

4. The 1965 Constitutional Conference

The stand-off between Sir Derek Jakeway and A. D. Patel took place during a familiarisation visit to Fiji by parliamentary undersecretary of state, Eirene White, in what was now a Labour government in Britain. Her task was to report back on issues that might be raised at the forthcoming constitutional conference. She heard a wide range of opinion: from Muslims about separate representation, from Fijians about their special interests — including political leadership of the country — from the ever mercurial Apisai Tora about deporting Indo-Fijians as Ceylon and Burma had done, from the Council of Chiefs reiterating the terms of the Wakaya Letter, from Indian leaders about common roll and the need to promote political integration, from journalist Alipate Sikivou expressing the Fijian nationalist line that the Indians could always go back to India, the Chinese to China and the Rotumans and other islanders to their respective islands but the Fijians, the indigenous people, had Fiji as their only home. Sikivou was not alone in holding such extreme views. Many others were of the view that, as Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu George Cakobau had said in 1961, at independence, Fiji should be returned to the Fijians. As Uraia Koroi put it at a meeting of the Fijian Association in January 1965, chaired by Ratu Mara, 'Fijians were determined to achieve this claim of right [returning Fiji to Fijians] at the cost of their lives. Bloodshed would mean nothing if their demands were not acceptable to other races in the Colony.'¹

A month before White's tour, in March, Trafford Smith had visited Fiji to talk specifically to the leaders of the three communities about their attitude and possible policy stance at the London conference.² Ratu Mara, whom Smith found to be 'thoughtful and reserved, much less open and gay', with an 'almost donnish outlook', reiterated the complete Fijian opposition to common roll, expressed optimism on the resolution of the land-lease situation while conveying Fijian fears of being dispossessed of their ownership rights, and thought the Fijian demand for paramountcy could be accommodated perhaps by giving Fijians an extra seat. He was 'not particularly impressed by Mr Falvey's idea of a trial balloon of three Common Roll seats at the next election'. Patel, whom Smith found a 'charming man to meet, not the "bogey-man" the *Fiji Times* makes him out to be', was prone to looking 'for sinister motives in British actions which are in fact either completely innocent or unthinking', such as Jakeway's speech in Australia, which had caused a furore in Fiji. Patel told Smith of the inequities of the colonial administration, the official patronage of anti-Federation Indo-Fijians and the 'islands of autocracy' in the public sector immune from parliamentary scrutiny. For him, the main controversial issues at the conference would be the method of election and the composition of the Executive. 'Would you be prepared to move away from common roll to some kind of compromise

if necessary,' Smith asked Patel at a private function. Patel answered: 'I would try to find a form of common roll having safeguards which would make it acceptable to the Fijians.' John Falvey, reputed to be 'the best brain among the Europeans', though not making much of an impression on Smith, explained the basis of Fijian–European political cooperation against the Indo-Fijians, emphasised the depth of the Fijian attachment to the principle of paramountcy, offered to give up a European seat to accommodate it and raised the possibility of three common-roll seats contested by a member of each of the three main groups.

