As far as Jamaica is concerned, the Agricultural Society may be considered a co-operative enterprise by the Government, the farmers and the processors: they are all interested in sugar cane. The Governor of the Colony, if I remember right, is a Patron of the Society, and the Colonial Secretary is ex officio a member of the Board of Directors. Consequently the work of the Agricultural Society of Jamaica cannot be looked upon as work conducted and carried out by a private concern.

As far as the Hawaiian Planters’ Association is concerned, the small peasants of this Colony cannot be compared either for knowledge or for means with the American planters of Hawaii. They have better facilities, better knowledge and sound finances to carry on the splendid work they have been doing. We need the same type of work in Fiji. For instance in one of the issues of the bulletins published by the Hawaiian Planters’ Association, there was a report on some admirable research work done on the subject of soil moisture and irrigation. We have a similar problem in Fiji in regard to the cane, just as they have in Hawaii, and who is going to carry out that experiment in Fiji? I suggest the Government.

I now wish to put forward the reasons why they should undertake the experimental work in sugar cane. First and foremost, we ought to read the signs of the times. The peasant world is seething with unrest. If we in Fiji indulge in wishful thinking and just remain blind to such contingencies after the experience of 1943, it would be our own mistake. So many Members deplore the amount of loss that this Colony had to undergo. I believe that it was a costly lesson and that it should teach us something. Why did the Colony have to undergo such a heavy loss? It was merely an industrial dispute over the price of cane. The growers were quite agreeable that the Government should help them in working out the cost of production, allow them a reasonable margin of profit and fix the cost of production over all those years. The Government had left experimental work in the field of sugar cane in the hands of the C.S.R. Company: they, as a third party, were unable to do anything.

The Commission was appointed, but the C.S.R. Company held out the threat that if the Commission required them to produce their accounts they would boycott it. The Governor suggested a private compromise by the counsel on both sides going into this question of accounts over the cost of production and submitting the accounts to the Governor. That came to nothing because again the C.S.R. Company were not willing to go into accounts or disclose their cost of production, and consequently the dispute dragged on. Government did not have any independent information of its own, but if there had been such a Government experimental station in the Colony where had cane growing on a practical basis, producing it and supplying to the Company, the Government itself would have been in a position to know whether there was any money or
profit or whether there was a loss to the peasant farmer in the growing of sugar cane. I suggest it is high time that Government undertakes it because that will at least help in averting such disputes in future.

I can understand why the C.S.R. Company would oppose such a project. But if the Government considers the welfare of the farmers of this Colony and the general interests of the Colony, it has an obligation to carry on this type of work on the experimental stations on a practical basis to ensure the largest measure of satisfaction to the primary producer and to ensure peace in one of the most important industries of this Colony. There has been some difference of opinion as regards the number of experimental stations and their location. It is agreed on both sides that there should be at least two, one in the wet zone and one in the dry zone. As regards the location of the station in the dry zone there is a tug-of-war amongst the Unofficial Members; some suggest that it should be located in the north-western part of Viti Levu, some that it should be located in Vanua Levu. My personal view is that if we follow the principle of maximum benefit to the largest number, the experimental station should be located in north-western Viti Levu, because the largest number of the farming population—may I say, the dry zone farming population—resides in that part of the Colony. As regards the finance of the experimental station, it has been suggested that these stations should be self-supporting. I am afraid I cannot agree with that view. If the Department is going to carry on experiments, it is bound to follow the ordinary scientific process of trial and error and elimination, and for the work to be of any practical utility at all to the Colony in conducting the experiments the Department has got to be prepared for some losses as well.

Coming to the next subject, which is conspicuous by its absence from the statement but which has been dealt with by Paterson and Dodds in their report, that is the question of agricultural banks. It is admitted on all sides that to ensure good farming the question of agricultural credit must be solved and it is not a question peculiar to the Colony alone. It is a question of worldwide importance; every country is faced with the question and every country has either solved it or attempted to solve it or is still trying to solve it.’ We in Fiji also cannot afford to ignore it. I was wondering why it did not appear on this Statement of Policy. I thought that perhaps because Paterson and Dodds mentioned that this is not properly a concern that should be undertaken by the Department of Agriculture, it was omitted from the Statement; but to me that hardly seems a plausible reason. The question of land tenure does not fall within the province of the Department of Agriculture but it has appeared on the statement and the question of an agricultural bank which is interwoven with all the problems of farming, including the tenure of land, ought not to have been omitted from this Statement. Certain statements have already been made by Your Excellency in
this Council regarding this subject. Your Excellency has already informed the Council that the Government is seeking expert opinion on the matter and I feel that it would have been right if it had been mentioned in this Statement.

The next important question is that of a soil survey. Everybody in this Council is agreed that it is a desirable recommendation. The difference of opinion is only regarding the limit and scope of such survey. I, for one, suggest that such survey should be limited only to those areas that could be thrown open for settlement in the near future or within the next five or seven years. To attempt any scheme of survey on an ambitious scale would be too much of a strain on the over-tried financial resources of the Colony.

The question of agricultural education has been one of the most debated questions in this Council. It has been suggested by the Director of Agriculture in his statement that such education should be limited to the candidates in the Teachers’ Training College and to the subordinate staff of the Department. Some of the Members on the Unofficial side have suggested that agricultural education should be open to those young men who would like to adopt agriculture as their vocation in life, and it has been suggested by one of the Members that the standard of education to be given at such a school should be similar to the standard prevailing in the agricultural school at Drasa. My own view is that if we are going to just limit ourselves to that standard as far as Indian students are concerned, we might as well not have the school at all, because an Indian grower himself feels that he is competent enough to educate his son in practical work. He can teach him how to plough, how to harrow, how to hoe, how to use a sacrifier, and, when the proper time comes, how to harvest and deliver the produce. What he is looking forward to is scientific education; he expects that his son when he returns back from the college knows more about farming than he himself does, and unless we are going to teach him scientific farming and the elementary science involved in farming, any such agricultural schools will be useless from a practical point of view. I suggest that the standard of education in any such schools should be the same as or similar to the standard that we have achieved in this Colony in our medical school, as far as the subject of medical science is concerned. If we can give them the same knowledge in agricultural school about agriculture as we have been imparting to Indian and Native Medical Practitioners in our medical school this Colony would have made one big step forward. I, therefore, suggest that there should be a proper agricultural school there on the same lines as the medical school here in Suva, but it should be open to other students who will adopt agriculture as their vocation after they have finished their education with the training college, and this educational school should be located on the same farm. As regards the practical work, there might be one year’s practical course in the dry zone where the students could go into projects and work either on the experimental station at Lautoka or anywhere on the north-western area of Viti Levu or any of the demonstration farms.
This brings me to the most debated and sore question of land tenure and the recent policy pursued by the Government. As far as the first part of the statement is concerned, everybody is agreed that the management of Crown land should provide for security of tenure for the tenant, so as to encourage good farming and maintaining and increasing the productive nature of the land. It is also agreed all around that the system of land tenure is not such as to create a feeling of security in the mind of the tenant, and that the problem of land tenure is one of great urgency. The experts also express the same opinion, and the man in the street holds the same view, but what do we find in part 2 of this statement? Paragraph 20 reads: ‘The application of the following principles and procedures in the leasing of Crown Land for agriculture purposes: (a) the maintenance of control over dealings in leases, including the encumbrance of leases.’

The first question is, should this control be one-sided? And the second question is, who would be the competent party to exercise that control? And the third question: the extent and nature of that control? The present control is one-sided. It is the control of the tenant by the landlord. The new policy laid down by the Government does not bind the landlord; the landlord is not amendable to that policy or that control. I will give you a few instances, Sir. We have been advocating that there should not be undue fragmentation of the land, that the creation of blocks of uneconomic size in the Colony is impossible. If any tenant is trying to sub-divide his lease in such small areas which, in the opinion of the landlord, amount to dividing up the land into uneconomic blocks, the landlord can turn it down and stop such a subdivision. But what is there to prevent the landlord subdividing his land and letting these blocks out to the tenants in such uneconomic sizes? Undue fragmentation of land is not in the interest of the public good of the Colony as a whole, and if we are going to follow that policy we must follow it to its logical conclusion. We must apply it to whoever goes against it, but be the tenant or the landlord, otherwise that policy has no meaning.

Take another instance, this vexatious question of prices of leases and sale of land. The new policy gives power to the landlord to say ‘No’ to any transactions by the tenant, in a case where the landlord is of the opinion that the price the tenant is charging for his leasehold interest is excessive. It has been said that we are restraining the tenant and allowing the landlord to prevent him from selling his lease at an excessive price in the interest of the land itself. We do not want land to be sold at an excessive price so that it may be flogged by the buyers, thereby affecting the future of this Colony. I agree with that argument, but again I say that if we are sincerely convinced of the desirability of such a control, then it ought to apply not only to the tenants but to both parties concerned—to the landlord as well as the tenant. We ought to be in a position to restrain any landlord if he is charging a higher premium or rental for his lease that, in the
opinion of the Government, would be uneconomic and excessive. We have done nothing of the sort. These are not merely questions of academic value: they are questions of daily practical importance.

I have one case in mind. There is a small block of land near the Nadi Hospital (it is native land), it was a swamp before. The Mosquito Control authority dug a big drain and drained this area. This land is surrounded by three tenants, two of whom are bona fide agriculturalists, and the third one a brother of mine in profession, a solicitor. During the war-time one of these agriculturalists, a cane farmer, took this land on rent from the native owners to plant rice, at the time of the campaign for growing more food. When the Mosquito Control dug out this drain they took it out of the block, which is also a small block of uneconomic size on which cane was growing at the time, of another adjoining tenant. He was not paid any compensation for the cane that was destroyed, which amounted to about four tons, nor for the area that was taken away in this drain, nor was his rent reduced. He is paying just the same rent now as he was paying before, but when that man applied for a lease of this adjoining area so that his own holding there might not become of an uneconomic size, so that he might be in a position to plant swamp rice on that area to supplement his income and have some satisfaction of getting some compensation for the land that he had lost, this application was turned down. The application of the other bona fide farmer was also turned down and agricultural lease was granted to the solicitor. I know of several instances where the same Board has refused transfers on the ground that the transferee is a store-keeper or a moneylender and not a bona fide agriculturalist. And he will see that the agricultural lands only remain in the hands of bona fide peasants. This shows that though the new policy is binding on the tenants, the landlords are free to follow or pursue whatever policy they like. Is that right? We are all agreed that there should be control, but we all say that such control should not be arbitrary, that it should be well regulated, that it should not be one-sided; it should be a control which will apply to all sides, and the control should be a judicial one controlled by the State, not by the landlord.