Throughout the early 1960s, the issue of land ownership and Fijian fears of dispossession lay close to the heart of the problem in Fiji — fears accentuated by a rapid increase in the Indo-Fijian population and increasing demand for a more secure land-tenure system. If they were not in political control, Fijians feared — or at least they said they feared — Indo-Fijians would enact legislation to take their land away. Land was not only an economic and social asset, it was the source of great power and Fijians were acutely conscious of it, using it as a leverage to extract concessions in the political arena. For Indo-Fijian politicians, however, land ownership itself was not an issue; everyone respected the ownership rights of the Fijians. At issue were the terms and conditions under which Fijian land should be leased to mostly non-Fijian tenants. Fortunately, the lease issue was addressed in the report of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Committee, which was accepted by the CO, with slight modification.³ New leases would be granted for a minimum of 10 years and would be inheritable. This, Trafford Smith pointed out to Jakeway, was an improvement on the English practice itself. Under the new legislation, tenants would be paid compensation for improvements they had made if the lease was not renewed, and there would be a Lands Tribunal to review rents and, perhaps more importantly, to decide on the 'relative' hardship if a lease was renewed or not renewed. As this tended to favour the tenants, the new provision came over time to be resented by many Fijians. At the time, however, the passage of the legislation caused much relief to officials in London and in Suva. In Fiji, Indo-Fijian leaders — A. D. Patel in particular — were blamed by some for 'selling out' the interests of the tenants, without appreciating the constraints of the times, the tenacity of the Fijian opposition or the subtlety of legislation that actually secured for tenants rights and privileges that no earlier legislation had done. The CO hoped privately that the resolution of the land issue might persuade the Indo-Fijian leaders to be more accommodating of the Fijian position in future negotiations.

Early in 1965, the governor initiated among members of the Legislative Council a dialogue about issues likely to be raised at the London conference. He aimed to achieve a measure of consensus, which, he hoped, would augur well for the coming talks. The discussion produced consensus on many issues: complete and immediate independence would not be the immediate aim of the conference, and links with the British Crown would be maintained. Predictably, however, the

talks faltered on the perennially thorny issue of the method of election. Patel pressed his case for common roll, while the Fijians and Europeans opposed it. When distorted versions of the confidential talks began to appear in the colony's major local daily,⁴ accusing Patel and his fellow members of the Legislative Council of unstatesmanlike behaviour, Patel withdrew from the talks — not only because the leaks had 'created an atmosphere of mistrust and misunderstanding among the people of Fiji', but because 'nearly all the remaining subjects for discussion are controversial and on which it is very unlikely any agreement would be reached in Fiji'.⁵ The government's own intelligence unit admitted that the *Fiji Times* often published distorted and damaging versions of Patel's speeches. The breakdown had several unfortunate consequences. It deepened the rift already growing between Patel and Jakeway. It poisoned political relations between the principal protagonists and it forged ever closer relations between Fijian and European leaders, which could well have been the *Fiji Times'* intention. It probably also hardened Patel's stand against any compromise. As Jakeway informed London, the possibility of 'reaching unanimous agreement in London receded over the horizon' at the moment the Suva talks ceased.⁶ Unfortunately, the governor himself had a hand in creating the impasse through his counterproductive confrontation with Patel and with his overtly pro-Fijian stance.

The London conference opened at Marlborough House on 26 July 1965. The positions of the three groups were clear.⁷ The Fijian group wanted the recognition of the principle of Fijian paramountcy in the form of two additional Fijian seats — nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs — and the complete rejection of common roll, though the CO thought Fijian leaders were 'prepared to listen to proposals from the British side and to give them a fair hearing' because their 'confidence in British integrity is complete'. The Indo-Fijians wanted common roll and self-government with continuing links with the United Kingdom. The European view was identical to that of the Fijians. The UK government opted to play a disengaged role in the deliberations. The secretary of state assured the Fiji delegation 'that you will encounter no disposition on the part of the British Government to press particular solutions upon you'.⁸ Ratu Mara, in his opening remarks, paid warm tribute to Britain, emphasising loyalty, trust and gratitude, saying that independence was not his goal, that he saw no reason to sever links with the Crown 'forged by our forefathers in 1874'.⁹ He spoke warmly of his and his people's 'trust and abiding loyalty in the British Crown and in British institutions'. Falvey, speaking for the European but also 'with' the Fijian delegation, echoed Mara's sentiments: continuing links with the Crown, satisfaction with the status quo, gratitude for all that Britain had done for Fiji. 'There are in fact many people of all races in Fiji who are well content with our present and relatively new constitution,' he said, 'and you will find few in our country who are seriously critical of the Government and the

administration of our country since 1874 when sovereignty was ceded to Her late Majesty, Queen Victoria.' These were unsurprising sentiments from one opposed to any reduction in European over-representation in the colonial legislature.

A. D. Patel predictably took a completely different line to Mara and Falvey. He hoped that the conference would produce a new constitution that would lead Fiji to 'complete independence in the not too distant future'. He spoke about the enduring importance of political freedom of the type developed democracies enjoyed. 'Political liberty, equality and fraternity rank foremost among the good things of life and mankind all over the world cherishes and holds these ideals close to its heart. The people of Fiji are no exception.' He hoped the conference would mark the 'beginning of the end of a form of government which stands universally condemned in the modern world'. He too had 'faith and trust in the British people and the UK Government' to work out a just and fair solution for Fiji, but warned that '[w]e have all got to guard ourselves against avoiding right decisions because they are unpleasant or run counter to our ingrained habits of preconditioned thought, or wrong decisions because they appear advantageous in the short run'.

Patel's anti-colonial sentiments would have been unexceptionable in most circumstances. Many in the United Kingdom felt that the days of colonial rule were numbered; and the words Patel spoke were a regular part of the vocabulary of many a nationalist leader in the Third World. But Fiji was Fiji. The British colonial system there was not reviled universally, but was embraced warmly by the indigenous population and supported opportunistically by the Europeans. It had preserved the Fijian way of life and secured their fundamental interests, such as ownership of the land. In that context, Patel's condemnation of colonialism, at the high table of the Empire, in the presence of people who were running it or wanted its essence retained or were full of praise for what it had accomplished, must have struck a jarring note. The UK delegation was already favourably disposed to the Fijian position, with the Fijian leaders making a considerable play of the Fijian contribution to World War II and the poor contribution of the Indo-Fijian community to that conflict.¹⁰ Patel's denunciation must have disappointed and embarrassed them, to the detriment of the cause he was pursuing. Whether a more tactful approach would have yielded a different result — and encouraged the CO to seek a compromise solution acceptable to all sides — is a matter best left to speculation.¹¹ For their part, senior CO officials predictably sought to put the 'failure' of the conference to provide a broadly acceptable consensus outcome squarely on the shoulders of Patel and his colleagues.

The conference nevertheless produced several major steps towards greater internal self-government.¹² For the first time, the constitution provided for a

majority-elected Legislative Council and the end of the nomination of unofficial members. The only nominated members in the legislature were to be the attorney-general, the financial secretary and the colonial secretary. Chinese, Rotumans and other Pacific Islanders were to be enfranchised for the first time — the Chinese placed on the European roll and the latter two on the Fijian. A new Public Service Commission and a Police Service Commission were to be created, which the governor would be required to consult, though the most senior officers — the attorney-general, financial secretary, colonial secretary and commissioner of police — would continue to be appointed by London. The constitution also for the first time would contain a bill of rights, though it did not provide protection against discrimination in civil service appointments — not surprising in view of the concern about racial imbalance there.

It was the composition of the Legislative Council and the method of election that proved, unsurprisingly, to be the most contentious issues at the conference. The council was to be expanded to 36: 14 Fijians, 12 Indo-Fijians and 10 Europeans. With the two additional members, nominated by the Council of Chiefs but who would be full members of the Legislative Council, the principle of Fijian paramountcy, which had so long divided opinion in London and in Suva, was at last recognised. The European number would be reduced by two, but given their tiny size, they would still be over-represented. London was disposed to reducing their numbers even further to appease Indo-Fijian feelings, but Fijians would not countenance further reduction: after all, Europeans were their willing and eager ally against the Indo-Fijians. The Indo-Fijians — the majority population of the colony — were to be reduced to a minority in the legislature.