I remember the Colonial Secretary once saying on this subject that everybody is criticizing the Government and the Native Land Trust Board regarding this policy but that nobody is saying anything about the freehold lands. I, for one, advocate that freehold lands also should fall within the same category. If we say that this is an agricultural Colony, that it is in the interests of the Colony that the fertility of the land should be maintained and promoted, that the fertility of the land must be and ought to be the concern of the State, then it will be the duty of the State to constrain anybody, whether he is a landlord or a tenant, whether he is a freeholder or a leaseholder, from exploiting that land and thereby endangering the future of this Colony. The policy can only be a
just policy but as it is it strongly savours, if I may say so, of a conspiracy of
the three biggest landlords of the Colony, viz., the C.S.R. Company, the Fijian
through the Native Land Trust Board, and the Government, to restrain and keep
the tenant farmers of the Colony down by just putting forward an excuse that
we are thereby trying to protect the farmers from such vultures and wolves
as the financiers and the lawyers of this Colony. Of course, landlords do not
like to place themselves in the same category, and they want us to accept as
a presumption that the landlord is the best person in the Colony to look after
the interests of the tenant and to safeguard his future, to ensure his happiness,
comfort and convenience. I for one cannot accept that view.

73: Delay Is Dangerous, 3 September 1949

All persons in authority, from the Governor downwards to the smallest officer of
the Native Lands Trust Board, have expressed sympathy for the Indian farmers
who will be dispossessed of the lands which will be included in Fijian Reserves.
So far it has only remained a lip sympathy. Nothing has been so far done for the
unfortunate farmers except being told that there are hardships and difficulties
in store for them.

The land belongs to the Fijian and he has every right to keep it for himself,
if he so chooses. The Government proclaims this right from housetops. But as
for the right of the dispossessed tenants to be compensated for unexhausted
improvements, everybody in authority observes unholy silence. About the 80
per cent or so of good, diligent and hard-working Indian farmers, who with
their sweat and money built up second grade, and sometimes even third grade
lands, into really first grade cane lands producing anything from 30 to 50 tons
per acre, nothing is said. But loud noise is made about 20 per cent or so who are
lazy and careless, and all are condemned for the faults of a few.

Even first class lands were acquired originally by payment of quite heavy premia
to the native owners and then brought under cultivation by uprooting and
clearing thick jungles of guava, vai vai and such other bushes and trees which
are hard and expensive to eradicate. In the first few years, the farmers had to
struggle hard to be able to produce even enough to make both ends meet. It was
years of intensive cultivation and heavy manuring with coral sand, chemical
and green manures which have made some of their first class lands what they are
at present. Besides building up the fertility of the land, the tenants have planted
many coconut, mango, tamarind, orange, mandarins, jack and other fruit trees
which for many years to come will yield rich harvest. Tenants have dug wells
and built houses on the land. In many areas they have paid heavy costs for the
building of the tramlines to enable cane to be taken to the main line and made
roads, put up culverts and even bridges to make the land easily accessible. They have also been contributing substantial amount every year to the Sugar Price Stabilisation Fund, the benefit of which will be enjoyed by the dispossessing landlords.

The Fijian owners are not only allowed to take their lands back, but they are also allowed to confiscate these costly improvements made by the Indian tenants. The fact that the tenant is allowed to harvest his standing crops upon payment of rent before he is actually evicted, is being advertised, as if it was a great act of generosity, while absolute silence is kept over the whole-sale confiscation of improvements. The Fijian owners should be duty-bound to pay full value for the unexhausted improvements to the lands brought about by means of clearing the land, manuring it and digging drains or building up dams and retaining walls; for the fruit and other trees planted on the land by the tenants, for the wells dug and houses, out-houses, stables and other building together with hedges or fences erected and total amount of contributions paid to the Sugar Price Stabilisation Fund. Trees and wells cannot be removed and even if the buildings and fences are dismantled, removed and re-erected in another place, the loss to be incurred by the tenant is so doing will be as much as there being left on the land. The tenant is entitled for the payment of these improvements and it is the duty of the Government to see that the compensation is fully paid to him before he is asked to leave the land.

It is also the duty of the Government to see that the dispossessed farmer is re-settled on suitable and easily accessible land. Breaking new lands and making them productive is a long laborious and expensive job. The farmer must have some source of credit to carry him over this long, unproductive period. As the farmer will not be allowed to mortgage his lease and as there will be no improvements on the lands which he can pledge, he will be thrown on the rapacity of usurious money lenders. It must be the duty of the Government to provide these tenants with sufficient loans on long and easy terms.

The Native Land Trust Board has already made a start in evicting tenants, but no start has yet been made to providing the payment of the compensation or opening up new land and re-settling the displaced tenants or financing them to bridge over the unproductive period. This procrastination on the part of the Government has created deep resentment amongst the farmers. Unless the lip sympathy is quickly turned into fair play and effective aid, the Colony will be heading for trouble.
Fiji is predominantly an agricultural country, with this distinction that the owners of land are not agriculturists and the actual agriculturists are not owners of land. Most of the farmers are either the tenants of the Native Land Trust Board or the Crown or the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Ltd. The Fijian owners have approximately 3,770,000 acres of land in their possession out of the total area of the Colony of 42 million acres. As early as 1905, the Government was alive to the Fijian interests. Under the Native Lands Ordinance passed in that year, the Native owners could lease their lands to the non-Fijians only with the consent of the Governor-in-Council. The Governor-in-Council was empowered to refuse consent if in his opinion the land proposed to be leased was necessary for the maintenance and support of the owners was leased out. Thus all the lands that were considered necessary for the maintenance and support of the Native owners have been all the while reserved and preserved for them and only the surplus lands have been leased out to the non-Fijian tenants.

The tenants who took these unrequired surplus lands (in many cases on payment of high premia) were induced to improve them as much as they could by the statutory right conferred on the tenants to the extension of the lease upon expiry of its term, or in default of such extension, to compensation for permanent and unexhausted improvements. If the native owners refused to grant extension of a lease, the Governor-in-Council was empowered to call upon them to pay into the Treasury or to the District Commissioner of the district within a specified time such sum as the Governor in Council would decide to be the present value of the permanent and unexhausted improvements made on the leasehold by any lessee during the period of the expiring lease. If the Native owners failed to pay the amount within the specified time the lease was deemed to be extended on such terms and conditions as fixed by the Governor-in-Council. Thus the tenant was not only given the right of compensation in respect of his improvements but he was also given a fair chance of extension of the lease.

Most of the leases that have now expired, and very many of the existing leases have been taken by the lessees on the strength of this statutory assurance. This assurance also provided them with an impetus to improve and build up fertility and turn them into first class lands. The Native owner naturally coveted the improved lands back. When the time came for the tenants to demand extension of their expired leases or to cash in their improvement the Government blandly took away that right with a strike of the pen by passing the Native Land Trust Ordinance 1940. When tenants, all the world over were given special protection and privileges to the point of indulgence when, even in Fiji, the town-folks were given the protection against evictions or extortions by their land-lords which continue to enjoy right up to the present, the tenants of Fijian land-
lords were deprived of the rights they were titled to under the Native Lands Ordinance. The tragedy of it all was that even those members who were the elected representatives of the Indian tenants at that time in Legislative Council supported the obnoxious and unjust measure which swept away the tenants’ right to compensate for permanent and unexhausted improvements.

When the Fijians were given this opportunity to take back well-developed lands without having to make any compensation for improvements, it was, naturally, to be expected that they would make most of such a golden opportunity. As a matter of fact the Fijian owners, like Warren Hastings, can very well claim to be surprised at their modern [good fortune] while the tenants stand aghast at this legalised confiscation of their just dues.

75: A Sop to Evictees, 15 October 1949

The Governor has appointed a committee for the Western Districts. Yes, the Governor has appointed the committee and the fact has been advertised in the Fiji Royal Gazette under the pompous title ‘A Resettlement of the Persons Evicted from Native Reserves within the Western Districts.’ The Committee consists of the District Commissioner Western (Chairman), District Engineer Lautoka, Mr. CL Langdale, Mr. CE Whitehead, Roko Tui Nadroga and Navosa, Mr. EA Potts and Mr. TR Sharma. These good men are appointed (1) ‘to assist persons displaced from Native Reserves’ and (2) ‘to submit for consideration by the Central Committee,’ which will be appointed shortly, ‘proposals for making available for settlement new areas outside the Reserves.’ How exactly this Committee is going to assist the displaced tenants we are not told. It is well known that none of the members of the Committee has the means, authority or power to procure resettlement of the displaced tenants even if they had the best intentions of being helpful to the unfortunate tenants.

In what way is this Committee going to help them? Is it going to intercede on their behalf and obtain compensation for the improvements left behind on the land or are they going to go around looking for some suitable but unoccupied land and obtain leases of the same? Or are they going to provide funds for the displacement tenant and his family to enable them to break new land and bring it under cultivation until such land can produce enough for their subsistence? Has the Committee been supplied with means to carry out all or any one of those tasks?

One of the objects and perhaps the foremost one in the establishment of the Native Land Trust Board was to constitute a body which would throw open for settlement Fijian lands not included in Native Reserves and provide settlement of farmers on a large scale. The Government also called experts like Dr Shepherd
to advise them on land tenure and settlement of Indian peasants. It is nearly a decade since eviction of tenants from lands which the Fijian owners may choose to reserve for their own use and the resettlement of such tenants were contemplated. It is five years since the Government had the benefit of expert advice on the matter.

And yet at this late hour the Government is asking for proposals from a committee which is least qualified to do so. Has it not been the duty of the Native Land Trust Board to design new settlements outside the reserves and make them available to those who are in need? Neither the Government nor the Native Land Trust Board have made preparations to meet the present emergency which could have been foreseen at least ten years ago. Instead of following the only logical solution of the problem in the circumstances, namely persuading the Fijian owners of the Reserves not to hasten and take possession of their land before the Government has made adequate arrangements and found areas for immediate settlement of evicted tenants, they have put the cart before the horse and followed the policy of throwing the tenants out of their old homes first and look for new homes afterwards.

What the Government did not, or could not, provide in a decade the Committee is expected to produce like a conjurer out of its hat on the spot. Though we do not believe in magic, we wish it good luck.