The conference produced an outcome that pleased — and relieved — officials: a Fijian majority (assured because of traditional European support) and thus a Fijian chief minister. Second, the Tanganyika Model, which Maddocks had advocated so strenuously, was also introduced. Of the 12 Fijian and Indo-Fijian members, nine would be elected on separate racial rolls, now called communal rolls (seven general electors).¹³ The remaining members — three general electors, Fijians and Indo-Fijians — were to be elected on a cross-voting roll where the ethnicity of the candidates would be stipulated, but they would be voted for by everyone eligible to vote, irrespective of ethnicity. There was another feature of the constitution that further isolated the Indo-Fijians from the rest of the community. For the first time, the Chinese were enfranchised, and they were placed on the general roll while Rotumans and other Pacific Islanders were placed on the Fijian roll. This amalgamation in effect turned the Fijian and European rolls into non-racial common rolls, while the Indo-Fijians remained communally separated.

The Federation Party protested against the final report of the conference. The two extra Fijian seats — through the Council of Chiefs — had upset the principle

of parity between the two communities. The Tanganyika Model was unacceptable to them and inappropriate for Fiji because of its electoral provisions. 'It would not make way for, but obstruct, the introduction or the implementation of common roll in the future,' said Patel.

It would magnify communal differences and inevitably harden the attitude of all races (including the majority race) along communal lines. Under this system, political parties will not be able to obtain the candidature of a true representative of any particular race, let alone obtain a majority of seats in the legislature to form a workable government.¹⁴

The fear of Indo-Fijian domination, the party argued, was more psychological than real, because the geographical distribution of the population was uneven. It continued in a similar vein, repeating all the well-known arguments. By then, however, the party was talking to itself. When the Federation Party realised that the Fijians and Europeans would not budge on common roll, that the United Kingdom would not intervene to resolve the impasse, Andrew Deoki (non-Federation member of the Indo-Fijian delegation) proposed a compromise towards the end of the conference, which he had presented earlier in Fiji. His proposal was to introduce three additional common-roll seats to the existing system of communal representation. By then, however, the Fijians had the upper hand and London had the result it desired, so the proposal was not considered because it had come 'too late'. 'Too late for what,' Patel asked, but no one was listening.

The Federation Party threatened a boycott of the final session of the conference, but did not do so 'out of respect for the Secretary of State', it said. The party accepted the outcome on protest, and put it in writing the next day to Secretary of State, Anthony Greenwood, who had been 'preoccupied with other problems during the last few days', (specifically, Aden). Patel wrote:

It is our intention to oppose these proposals by peaceful and constitutional means. The implementation of these proposals, in our view, would create a grave racial disharmony leading to undesirable results. In this process an irreparable harm would be done to the country as a whole and we fear that goodwill, harmony and understanding which have existed among all the races in Fiji over the last 90 years would disappear forever. The responsibility for any course of events arising out of the implementation of these proposals would rest, in our view, on Her Majesty's Government.¹⁵

Greenwood admitted that the constitution was not perfect but thought sufficient progress had been made towards multiracialism in the cross-voting proposals and urged everyone 'to strive to make it work with the maximum efficiency for

the benefit of all the people of your country', to consolidate the growth and achievement of racial harmony. An elated Ratu Mara cabled Fiji: '*Ni yalovinaka ni kakua ni taqaya, na veika kece koni taqayataka e seqa ni yaco, sa nomuni na lagilagi* [Do not be concerned. All that you were concerned about did not materialise. The victory is yours].'¹⁶ Large victory celebrations awaited the Fijian delegation in Fiji.

Trafford Smith offered his own assessment of the conference and how it transpired as it did.¹⁷ He reported to Jakeway that Mrs White had held private talks with Mara and Falvey during the conference to see if giving Indo-Fijians an extra seat would 'be worth the candle'. The proposal was rejected because 'a late concession of this sort might have shown that [Her Majesty's Government] — and the Fijians and Europeans, if they acquiesced — were trying to make some move towards placating the Indo-Fijians'. There was no political advantage for any of the three parties in making this concession anyway. Smith thought Patel 'got off on the wrong foot during the formal opening session by talking about independence as the ultimate objective and holding up the colonial state of Fiji to condemnation'. He also considered the Federation group singularly inept and unprepared for the conference. Had 'Patel and his henchmen'¹⁸ tabled the compromise proposal for limited common roll at the beginning of the conference, the British government would have had to take a serious note of it and impress on the Fijians and the Europeans the need to consider it. Rarely 'has a case been so mishandled by three competent lawyers'.

Smith's tone needs to be tempered by several considerations. The UK delegation seems to have been more concerned to appease the Fijians than to arrive at a solution broadly acceptable to all parties. White held private talks with Mara and Falvey, but made no such attempts with the Indo-Fijian delegation, to impress upon them to meet the others half way. In this, she was disregarding the advice of the CO, which thought it 'necessary to have separate discussions with the delegates from each community to find out to what extent they are prepared to compromise on the issue of common roll'.¹⁹ Accusing the Indo-Fijian delegation of not offering the compromise common-roll proposal on the first day of the conference was like asking a negotiator to put on the table their basic minimum demands at the outset of the bargaining process. For a different reason, the CO itself recommended that it was 'desirable to avoid allowing this issue [common roll] to be raised in full conference at an early stage as to do so might well lead to the striking of attitudes and deadlock'. Smith was accusing the Federation Party of taking the course of action his own office recommended! For him to argue later that the Indo-Fijian delegation should have declared hand earlier seems self-serving.

The Federation Party had hoped to convince the conference of the merits of its common-roll proposal for building a new, non-racial Fiji, and expected Britain

to show some sympathy for its position. Only when that approach failed was it prudent, at the last minute, to present their minimum demand. The tactic was unexceptionable. London was, however, more attuned to the demands of the Fijians, and some members of the European delegation felt close enough socially to the officials in London to make, as Smith reported, racist, anti-Indian comments in their presence. 'We all hate Indians,' Richard Kearsely was heard to say, while Falvey called Patel a 'rat', to the discomfort and embarrassment of some CO officials.²⁰ Privately, senior officials in the CO, such as A. J. Fairclough, assistant secretary and head of the Pacific and Indian Ocean Department, agreed that the outcome of the 1965 constitutional conference was 'unduly pro-Fijian' — though he doubted the prospects of a truly democratic set-up in Fiji.²¹ Independent experts — the eminent Commonwealth constitutional lawyer Professor Stanley de Smith among them — agreed, regretting that the Federation Party's 'relatively moderate compromise proposal [for limited introduction of common roll] received such short shrift'.²² The 'movement must necessarily be towards a common electoral roll,' he wrote, 'with or without racial reservation of seats. The only real question is one of timing.'

Were the Fijians going to be as intransigent on common roll, as officials in London thought? A CO brief summed up Jakeway's talks with three pre-eminent Fijian leaders, Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and Ratu Edward Cakobau: the governor reported that 'some gentle selling of the attractions of a limited common roll element in the next constitutional stage has been done with all three and does not appear to have fallen on entirely unreceptive ground'. It was true that the Council of Chiefs had come out in favour of a communal roll but there was no specific discussion on the electoral system. Jakeway suggested that 'the position is that they are prepared to listen to proposals from the British side and to give them a fair hearing'.²³ None came. The governor also informed London that Patel would pursue common roll, but 'if he sees no alternative, he will probably accept a limited number of common roll seats in a Legislative Council which is otherwise elected on communal roll'.