76: Adding Insult to Injury, 26 November 1949

This is just like the Native Land Trust Board. For who else would put forward such an excuse as given by the Board in its latest circular to confiscate tenants’ improvements. The circular reads ‘The Board is of the opinion that, in general, past methods of farming on leased native lands have not led to any permanent improvements in such lands, and in consequence the Board is not prepared to consider the question of compensation for improvements to such lands.’ If the Board really believes the correctness of its opinion, it would have certainly declared without beating around the bush that it was willing to pay for permanent improvements, if any, in the event of the non-renewal of the lease. Nobody then could have questioned the fair mindedness on the part of the Board and it would not in fact have to pay any compensation if no permanent improvements exist as they try to make out.

The Board blandly states that, in general, past methods of farming on leased native lands have not led to any permanent improvements in such land. Some of these lands have been leased to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company which has in turn sublet them to Indian tenants. Some lands are directly leased to Indians which have been developed and brought into sugarcane cultivation by
them. So far the Colonial Sugar Refining Company as well as the Government of Fiji have taken pride in the methods of sugar cane farming prevailing in this Colony. Lands that were under scrub, stones and weeds when they were leased out, now produce in many cases 30 or 40 tons of sugarcane per acre. The lessees of the native lands in sugarcane areas have not only broken and developed wild country but they have also permanently enriched it. Lands that were not easily accessible have been made accessible by the roads and tracks made by the tenants. Their contributions in the past to the Sugar Price Stabilisation Fund will also benefit the Fijian landowners.

This is what the ‘past methods’ of farming have achieved in the sugarcane areas. Besides that, valuable fruit trees are planted by the tenants whose fruit will be enjoyed for some generations by the landlord. And yet the Native Land Trust Board claims that there are no improvements for which the question of compensation can be considered. Many native leases have been brought under coconut plantations by the tenants. It is their past methods of farming which yield such lucrative harvest of copra today. We know of a native lease on which the lessee had a rubber plantation. The Native Land Trust Board refused to renew the lease and did not pay any compensation for the value of the rubber trees which the Fijian owner took over with the land. Perhaps in the opinion of the Native Land Trust Board even a rubber yielding plantation is not a permanent improvement deserving payment of compensation.

If the Board does not like the native lands as they are at present, would they like the tenants, before they hand over the lands, to exhaust all improvements, cut down or dig out all valuable trees and turn it into a veritable bush as it was when originally leased? Expropriating landlordism never runs short of excuses to swallow up what rightfully belongs to its tenants. But the excuse put forward by the Native Land Trust Board is unique. It condemns its own creator.

**77: Diversification of Agricultural Production, 4 November 1956**

What stands out most prominently in the report of Sir Geoffrey Clay, Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on his visit to Fiji in 1954 is his advice on the urgent need for diversification of agricultural production, a need which discerning students of this Colony’s economy have felt, and to which we have had occasions frequently in these columns to refer. For no wise country should have all its eggs in one economic basket—and that is more or less the position in Fiji now.
Sir Geoffrey Clay spent five weeks in Fiji last year in the course of his tour. And after a study of the agricultural problems of the Colony, he sums up the present situation:

Fiji’s agricultural crop production is, in the main, confined to the flat alluvial lands and occupies less than 10 per cent of the total land area, is dependent very largely on sugar cane and copra, and with the exception of bananas and rice, which show welcome expansion, has remained static in volume over the past decade and half in spite of an expansion of population of over 50 per cent and an adult male population of at least 25 per cent during that period.

Faced with this situation, some publicists in Fiji used to raise the bogey of overpopulation and also blame it all on one particular race which happens to be virile and active. But a wise and unprejudiced authority like Sir Geoffrey naturally suggests the scope for development and the need for carrying out studies and field experiments in this behalf.

‘To anyone acquainted with the other parts of the Colonial Empire,’ states Sir Geoffrey, ‘one’s first major impression must be surprise that the interior of the mountainous islands has been almost completely neglected.’ He suggests, therefore, that necessary soil survey and ecological study should be completed in these regions. For, it would appear that in many of these regions the climate and the soils may be suitable for tea and coffee. In the wetter zones cocoa should hold out excellent possibilities as the investigations already completed show; Sir Geoffrey suggests the advantages of under planting cocoa in the coconut plantations too. And in the intermediate as well as in the wet zone conditions could be found suitable for rubber and coffee. For the dry zone, cotton, especially the short and medium stapled varieties, could well form the basis of the farmers’ crop. There are possibilities too of expanding rice production with irrigation, schemes for which could well be executed without very heavy investment.

Fiji is the nearest tropical dependency to Australia, New Zealand and (Western) Canada, three important members of the British Commonwealth. And this fortunate location should and can be exploited for the advantage of the Colony which can supply all tropical produce to these countries, as well as to America. Spices like pepper could form valuable dollar export crops. And with the rapidly developing air service between temperate countries passing through Fiji, tropical fruits like mango, often, called the king of the tropical fruits, should also provide as valuable an export crop as banana is at present. And in the case of the mango, there is the additional advantage that once orchards are planted with good varieties, the recurring labour costs are comparatively negligible. And the vast untapped Market of the temperate countries nearby should be able to absorb Fiji’s exports, although these Market will have to be developed.
In dealing with the sugar cane, naturally and rightly Sir Geoffrey says that he was impressed with the organization of the sugar cane industry under the over-all management of the C.S.R. Co. He pays well-deserved encomiums to the scientific and field staff of the Company for their work. And he suggests that better over-all production might be obtained by limiting cane to the plant crop and practising 25 per cent rotation.

In dealing with this topic, Sir Geoffrey mentions how the application of quotas for sugar under the International Sugar Agreement makes development of crops other than sugar cane essential for the Colony. For already the Colony is producing, under the existing area under cane, an exportable surplus up to the quota limit. And in order to avoid over-production, at least so long as the International Sugar Agreement is in force on the present basis, it may even become necessary to reduce acreage under cane, when perhaps the Company might close their Nausori Mill.

The complacent cane farmer may not be worried over the situation. But an enlightened public and government interested in the welfare and progress of the people cannot afford to be complacent.

**Diversification of Agricultural Products II (18 November 1955)**

We have considered in a previous number the need for diversification of agricultural production in the Colony in the light of Sir Geoffrey Clay’s report. How much diversification can well be effected is the next question to be considered.

Sir Geoffrey has some valuable suggestions to make in this regard too. In its position as the agency responsible for the control of all native land, the Native Land Trust Board, says Sir Geoffrey Clay, ‘must play a major role in organising settlement and development of vacant lands’.

When the demarcation of Reserve Land is completed, a picture will be available of the nature and extent of the land available for development. Perhaps it should then be possible for giving the settler in the land a greater stake than is available at present. For the needs, present and future, of the Fijian having been provided for, it should be possible to give the farmer his due share of what he produces. Terms of land tenure and the basis of rent payable to the land owner should be all fixed in such a way that these will provide real inducement to the farmer.
In considering the suitability of climate and soils, especially in the interior of the mountainous islands, for particular crops the need for survey under able and experienced experts has been stressed by Sir Geoffrey. He has also suggested some suitable names for this purpose.

While discussing the recruitment of senior staff for the Department of Agriculture, Sir Geoffrey wisely said that ‘it would not be in the interests of Fiji to attempt to make the Fijian service a closed service,’ by confining the recruitment of officers domiciled in New Zealand and Australia. In fact he suggests that ‘in the case of recruitment from Australia and New Zealand, some tightening up in the actual selection is required.’ The advantages to be derived from transfers to and from the Unified Service of the British Colonies are great indeed.

It would, in fact, be to the advantage of agricultural development in the Colony if arrangements are sought to be made for getting the services of experienced officers from parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations, especially in the projects for development of new tropical produce like tea, coffee, rubber and spices. Experts from tropical countries like Ceylon, Pakistan, Malaya and India can render valuable aid. And the idea behind the Colombo Plan, which has shown such magnificent results all over South-East Asia, should be of benefit to the Colonies. And the spirit of amity and helpful co-operation, existing between the different members of the Commonwealth is an assurance that such help will be forthcoming, provided they are tapped.

Next only to the land suitable and available for the purpose, is the man power which is essential for the purpose of agricultural development. Sir Geoffrey Clay has some valuable suggestions for enabling the Fijians to play their part in such a development. Though ‘speaking generally the Indian section of the population who are traditionally agriculturists have tended to regard,’ as Sir Geoffrey remarks, ‘agricultural development as synonymous with sugar cane farming,’ it was no fault of the Indian farmer himself. We dare say the enterprising and industrious Indian, provided he is given the opportunity, will play his part creditably in any well-thought out scheme of agricultural development in the Colony. There is need for it. There are men ready for it. It is for the Government to do their part to enable and help the men to play their part for the agricultural development of the Colony.

78: Fruit Industry, 31 May 1956

The demand for fresh fruits and also preserved varieties is steadily increasing. Fruit contains some minerals and sugar, and is valuable for its roughage. Fruit has the additional advantage that it is frequently consumed raw, without any loss of Vitamin C. Sir Robert McCarrison, world famous for his research in nutrition in India, says that fruits are rich in alkali minerals.
No propaganda is necessary to make our people eat fruits, for they like them provided they can get them. Hence it is necessary to encourage fruit growing on large scale commercial basis and make them available to the poorest man. At present fruits form a negligible part of our diets.

At present we grow only bananas and pineapples on commercial basis. No other tropical or temperate fruit is grown for marketing though we have suitable land for growing such fruits. Such land is now lying waste. We depend mostly on imports for preserved varieties.

An intensive effort to introduce temperate-fruit growing is necessary in our Colony. In areas like Nadarivatu and other hilly regions, this variety can be successfully introduced provided we do it in the scientific way. A new variety of bananas, *Musa Sapidisloca*, which is sweeter and more nutritious, can be grown on hillsides 2,000 feet high.

Madras State has paid considerable attention to the development of hill fruits and has introduced varieties of exotic fruits. Southern California is another place where we have the organization of fruit orchards on large commercial basis. Countries like Switzerland, Italy and the United Kingdom have well developed fruit industries. Succulent strawberries available in temperate regions can be easily grown in our high hills as it has been done in the Nilgiris. Better strains of oranges and other citrus fruits may be usefully introduced.

There is no reason why Fiji should not be made self-sufficient in the matter of these ‘temperate’ fruits. The hilly region, which occupies the major area of our island and remains untouched except to some extent for manganese prospecting, favours the production of many kinds of temperate and sub-tropical fruits. Table grapes are grown in plenty in the plains adjoining the hilly regions of Southern India. The income per acre in such fruit growing areas is many times more in comparison with other produce growing areas.

Our Agriculture Department should lead the way by starting model fruit farms at different places in the western districts for demonstration purposes and teach our people modern techniques, and supply our farmers with saplings, seeds, plants and other material. This will induce at least some of us to be the pioneers in large scale fruit farming in Fiji.

Fruit shows, like flower shows, will serve as a fine instrument for propaganda. Quite apart from the temperate fruits we can grow a wide variety of other sub-tropical and tropical fruits, the chief of which is mango. Growing and eating more fruits would add to the pleasures of life. In New Zealand we can find good market for our new tropical fruits like mangoes, pomegranates, and plums.
79: Diet and its Effect, 3 August 1959

The diet of Magsaysay Peace Prize winner, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, indomitably energetic in his own way, consists, according to Arthur Koestler, of small cups of curd and molasses taken every three or four hours, a total of 1,100 calories a day. Yet his body is all muscle and sinew, his skin has a healthy glow, his gestures are vigorous, and he can out pace his younger disciples on his Bhoodan Marches.2

The influence of diets on politics must be considerable, if British poet Walter de la Mare is to be believed that whatever Miss T eats becomes Miss T. This is supported only by Hindu thought, which has drawn a sharp, if unscientific, distinction between vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism and in certain food stuffs in their effect on human qualities. Gita mentions this in Chapter 17.

This is different from the pre-Puranic Brahmanism of Emerson’s Brahma who claimed that he was the slayer and the slain and did not bother what anybody ate or killed for eating. The trouble with modern vegetarians is that they have not been unanimous in defining vegetarianism. The London Vegetarian Society included some kinds of fish in vegetarian diet on the basis of its definition of meat.

The adherents of vegetarianism exclude even mild and other animal products. The vegetarian societies which grew in many European countries cited in their favour health, economy, race improvement, and character development in their tracts for the times. Not the least interesting argument was that if it required ten pounds of fodder to produce one ounce of meat, it was better to achieve caloric contentment through vegetables.

The great modern dramatist George Bernard Shaw put it in his topsy-turvy way by saying that he was a vegetarian because he would not eat dead animals. Hegelian dialectics led to both Prussian militarism and Stalinist communism, and it is difficult to say what vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism contributes to politics. The Brahminical tradition in India was strengthened by the Jain doctrines which in the name of Hinduism Gandhi propagated. He experimented with diet, but always within the limits of vegetarianism.

Nehru’s biographers describe his breakfasts and not the rest of his diet, though it is widely known that he achieves a balance in his habits which could be called both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The difference between vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism in the higher levels of thinking is the difference between Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell.

2 A movement started in 1951 by Bhave to get wealthy landowners to give a percentage of their land to the landless lower classes.
Part III: Land and Livelihood

Non-vegetarians include men as various as Hitler and Churchill, though in the case of Western statesmen, what they drink matters as much as what they eat. Disraeli used to claim that he had taken too much claret whenever he had taken too much brandy.

The classic story from British public life is that of Pitt the Younger remembering, on his death-bed, Bellamy’s pork pies, though it is widely believed to be an apocryphal story. Drinking is considered a worse habit than meat-eating in India, though they should go together, but the more sensitive set of public men consider that corrupt men are acceptable but people who drink are not.

There is no particular glory perhaps in any habit and man’s metabolism has many contradictions. Learned Erasmus said his heart was Catholic but his stomach Lutheran. The metaphorical significance of meat-eating is greater than its protein and other values. Among the people, habits change, howsoever slowly: some get tired of eating meat and others of eating vegetables, as the Roman Empress, Valeria Messalina, got tired of adultery.

80: Fiji’s Growing Pains, 17 December 1959

The Legislative Council of Fiji has 31 members, of whom 16 are official and 15 unofficial. The official members are bound to vote as the Governor directs. So the Government can never be defeated on any measure. Out of the 31 members 21 are Europeans while there are five Indians and five Fijians. Out of the 15 unofficial members, the Governor nominates nine, two of whom are Europeans, two Indians and all the five Fijians. Thus the Fijian members are appointed by the Governor and all of them invariably are subordinate government servants. No Fijian who is not a Government servant has ever been appointed to the Council. Never has a Fijian—whether a Chief or a commoner—from the Western Division has been nominated, although it is the most important division in the Colony in all respects.

The Fijian nominees by virtue of their position dare not open their mouths against the Government. They justify their appointments by praising the government and the Europeans and criticising Indians. Motions have been brought by Indian members from time to time for constitutional reforms. European members oppose any constitutional change because it can only mean curtailment of present European hegemony. Fijian members oppose because for them it means self-elimination from the Council. If the Fijians get franchise, then they being government servants, cannot stand for election. If any of them resign from government service and seek election, it is most unlikely that he will be elected. The Government and the European press represent to the outside world that the Fijians are completely satisfied with the present political setup and oppose any change in the constitution.
The Government and the press call the Fijian nominated members, ‘Fijian leaders’ and whatever they say in Council and in public is represented as the considered opinion of the Fijian people. But in truth these ‘Fijian leaders’ are not the leaders of the Fijians. They are paid government servants. The late Ratu Apolosi Ranawai, the leader of the Fijian people, raised a cry of Fiji’s independence as early as the twenties of this century. But for a few intervals Apolosi had to spend most of his life in interment and exile. It is several years now since he passed away, but many Fijians still refuse to believe that he is dead. It would be a mistake to assume that since Apolosi’s death the Fijians have no leaders.

The workers of Fiji comprise of Fijians, Indians, and part-Europeans, who are united in their demand for higher wages and better conditions of work. The employers and the ‘Fijian leaders’ try to disunite Fijians from Indians and part-Europeans. But the more they try to divide them, the more united they stand.

Last year’s unrest among workers in the sugar industry gave sufficient warning and notice to other employers in the Colony to revise the wages of their employees. The C.S.R. quietly took advantage of the Honeyman Commission’s majority recommendation and settled the unrest by giving a raise of three pence per hour to their workers. Other employers could have followed C.S.R’s example and secured industrial peace for at least one year.

Christmas was drawing near. The shop windows were filled with expensive and glittering Christmas goods. The schools were closed for the long vacation. Fijian school boys were wandering looking at the glittering shop windows with bleak prospects for a merry Christmas in their hearts on account of unemployment or low income of their parents.

In this setting on Monday last week some 250 workers of the Vacuum and Shell oil companies working in Suva, Lautoka, Vuda and Nadi Airport went on strike. The smallest body of workers in Fiji went on strike against the biggest oil companies in the world. The Government promptly came out with a statement condemning the strike and asking the strikers to return to work. Right on its heels, the Native Land Trust Board came forward with an announcement that no rents will be paid [to the landowners] until transport situation improved. It meant that the Fijians will not get their own money to spend at Christmas. These two announcements created a widespread feeling among the general public that the Government was siding with the oil companies and bringing undue pressure on the workers.

The bus and taxi drivers in Suva replied with a sympathy strike without prior announcement. Men, women and children collected at the bus station looking for transport. The Secretary of the Wholesale and Retail Workers’ General Union tried to address people who were there. The police thereupon used gas bombs
and batons to disperse the peaceful crowd. This action of the police played the part of a spark. Widespread rioting broke out in Suva. Youngsters smashed shop windows and destroyed goods and hurled stones at passing cars injuring several people. It appeared as if pandemonium was let loose in Suva, but the rest of the Colony remained completely peaceful.

The Public Servants’ Association made representations to the Governor requesting immediate settlement of the dispute and the establishment of peace and order. This body of Government servants condemned most strongly the action of the police in using the gas bombs and baton charges. It added that until the throwing of the gas bombs, the assembly was peaceful and if it were to ascribe responsibility for disturbances that followed, then it must rest on the shoulders of the policemen whose action actually provoked the feeling of the crowd.

To establish peace and order in Suva the Governor-in-Council clamped drastic regulations on the whole country and imposed curfew not only on Suva but on Lautoka and Nadi Airport as well. People were shocked at the outbreak of violence in a country which is normally so peaceful. There was no one who did not sincerely condemn the violence, and the situation became calm long before the promulgation of the curfew order.

‘The winds of social change which are transforming Africa and Asia, blew even over Fiji,’ commented London Times in its editorial on these disturbances. The editorial went further and said: ‘Fiji which was aware of the rapid emancipation in other dependencies, was beginning to question a Crown Colony constitution which still gave a small permanent majority to the official side. There were complaints too that the five Fijians in the Legislative Council represented the Chiefs and not the people.’

The ‘Times’ hit the nail on the head when it further stated, ‘Whether or not this diagnosis is right a general overhaul of the constitution and economy of the islands will not come too soon.’ It is hard to say which perturbed the reactionary elements in this country and abroad more, the editorial of the ‘Times’ or the disturbances. To many of the diehards the editorial appeared to be a greater calamity than even the outbreak of violence. Their tune suddenly changed. They now try to make out that ‘subtle minds have tricked the Fijians into a Ghana-like “out with the British” demand which they don’t really want and which could only harm them.’ They are trying to block constitutional changes by carrying on a propaganda in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and other countries to the effect that Fijians do not want any political change. The ‘Fijian leaders’ are vainly trying to support it by diplomatic anti-Indian utterances. But the Fijians are not as unintelligent as they think.
We are glad that the violent part of this big drama is over. We sincerely wish that it is over for good. It would be wise to remember that more can be achieved by touching peoples’ hearts than by touching their heads. And this applies to everybody—as much to the members of the Government as to the people of this country. In this big drama all have a part. It will be admitted on all sides that the wages of workers in cities and towns are too low to provide themselves and their families with proper nourishment and even minimum comforts and social amenities of life. A general revision and fixing of a proper minimum living wage for all workers by government legislation will save the country all the unrest and damage which result from wage disputes.

81: The Medicine\(^3\), 7 March 1960

The long awaited Report of the Burns Commission is now published. It has killed many expectations and put to rest many doubts and misgivings.

Fiji is a Crown Colony with meagerly developed natural resources and rapidly increasing population. To develop natural resources in such a way as to keep pace with increasing population, the things which the Colony most urgently needs are capital, technical know-how and remunerative market for the products. None of the members of the Commission was competent to procure these things or to produce a blueprint in the absence of their provision. If the cart was put before the horse, one can hardly blame the horse for it. The people who are disappointed because their expectations of a blueprint did not come true, should blame the Governor who appointed the Commission rather than the members of the Commission who did what they could under existing limitations.

Instead of a blueprint the Commission has provided the Colony with a prescription, which is a mixture of numerous ingredients, some of which are sweet and some bitter, some salty and some sour, some hot and some acrid. The ingredients include all tastes, and the mixture is, therefore, likely to leave, if not an altogether bad, at least a very disagreeable taste in the mouth.

The Commission warns that all the medicine has to be taken and it will not do just to take that which appeals and leave the rest. The Commission consists of two colonial administrators who were perhaps highly successful in their careers in the colonial service with minds securely closed against any chance of pollination by the winds of change which are blowing all over the colonial territories, and a learned professor ensconced in the academic sanctuary of a Scottish University.

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They have rushed into the question of constitutional reforms with head long speed regardless of the fact that neither their competence nor their terms of reference allow them even to tread.

Usually a doctor takes into consideration the religious and other prejudices and sentiments of his patient in prescribing the medicine. The Commission has departed from this time honoured practice and has allowed their own personal prejudices and religious beliefs to influence them in determining their prescription for the patient. This is quite evident in the report when it says that Sir Alan Burns dissents from his two colleagues on the recommendation relating to family planning and birth control because of his religious belief. How many of his other peculiar beliefs have influenced him in arriving at the conclusions contained in the report are not very hard to surmise. The report can therefore be hardly described as a result of scientific investigation by impartial and unprejudiced experts. The reason for appointing such a costly Commission at the time when every penny is important to the Government and the tax payer, was to secure expert, impartial and unprejudiced minds to bear upon our problems in order to find correct solutions.

To point out these drawbacks does not, however, mean that the medicine is perfectly useless. If the Colony has not got its money’s worth it has at least got something in return. The Commission has candidly pointed the impediments and disincentives which hamper production and development. The Government’s land policy, the expensive inefficient and unnecessary Fijian Administration, the cramping communal system, the policy and undesirable functions and activities or the Native Land Trust Board, the lethargy and incompetence of the Native Reserves Commission which has not completed its work, which was intended to be completed within two years, even in 20 years, and many other things have been carefully scrutinized, exposed and suitable remedies are prescribed. On the other hand, the proposals not to incur any further expenditure on Health, Education, and other social services and failure to realize due importance of these in the development of the natural resources and economic improvement of the people are apparently the outcome of the minds preconditioned by the concepts of Colonial Administration prevailing in the pre-World War II era.

The salaries and allowances of expatriate civil servants are upheld and justified. People are warned not to criticize them too much lest it might hurt their morale and affect their efficiency. Religious, educational and political leaders are exhorted to exert their influence to restrain extravagance by persons of all races. It is not stated who the religious, educational and political leaders of the expatriate civil servants are. Many of the recommendations amount to supporting the findings and recommendations of previous investigators appointed by the Government, which are not so far implemented. The Colony has had many investigators and many reports since the last war. It is to be hoped that Burns Commission will be
the last for many years to come, and instead of calling any more investigators, the Government will seriously and sincerely start to properly implement at least some of those reports.

The Burns Report does not claim to provide a cure. It leaves it to others to diagnose further and find the cure. It frankly admits that even after due administration of all the medicine the patient may keep on losing weight. Strictly speaking the prescription is more in the nature of a tonic than a medicine.

82: Landlord and Tenant Bill, 20 July 1966

The problem of security of tenure, of fair rent and of compensation for unexhausted improvements by the tenant on the expiry of the lease in respect of agricultural tenancies, has been with us for over 30 years now. As time passes, these problems grow in extent, in acuteness, and in complexity. Certain requests have been made for the postponement of this Bill. The Attorney-General gave very sound and excellent reasons why the Bill should not be postponed. There is one more reason that I wish to add to that long list. It is said that people whom this Bill concerns most have not been consulted, and they have not been given the opportunity to study this Bill: namely, the tenant farmers. I would like to point out that the request for deferment of this Bill came only from the merchant community through the Federation of the Chambers of Commerce, and the working community of the Law Society. As is well known, there are many farmers’ organizations in existence and all these years we have been alive to the interest of the farmers and very active in championing their cause. There are Indian farmers’ associations and there are Fijian farmers’ associations. This problem has been exercising their minds all these years, and not one farmers’ association has come with the request that they want time for further consideration of this Bill, and that this Bill should be deferred.

What is more, there are as far as the Indian side is concerned, at least four members in this House, who are active workers in farmers’ organizations. I myself happen to be the President of the Federation Committee of several farmers’ associations operating in the Western and Northern Divisions. The member from North Viti Levu is the Secretary of that Committee. The Indian Member for the Northern Constituency is also a prominent member of that Federation Committee and the fourth member is the First Indian Nominated Member who is a tenant of native land. He is a farmer who farms sugar-cane, who keeps poultry, who breeds, rears and keeps livestock. As far as the tenant farming community is concerned, it is well represented in this House and no request has come to any of those four members of this House that they want more time to consider this Bill and that it should be postponed. I, on the other hand, am of the opinion that the sooner
we put the landlord and tenant legislation on the statute book, the better for
the tenant farmers whose minds are acutely in distress. The sooner that alarm is
allayed, the sooner relief is granted to their minds, by relieving their anxiety,
the better for everybody. I, therefore, strongly support that this Bill should be
put on the statute book as soon as possible.

As far as the tenant community of Fiji is concerned, I would say that about 90
percent of tenants are the tenants of either the native owners or of the Crown, or
of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. About 10 percent of the tenants will be
tenants of individual owners of freehold land. There is a tendency in this country
to presume that everything which is big is good and virtuous. I must say that it
is not necessarily so. I must emphasize the fact that whether the landlords are
the native owners or the Government or the Colonial Sugar Refining Company
or the private freeholders, all of them have got skeletons in their cupboards and
it is no use for any of them to feel more virtuous than the rest. Let me first take
the largest landlord in this Colony, the Native Land Trust Board, and point out
that the largest tenant of native land is the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. It
was said that the Fijian owners have made a determination that they must use
their land. I appreciate both their desire and their determination to make use
of their land which covers from 80 to 83 percent of the total land area of this
country.

But I must sound a note of warning. Good as this determination may be, if it
is not used in a proper manner there are dangers that such a determination
may lead their tenants and this country into a state of a chaos and may result
in the economic and political ruin of this land. If their determination and
desire takes the form of resuming lands from the tenants which have already
been developed and are placed in the highest state of production, under the
temptation of having land which has been already well developed and ready-
made and requires the least amount of struggle and effort, it will only result in
uprooting farmers who have been experienced over all these years, farmers who
have specialized in growing particular crops which they are growing on those
lands, such farmers will face utter ruin and the land which will revert to the
Fijian owners will of necessity, go down in production until the Fijian owners
gain sufficient experience and knowledge of that type of farming, which will
affect the general prosperity of the Colony.

Another result will be that the present tenant farmers will be reduced to the
position of ‘nomadic farmers,’ as I call them. In arid areas nomadic people
migrate from place to place seasonally. Here, if I am to take the words of the
Director of Lands seriously that 30 years’ tenancy is adequate for purposes of
all kinds of farming including copra planting, then it will amount to this: at
the end of every 30 years, in spite of this legislation, the farmer must leave his
land which he has occupied, used, cultivated and brought to the highest pitch
of production and go somewhere on virgin, possibly marginal, land and again
start breaking new lands and developing it, until the entire 80 or 85 percent of
the land area of the Colony is developed by the unfortunate tenants. That sort
of treatment will terribly shake the confidence of the farmers both as far as their
own personal interests and their profession is concerned, and also in the training
of the future generations. Every farmer will try to see that his son does not
become a farmer and seeks employment in some other vocation or occupation,
with the result that the agriculture of the Colony will sink to its lowest level and
at the same time it will create an acute problem of unemployment in other walks
of life. Instead of taking the Colony upward and ensuring a higher standard
of living for everyone, it will result in lowering the standard of living for
everybody—not only the farmers but everybody living in this Colony—to its
lowest level. Luckily, in this Colony, as far as Fijian lands are concerned, only a
small proportion of those lands have been actually leased out and there is still a
vast proportion of land unleased, unused and if they turn their attention to the
development of those lands, it will help them, it will help their tenants and it
will help this Colony.

First, take the native reserves. There is quite a substantial acreage in native
reserves. Should it not be the first objective to make the fullest possible use of
those reserves before thinking of displacing tenants on other lands? I know
there is quite a legitimate desire on the part of Fijian owners that they would
like also to be cane farmers and share the prosperity of that industry. But if you
look to the history of that industry it had its ups and downs and in future, too,
there is no guarantee that it will not again have its ups and downs. Indians came
as farmers when the sugar industry was on the rocks, when the big plantation
owners had to get rid of plantations and get out of the industry. It was at that
moment in the history of the sugar industry that the Indians became sugar
farmers and kept that industry going and salvaged it from those difficult times.
It was because of their innate temperament for hard work and for thrift. They
know how to live on as little as they can get as well as live on the utmost limits
of luxury and comfort that they can afford.

As far as the sugar industry is concerned, the Government hopes and expects
that production will be increased and the area of sugar-cane farming will be
extended. Before the War, this Colony was producing around about 100,000 tons
of sugar. Now we are producing more than 300,000 tons and we are hoping that
in the next few years, the production of sugar may be increased to 400,000 tons
and, if possible, to half a million tons per year. Even in the sugar industry as far
as the extension is concerned, the Fijian owners have got an opportunity without
displacing the tenant to enter the industry and to try it out for themselves. I
hope, and sincerely hope, that they will not find that it was distance that had
lent enchantment to their view. Even after these lands are exhausted, there
are such extensive unused areas for which we have made a provision in the
development plan laying emphasis on forestry which is also included in this Bill
as an agricultural tenancy. Even if they do not look at sugar-cane, there are still
plenty of opportunities and plenty of scope for resorting to cash farming and
to subsistence farming. That will be a great help to themselves, to their tenants
and to this country as a whole.

As far as native leases are concerned, the most acute problem has been, and
is, renewability of the leases on their expiry. When the Native Land Trust
Ordinance was passed, people thought that the problem of renewability was
more or less solved. But unfortunately we have that problem on our hands even
now, and in a worse form. This Bill seeks to provide for two extensions, each of
not less than ten years. As far as the existing leases are concerned, it means that
on the extension of these leases, the tenant, if he is a good farmer, has got a very
good chance of getting leases renewed twice each time for a term not less than
10 years. If the Native Land Trust Board and tenant agree to the term and if the
tenant has no necessity to go before the Tribunal, there the matter stops, but
if the Native Land Trust Board and the tenant does not agree, then the tenant
has at least one remedy provided under this Bill: he can go to the independent
Tribunal and have the term of his extension fixed.

Complaint has been voiced that if a Fijian owner wishes to resume land on the
expiry of a lease for his own use, he will not be able to establish greater hardship
than the tenant before the Tribunal. I would think that in that case the Fijian
landowner is in a more fortunate position than the tenant and he should be
thankful to Providence for it. As a matter of fact, as this Bill stands, it provides
that if the Fijian landowner just wishes to limit himself within the provisions of
this Bill, that provision in itself, to my mind, will supply an excellent reason for
the tenant to establish greater hardship and that is the provision that the owner
of the land, the landlord, has got to give twelve months’ notice to the tenant
of his intention to resume the land for his own use. The tenant has got a sound
argument and case before the Tribunal. How can anyone expect an established
farmer with all his fixtures and all his commitments to be able to get away and
make provision elsewhere and get out and hand over the land without causing
acute hardship on him? If the owners of the land are wise, this Bill provides for a
better and easier reward than what they would get by using the land themselves
and that is a fair market rent which can be re-assessed every five years.

This Bill will also obviate another problem which creates acute anxiety in the
minds of holders of native leases; that is, when the lease expires and when
the tenant has made an application for renewal or extension of the lease, and
a document is issued to them which is interpreted as a tenancy-at-will. Some
years ago, it was the practice of the Board that under this tenancy-at-will, the
tenant was called upon to pay the rent monthly, knowing fully well that he has
a sugar cane farm and it would take 18 months to harvest from the time it is planted. This absurd position went on for quite a long time. Later on, when it was pointed out and when there was a lot of criticism about it, then it has been changed to annual rent payable in two installments but still it is a tenancy-at-will.

Now, these tenancies-at-will are abolished by this Bill and the tenant has not got to worry about what will happen under such a vague and flimsy nature. At least he gains the chance of having his lease renewed for two terms each not less than ten years. What's more, if a tenant wanted to sell his lease, the Native Land Trust Board insisted that the price he could charge for the lease should be the value of improvements he has effected on the land and the crops and buildings which are standing on the land. Later on that was modified and the tenant was allowed to charge whatever price he could get. The power to refuse consent for transfer was used to re-assess and raise the rent on that lease with the result that the buyer of the native lease has got to pay a high price for the land as well as a higher rent to get the consent of the Native Land Trust Board to that transfer. This Bill removes that handicap. The Native Land Trust Board, or for that matter any landlord, cannot withhold consent. So as long as the choice of the tenant is a proper choice and there is no unreasonableness, this law provides that the lessee is free to sell his land at any price he can get on the market.

As regards security of tenure of native leases, there is one loophole and that is that the provisions of this Bill do not apply to land in a native reserve. The Governor, at the same time, has been given power to apply the provisions of this Ordinance, if he thinks fit, in consultation with the Native Land Trust Board, to the tenancies falling within such a survey. What some people are afraid of is the power of the Governor to take any land and put it into reserve at any time. Fears have been expressed by some people that there is nothing to prevent the Fijian owners asking the Governor to take that particular land into native reserves and thereby defeat the protection afforded under the clause providing for greater hardship. In the first place, I believe that no Governor would resort to such a devious method of defeating a legislation which is a Government measure specially designed for the protection of the tenants and I believe that that is sufficient assurance, and there is nothing to be afraid of on that score. As regards the problem of renewability of leases, that is by and large the problem of the tenants of the native lands and of individual freeholders. The security of tenure is adequately guaranteed by the provision of clause 5 and clause 13. All the annual tenancies in this Colony upon the passing of this Bill will be completely abolished and converted into leases for a term of at least 30 years. To my mind, it is a very substantial and radical change and considerably in favour of the tenants.
Provisions in regard to compensation only apply to any improvements which may be made after the passing of this Ordinance and those improvements are divided into categories, which means that the improvements which the tenants have already made on their existing leaseholds are not covered by this provision. They still stand to lose those improvements in the event of their not getting an extension as provided under clause 13. As against that, for very many tenants, there is more or less an absolute certainty that leases will be renewed or extended, at least for two extensions and that minimum period of twenty years may be sufficient for them to exhaust the improvements which they have already made. As far as that goes, it provides some sort of remedy which is better than what is the position under the present legislation.

I consider the provision for control of share farming and provision for maximum rent very important, safeguarding the tenants against excessive rents. There is a lot of pressure on the land; demand for land is increasing, especially in sugar-cane areas. Even at present on the majority of our sugar-cane farms, two or more families live on a size of farm which is adequate for one family. That, in itself, accentuates the demand which, naturally, would tend to send the prices as well as the rents of cane lands upwards. This ceiling on rents is an adequate safeguard against an evil which will naturally result from the present state of things unless and until steps are taken to relieve the existing pressure on cane land. The freedom to the tenant to sell his lease at the price it may fetch is also a very important change. So far, his right of disposal was seriously restricted, both in the case of native land, in the case of Crown land and in the case of Colonial Sugar Refining Company, as well as the land of private owners.

It is well-known in the sugar-cane areas that the Colonial Sugar Refining Company’s tenant who wishes to sell his block has got to collect his premium under the table because under the existing law, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company has got absolute discretion to withhold consent to any transfer. Now, there will not be any necessity for such tenants to go about in a devious manner to sell their land and to collect their premium. The same will apply to the tenants of individual freehold lands. At the same time, while the numbers of leaseholds will go up because of this freedom, the price of freehold lands will come down because of the restraint provided under this Ordinance. I will not be surprised that in the near future, unless something is done to relieve the pressure, the price of leasehold will be higher than the price of freehold, which will amount to a reversionary interest which will revert to the owners after about 30 years. If the landlord is given the freedom to charge his premium for the lease, there is also a limit placed on it by providing that such premium will be taken into account in assessing the annual maximum rent under the formula provided under this Bill, to my mind, that is a very substantial provision which will operate and work in favour of the tenant and against the landlord.
Another very important change is in the field of relief for forfeiture. Under the existing law, if a tenant does not pay his rent regularly and is out of time, the landlord is free to re-enter and he is not bound to accept the rent if he offers it at that late stage. Now, under this Bill, the tenant gets three months’ grace after the rent is due and within those three months’ grace, the landlord cannot do anything. After the three months of grace has expired, the landlord can serve him with a notice to quit and after he receives the notice to quit the tenant gets one month more within which he can pay the rent and save his tenancy. I consider that is a very substantial reform.

Of course, with measures of this type, there is a wide diversion of views. The problem of law reforms is not only limited to Fiji; it is world problem. You come across that problem in almost every country in the world. All countries are trying to solve this problem in a manner suited peculiarly to its own circumstances. Some people may say that the easiest and best solution of this problem would be nationalization of land, that the State hold all the land and that all the people hold the land from the State as tenants. Some people may say that the Agricultural Holdings Act 1948 of the United Kingdom is the best solution, to convert all the tenancies into perpetual tenancies. Some people say that the best solution to the problem would be to follow the principle that the land belongs to the person who uses it. There are radical ways in which problems have been solved in various countries. As far as Fiji is concerned, we have to consider this aspect; Fiji lives on agriculture. Farmers are the foundation of Fiji’s economy. The number of landlords is also large and strong. Naturally, the landlords want to preserve their own freedom of contract. The tenant, on the other hand, naturally wants protection of law against such freedom. Fiji has got to provide a solution whereby the conflicting interests from both sides are compromised.

I support this Bill because I look upon it as a compromise measure. It goes a fair way in relieving the immediate problem and the prevailing fear amongst the tenants that their leases may not be renewed. That, in itself, is a great thing. For the landlords, though it takes away from the sale value of that land, it provides them with a fair and reasonable return. It should not be overlooked that this Bill does not compel either the landlords or the tenants to secure or grant terms and conditions more favourable than this Bill provides. There is nothing to prevent a landlord and a tenant from amicably terminating their tenancy if they so wish. This is, as the Member for Natural Resources [Mara] pointed out, a code of behaviour prescribed by law both for the landlord and the tenant. I would say that it is a minimum code of behaviour prescribed for both. Ultimately, the problem depends upon the human relationship between the landlord and the tenant. If both the landlord and the tenant curb their greed, both consider their
mutual interest as well as the common interest of the country as a whole, I do not see that there will be any serious difficulties in the administration of the Landlord and Tenant legislation in at least a few years to come.

We are not finding a permanent solution to the problem but we are, by this Bill, providing an immediate relief and remedy which may last for twenty years and within those twenty years this country, I hope, will make great advances in economic development which will result in relieving the existing pressure on the land and increasing the prosperity of the country, which will result in increasing the number of tenants of all races, including the Fijians, so that at the time when it comes to revise our thinking and to find a solution, there will be as strong and as numerous a body of Fijian tenants as there are of Indian tenants now. I believe that an increase in the number of Fijian tenants in itself will considerably help in securing a solution which will be of benefit to the tenant. I support this Bill with what I would call a feeling of ambivalence but it would be a miracle if a compromise was to completely satisfy both sides. If a compromise satisfied only one side, and left the other side dissatisfied, that compromise would be grossly unjust. But a fair compromise is sure to leave both parties partly satisfied and partly dissatisfied, and this measure falls within that category.

83: Nationalizing the Gold Mining Industry, 31 January 1968

The subject of nationalization is usually a controversial one even in countries where people are now used to various nationalized industries. Therefore, it is no wonder that in a country like ours, which is economically ruled by private monopolies and buttressed and supported all along by the Government, this motion appears to be something very radical. Before I deal with why the gold industry in Fiji should be nationalized, I will first of all reply to the questions asked by the Government speakers as to why it should not.

Now as to prospecting for gold, even the Tavua Gold Mines has a very interesting history. Tavua gold was not discovered by the Emperor Gold Mines by any manner of means. The original prospector to discover gold in Tavua was generally known as a man who lived and died in poverty. That man was Borthwick, who was financially aided and physically maintained by Mr. Pat Costello, who was then the owner of the Lautoka Hotel. When gold was discovered Mr. Costello and others who were aiding Borthwick helped to bring in Mr. Theodore who used to be an ex-Finance Minister of the State of Victoria and had many personal interests in the gold mining industry outside Fiji. As far as prospecting was concerned, Tavua gold field was discovered by
an individual, and as has happened so often in history, such pioneers live and
die without reaping any reward or the benefits that they confer either on the
country, the community or even the world. If gold industries were owned and
run by the State instead of by private corporations, this State could carry on
with the prospecting in the same way as a private corporation and perhaps
much more effectively. We have the example of India prospecting for oil fields.
Britain has had a lot of experience in oil prospecting. Many giant oil companies
belong to Britain. Even now Britain holds and owns very rich oil fields in the
Middle East. So prospecting is no more a problem for the Government than it is
for any private enterprise.

I come now to the point raised about the difficulties in acquiring the ownership
of the oil industry which nationalization entails. We are aware but once we
agree and once we make up our minds that the gold industry would and must be
nationalized, 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. As far as
Fiji is concerned, our constitution is in a fluid state, it is not yet finally settled,
we are just going on from mile to mile so that is not an obstacle which one could
call insurmountable.

Now, I come to the Minister for Communications, Works and Tourism [JN
Falvey]. One advantage he has over us is that he has settled ideas and settled
views which probably no matter what happens, he would never change, but the
reasons he put forward as to why the gold industry should not be nationalized
were the product of a confused mind. In one breath he says that if the industry
is nationalized, it will discourage prospective investors from bringing in their
capital to Fiji. In another breath, he says that if we took such a step there would
be nothing to prevent the Gold Mines from gutting the mines and from the
shareholders filling their pockets with the loot and finding themselves in a far
better position than they are. If one were faced with such an opportunity, one
would think that instead of discouraging prospective investors it would rather
encourage them. He went to the extent of saying that capital is shy. Let me say
that shyness ordinarily arises and is the offspring of morality and modesty. In
my opinion capital is a shameless, brazen immoral dame who would travel and
go to any length if there was monetary gain at the other end. Nothing is going
to discourage it.

Nationalization took place in Britain on a considerable scale but it did not
prevent the hard-headed American investors from pouring their capital into
Britain and establishing various factories and industrial concerns. Even India
which had resorted to a modest programme of nationalization after the end of
the British rule there, in spite of such nationalization today more new British
capital is coming into India than was the case during the British Raj. So it is
quite wrong to say that if a particular industry is nationalized in Fiji, capitalists abroad will not think of coming to Fiji and will simply dismiss the idea by saying ‘Oh, they have nationalized the gold industry there so we will not go and start a textiles industry (for instance) in Fiji’.

The General Member for West Viti Levu said that we on this side of the House were utterly ignorant of the gold mining industry. He then enumerated certain members on the other side of the House as people who were very well informed and possessed expert knowledge on this industry. Amongst these formidable personalities, the member also included himself. I was, therefore, hoping to learn something from him in this debate which I did not already know. But to my utter disappointment, he only reiterated the same figures that the Gold Mines have kept on feeding to the public and to this House all along for a number of years. That is how much it pays in wages, how much it pays in taxes, how much even its employees pay in taxes, and then he tried to make out the case that because it was doing all this it was essential that the Gold Mining Industry should not in any way be interfered with and that the State should continue with this partnership.

I would have been interested to hear how much of this profit they had ploughed back into the enterprise. He could have given us the figures for every year; the way in which it was utilized, and how it was profitable. We did not hear anything on that score. They just kept on repeating in parrot fashion that ‘Oh, the gold mine is here, it is giving employment to so many people; that mine has built up a town, and if the Gold Mine is taken over then all these things will somehow miraculously disappear, and this country will have to dream about a Gold Mine in the sky’. Leave the Gold Mine in the sky to those who are fond of it. We are dealing with the Gold Mine in Tavua and all the other gold mines that we hope we may be able to discover in the future.

Fear has been expressed that if the Gold Mines were nationalized the workers would be seriously affected and in his excitement [the General Member] went to the extent of saying that if such a day came they would not work for the Government-owned mine. We have had several transactions in this country before of change of ownership, and no one raised any outcry against such a change. Take for instance, Brown and Joske. When it was taken over by Carpenters, no employee of Brown and Joske complained or objected to such a takeover. They were, as a matter of fact, happier that they were coming under a large concern with better prospects. When Morris Hedstrom was taken over by the same company, there was no outcry anywhere, no voice was raised in opposition. Even the Minister for Communications, Works and Tourism did not have anything to say against that as to why the ownership should be changed. Now, if nationalization 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 replaced by the largest and the strongest corporation in the country, namely, the Government.

If the employees of Brown and Joske or Morris Hedstrom had no objections to being taken over by Carpenters, I see very little reason why there should be fear if the Emperor Gold Mines is taken over by the State of Fiji. The workers will be in a stronger position than now because it is the duty and will always remain the duty of the 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, they will be securer in their employment than at present. Furthermore, it will confer upon them a higher social status as government employees. I do not see any reason why the staff or the working force should have any anxiety if the Gold Mines instead of being owned and run by one company, would be owned and run by the Government.

The Minister of Finance mentioned nationalization not having proved very satisfactory even in a country like the United Kingdom. Now the British people are known all the word over as a nation of shopkeepers. Economically they have stronger brains than probably anybody else in the world. They have enjoyed this privilege for more than a century. But in spite of a change of governments, both Labour and Tory, some of the industries which were nationalized have remained and continued to run as nationalized industries, with the exception of one, namely, the Steel Industry. This has become more or less a political football in British politics. Apart from that, because the owners in the Steel Industry are politically more powerful, they have more political influence and more power, as one of the speakers from my side of the House pointed out, in the House of Lords. I would go further and say even in the House of Commons. So to say that nationalization has not proved to be satisfactory in Britain is merely to express one’s personal opinion. I am quite sure that there will be millions of Englishmen who would maintain that it has proved successful. That is again a matter of personal opinion and not a proven fact.

Turning to the subject of why we should nationalize the gold industry in Fiji, first and foremost, we must not forget that gold belongs to the State. It is owned by the State whether in Tavua or anywhere else in Fiji; it is the property of the Crown and what is the property of the Crown today when Fiji becomes a free and democratic nation will become the property of the nation—the people of the country. The question is, what would be in the best interest of this country: to extract gold and use it for the benefit of the Government and people of this
country or should we just step aside and allow what rightly belongs to the people to be taken over by private concerns who would profit from it at the cost of the nation and at the cost of the taxpayers?

Another factor which has not been so far mentioned in this House is the capital gain that the shareholders have made in respect of the Tavua Gold Mines (besides all this profit which the Company has made over a number of years, the indirect tax free gain which the shareholders make on the original value of their shares). According to the editorial of the Fiji Times headed ‘An Unfortunate Proposition’ in the issue dated Saturday, December 7th, 1968, which was quoted and read out at length, ‘Both Government and Company are gambling that the gold price will rise. When a report that gold would go free again swept across the world four months ago, Emperor shares rose on the Sydney share market from some 30c to 4 dollars.’ (So even when this speculative rise took place it was three times its original value and it suddenly soared to forty times.) ‘They went back to $1.75’, (which means that even then it was 17 and a half times worth its original value) ‘and have risen again to $2.30’ which means at present the value of these shares is 23 times its original value. So for anyone to say that the poor shareholders will suffer a great deal if the enterprise is taken over by the State since they have done so much for us and they will get so little in return is all again, as I have said, without any foundation.

Gold is a commodity which is rightly or wrongly valued by mankind all the world over and highly prized. It is one asset that is most important in international trade, both in times of peace and in times of war. I, for one, would not [be surprised] if the Government of the United States of America or of the United Kingdom or President de Gaulle looked with alarm if there is some depletion in their gold reserves. Not only the monetary system but the country’s strength, both in times of peace and in times of war, depends upon its gold reserve and that is why we find such a strange spectacle that the United States buys up and gathers as much gold as it can and then puts it under the sea and as some wisecracks remark ‘What is the use of gold? It is taken out of the earth on one hand and it is sunk into the water on the other hand.’ It remains the most coveted commodity internationally. This is common sense. Nature has bestowed upon us an asset which mankind values so much and looks upon as indispensable both for its own maintenance and for its own survival in political as well as economic vicissitudes.

Tavua gold field is known to have a rich deposit and is considered amongst the richest deposits in the world. What phosphate is to Nauru, gold is to Fiji. Nauru, even before it became independent, decided that it would nationalize the phosphate industry and she has already started negotiations with the British Phosphate Commission to take over the phosphate industry, with the result that in the very first year of its independence, the Nauruans found themselves a
people who can financially help their neighbours living in the South Pacific, for instance, us. If the gold industry is nationalized we will be able to solve many problems. We are building a very imposing edifice just across the road and for the time being, we call it the Capital Development Bank [later the Fiji Development Bank]. I hope a day will come in the not too distant future when that Bank will become the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

Gold is universally in demand at all times and in all places while manganese is not. Now the advantage by nationalizing gold will be to spread out the benefits resulting from its production and use. Just at present, it only benefits to a limited extent those who are engaged in the mining of gold. As has been pointed out by some of the honourable members opposite, it helps about 5,000 people in Vatukoula. If it were nationalized it will help them more, it will better their conditions in many respects and the profits and benefits derived from gold through the State will benefit the entire population.

If we make good profits, it helps both in our economic development projects as well as in easing the incidence of taxation on the taxpayers. It strengthens the whole nation and it gives the nation a status and a place in the international world. We at present have three products mainly to offer to the outside world: one is sugar, another is copra and third is gold. As far as sugar and copra are concerned we have often met with opposition that if we produce more there is no demand, no market for it, and we had to, only recently, sell our sugar as a gift—free gift to certain countries. The same thing happens with copra. There is always a limit on the market, anything beyond that and marketing becomes a problem. And even within the limits, there is always the danger of a slump in prices. Gold is the only commodity in the world for which demand never fluctuates. No country has complained that there is nobody to buy its gold; and the price remains steady. As time goes on, gold remaining in the bowels of the earth gets less and less with the result that sooner or later gold can be even more precious and a more coveted metal in the world than it is even at present. Such a valuable asset can help the nation a lot because instead of leaving it in private hands to be sent to Australia and then for the Australian Government to decide as to how that gold reserve will be used once it is in Australia, while the Government of Fiji has not got even an once of gold on which it can in any way bargain with any other country. Nationalization of gold does not necessarily mean that the Government should sell either all its gold as soon as it is extracted, nor does it mean that it should store all its gold in reserve for the future but it certainly enables the Government to sell gold to whom it suits best considering the interests of the country and the government at the time or at the price or on a deal which the Government considers will be most profitable and favourable to the country.
Gold is an asset in the hands of the Government, an internationally coveted asset, which it can use when and if it finds it necessary. We must not forget that there is a vast difference between sugar, copra and gold, not only in marketing but in the very fact that we can replant cane and keep on producing sugar. We can replant our coconut plantations and go on producing copra, but gold is a limited and wasting asset. Whatever gold you take out from the ground and ship out from the country is a dead loss. Gold does not grow in the mines; it cannot be replaced, and this is the asset which belongs to the nation, not only the people who are alive today but it is a national asset that also belongs to the coming generations. The more we take out and ship out of the country the less there is left. In the hands of the Government you can regulate, you can decide how much should be used and shipped out, how much should be kept in reserve so that the future generations are not totally deprived of the benefits.

Another important reason why gold should be made a national industry is that, as I have already pointed out, gold is a sacred trust in our hands for the people of Fiji and for those generations who will succeed us. Some difficulties have been pointed out by some of the members opposite. One of the members read out from a book and said that one drawback of nationalization is lack of initiative. Lack of initiative is an established and outstanding characteristic of civil services right throughout the world. As a matter of fact, individual initiative is generally discouraged. A civil servant is trained to look for precedents, and rules and the orders, that he may be given from his superior officers for all his actions; any initiative which makes him depart from instructions, rules or practice is frowned upon.

I can understand the diffidence and the hesitance of the present Government because it is in fact a ‘Civil Service Government’ consisting of existing civil servants or civil servants who resigned and left the civil service after they were elected to this House and took their places on the Government benches and the fortunate ones inside Government ministries. But a government would be a poor government if it lacks initiative. Ability to take initiative, to have foresight and not to provide ways not only to meet existing challenges but to provide ways and means for future challenges as well, which means it is indispensable for any strong government to have both foresight and initiative and even if the present Government feels diffident, I am sure and I hope that the Government of Fiji will not all the time consist of civil servants and will be composed to people who have foresight and who have initiative. If the present Government feels that nationalization is beyond their capacity to undertake and handle it, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with nationalization. It only provides an argument for the change of government.
A Vision for Change Speeches and Writings of AD Patel, 1929-1969

84: Agriculture Landlord & Tenant Ordinance, 30 January 1969

In the modern world, feudal landlordism is a matter of the past and, wherever the order survives, it is receiving strong and violent attacks. We, in this country, are moving towards democratic freedom and, in a democratic state, common good prevails over personal greed, be it the greed of the owners of land or the owners of capital, or the owners of personal labour; all have got to make their personal interests subordinate to that of the interest of the people as a whole and of the welfare of the country as a whole. Ours is a predominantly agricultural country. Therefore, our prosperity largely depends upon agricultural production and good management of agricultural land. So the prevailing and overriding demand on agricultural land is that the production should be maintained if not increased further. Also, agriculture should be carried on in a manner which will not only preserve the fertility of the soil, but will also further build it up and enhance it. And, for that, proper land usage is absolutely important. If a man happens to be the owner of land either by birth or by personal acquisition, in a modern State, it is his duty to see that the land is used in such a way that the production is maintained, if not enhanced and so also the fertility.

I, myself, have got a small bit of land in this Colony, but if I insisted on working that land myself, it will only lead to personal disaster economically and to the loss and inconvenience, not only of the tenants but the general prosperity of the country as a whole. I tried out an experiment on a very small scale. When the Labour Government in England was keen on the ground nut scheme in East Africa, I thought that I might also try it out on a small piece of my freehold land in Fiji. The area was very small, but instead of making any profit out of it, the loss came to £400. And, if I had been foolhardy enough to bring all the land under ground nuts, probably I would have sustained such a loss that it would have taken several years to recover from it. So, it does not necessarily mean that if a man owns land, he is fit to use and work on that land to the best advantage of himself and others.

In the modern world, serious strictures have been placed on the absolute rights of landowners practically everywhere right throughout the democratic world. Even the United Kingdom, whose example we very often follow in this country, is not exempt from it. Agricultural land in England is in the hands of a few fortunate owners. And, land is worked in the United Kingdom as elsewhere, very often by tenant farmers. But the law of the land has made it obligatory on the person who is working the land whether he is the owner himself or the tenant, that he can remain in occupation and utilize the land so long as he carries out the norms of good husbandry. And, if he fails in that duty, the County Agricultural Board gives him notice; first to set the matters right and
bring the production up to the norm and, if he fails to do it, then he is served with a notice to vacate the land, even if he is the free hold owner of the land. The Board would then give it to a deserving farmer who would carry out the obligations of meeting the required target of production. And security of tenure in the United Kingdom is secured in a manner which is more drastic than ours. Though on the face of it, it appears to be an annual tenancy it provides security of tenure to the tenants so long as they work properly. If the tenant is not working the land properly, he can be ejected not only at the instance of the owner but of the State.

Sir Malcolm Trustram Eve in his Report\(^4\) from which the appointment of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Committee took place, and which ultimately resulted in this legislation, based his recommendations on the prevailing practice in Great Britain. We, in many ways, are more fortunate than owners of land in many other parts of the Commonwealth, including India. Under the present law, if the owner of the land finds it difficult to get the land back for his own use, he has also got countervailing advantages conferred upon him by the Ordinance. Before, native leases of agricultural land were granted for a term of 30 years—that was the normal term—and rent was reassessed in certain leases after a long interval and, in some leases there was no provision for reassessment of rent at all. Now, the landowners are in a fortunate position. Whether such a covenant in the existing lease is there or not, under the existing law, every five years, if he so wishes, he can go before the Tribunal and have the rent revised. It also confers the same advantage and benefit on the tenant. If things have changed so adversely that the existing rent becomes too high and onerous, he can also go before the Tribunal and have the rent revised. So this is one advantage which the owners as well as the tenants enjoy under the existing law which they did not enjoy before.

Another advantage is that the landlord has the advantage of ensuring that the fertility and the condition and the productivity of the land will be preserved and maintained by the tenant properly from year to year. And, if at any time he makes a serious lapse, he is liable to the termination of the tenancy and the land reverts to the owner. In all the enlightened countries, security of tenure is considered vital to the interests not only of the tenant, but also of the landlord and the country in general. If a tenant feels secure on the land he will put his heart and soul into his work and he will have an incentive to improve the land and to increase the production of the land to the mutual benefit both of the landlord and the tenant. If the fertility goes up, if the production goes up, the value of the land goes up and, after five years, the landlord can take advantage under the law and have his rent revised especially if the price of the produce soars high. There are such circumstances where the landlord can, with advantage, share in the

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prosperity of the tenant which is due to the circumstances which were more or less in the nature of a windfall; which he could not have done under the existing leases in the absence of that Ordinance.

A tenant has also got this advantage, that with the security of tenure, and with the assurance that whatever improvements he effects on the land, he will have the opportunity either to exhaust them or, at the end of the term when he has to leave the land, [receive] adequate compensation for such improvements effected by him [which] has remained unexhausted. In India the owner of the land is not in such a happy position. For instance, if I had land in India, not only would I not be able to take only a reasonably low or fair rent on the land that I have got there, but my land will be given to the tenant. The price will be fixed by the Government and installments for the payment of the price will also be fixed by the Government so that it does not become too onerous on the tenant to pay that price. Even in the case of owners of land who are present there, considerable strictures are placed on their rights of ownership. In very many cases they are compelled to sell their land to the tenants and the prices are fixed by the Government. There is a well known slogan in India now that the land belongs to its tiller.

We are lucky that we [do not] have any such radical reforms in this country. If we take a moderate and reasonable attitude and give little time which might satisfy the other side, it would be far better and far more sensible than what we may be compelled and we may feel is too much if it comes too late. I would ask and appeal to the taukei members in this House to take the excellent advice given by the Attorney-General to explain the law as it exists to people. I am quite sure that if that is done half of the misunderstanding and half of the fears will completely disappear. The other half of the fears arise not from the Ordinance or from the law but from the operations of the Native Land Trust Board and the owners of the land themselves, and the relationship between the two. Under the existing law, an individual owner has got to follow the machinery of the law; give the notice at the due time; put in his application whenever he wants to. In the case of other Fijian lands, it is not the owners who directly are entitled to do it but they have got to depend upon the machinery of the Native Land Trust Board as their trustees and agents to carry these requirements out for them. So the other half of the fears are due to the present position that though the taukei are the owners of the land their rights of ownership under this Ordinance have to be exercised through the agency of the Native Land Trust Board. If that relationship and if the working and efficiency of the Native Land Trust Board is improved many of the fears resulting from the second half can also disappear.

We have tried this Ordinance out over a short period now but during that short period we have discovered certain difficulties, certain undesirable side-effects which we had not anticipated before and certain new problems which have
arisen out of the working of this Ordinance. These are all matters which can be conveniently gone into by the committee; it can make its recommendations after thoroughly going into all the matters and giving them full, deliberate consideration. I have no doubt that the work of such a committee would result to the benefit of the country, of the owners of the land, and of the tenants. And, considering the amount and nature of work this committee will have to do, I consider that it would be unreasonable to set a date and compel the committee to make its report on that particular date or before that date. I personally consider that we should not tie down the hands of the committee so much. It would serve our purpose and it would serve the urgency that this matter requires, if the motion is amended by deleting the words ‘before the 31st March, 1969’ appearing in the penultimate line of the motion, and substituting the words ‘as soon as practicable.’ The motion then reads ‘That this House notes the resolution passed by Provincial Councils and the Great Council of Chiefs in relation to the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Ordinance and in particular to section 13 concerning hardship, and having regard to difficulties which have become apparent in the first year of its operation, both for landlords and tenants, requests that the Governor be invited to appoint a Working Committee to study the Ordinance, including the Regulations made thereunder, and its operation, and to make recommendations including a draft amendment Bill as soon as practicable, to render the Ordinance more workable and more equitable.’

85: Letter from Justin Lewis QC to AD Patel, 15 September 1969

Dear AD

I have been asked by all the members of the Working Committee on Landlord and Tenant matters to write to you and wish you a speedy recovery. I do hope you will soon recover.

In 1964 I myself had a sudden collapse due to overwork and I have the deepest sympathy with anyone who has suffered or is suffering in this way. I do suggest you take as long a rest as is possible.

I am very sorry to trouble you about the following matter. The next meeting of the above Committee is to be held at Lautoka on October 1st, 2nd and 3rd, 1969. These are to be discussion meetings.

I do not propose to hold such meetings in your absence nor in the absence of any member unless he absents himself voluntarily.

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5 The Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act was passed into law in 1976.
I would be grateful if you would inform me by sending a message through your wife or any other convenient means whether or not you will be able to attend on the above dates because if not, they will have to be adjourned.

Is it possible for you to give me any idea when you will be fit and well to attend these meetings?

We miss you very much and we look forward to your return.

Very best wishes

Yours sincerely

Justin Lewis
Attorney General