The United Kingdom went into the conference, however, with its mind already made up to recommend the adoption of three cross-voting seats on the basis of parity. The CO recommended that Fijians and Indo-Fijians have parity (12 seats each), but Fijians got two more during the conference. Once back in Fiji and stunned by the vehemence of the Indo-Fijian reaction, Jakeway broached with Mara and Falvey the possibility of Fijians reverting to the status quo, but by then it was too late, and would 'lead to too many internal difficulties for the Fijians themselves'. Nonetheless, the CO 'thumped home' to Mara and Falvey that 'it is essential for the future happiness and good government of Fiji that a vigorous attempt should be made to make a multi-racial appeal to the electorate not only in the cross-voting seats but also more generally'. Would the subsequent

history of Fiji have unfolded differently had this been done in London before the final document was signed? It is difficult to tell now, but Professor J. W. Davidson's observation on the 1965 conference is worth noting. 'There is reason to believe,' he wrote from close personal observation of Fiji, 'that the Fijians could have been persuaded to abandon their demand for greater representation in the legislature than that of the Indians and to accept a simple common roll procedure for the election of the nine members to be returned by voters of all communities.'²⁴ Certainly, a limited introduction of common roll was a distinct possibility, but the CO was trapped by past habits of thought, publicly sympathetic to Fijian concerns and understandings of their place in the larger scheme of things in Fiji and generally unwilling to force a broadly acceptable solution for fear of jeopardising the peace. When it came to the crunch, the Indo-Fijians' demands, the CO reasoned, could be dismissed without much damage.

In September 1966, Fiji held a general election under the new constitution. It was an important contest fought for the first time between two political parties, the Federation and the Alliance. The latter was launched officially on 12 March 1966, although its component parts — the Fijian Association and the Indo-Fijian National Congress, for example — had existed before then. The Fijian Association was the foundation of the Alliance. Most Europeans and a sprinkling of Indo-Fijians also joined the party. The Alliance saw itself as a multiracial political party, unlike the Federation, which while ideologically non-racial, had its base in the Indo-Fijian community and was unable to attract many Fijian or European members. Something like the Alliance was bound to enter Fiji's political arena, but it was helped considerably by encouragement from Jakeway, who helped organise contacts.²⁵ As he told a sitting of the Legislative Council in 1966:

The way is wide open for leaders of imagination, who have the interests of *all* the people of Fiji truly at heart, to build political alliances with the object of contesting elections on a common cross-racial platform and, if they win a majority of seats, forming a broad-based administration which will be effectively self-governing. I shall be only too happy to cooperate with such an administration and give it maximum freedom of action.²⁶

Patel clearly was not one of Jakeway's 'leaders of imagination'.

The elections produced a massive, though expected, victory for the Alliance: 22 seats to the Federation's nine (all Indo-Fijian communal seats, none of the cross-voting ones). As the leader of the Alliance, Ratu Mara was appointed the leader of government business, while retaining his natural resources portfolio for a few months before handing it over to a general elector member of the Alliance, Doug Brown. Vijay R. Singh, Patel's most bitter opponent, with a sharp mind and an eloquent tongue, was appointed Member for Social Services, and Charles Stinson, a Suva businessman, Member for Communications and Works.

Three other elected members — Ratu Penaia Ganilau, Ratu Edward Cakobau and K. S. Reddy — were coopted to the Executive Council. This arrangement lasted until 1 September 1967, when a ministerial style of government was established with Ratu Mara as Chief Minister.

The Federation Party protested against its exclusion from the Executive Council, pointing to Paragraph 39 of the conference report, which said that the 'Governor would continue to appoint the unofficial members of the Executive Council in his discretion but would provide for appropriate representation of the various communities in the unofficial element of the Executive Council'.²⁷ As the Federation Party represented the Indo-Fijian community, it claimed that it was entitled to be invited into the Executive Council. Trafford Smith agreed with the Federation claim, saying the 'Secretary of State no doubt had in mind that the [Executive] Council would be formed on all-party basis as hitherto'. A resounding Alliance victory was not, however, foreseen at the time of the conference. Now with the adoption of a 'government' versus 'opposition' system, Fiji had 'crossed a major Rubicon'.²⁸ Ratu Mara did not want the Federation Party in government because its policies, he said, were diametrically opposed to his party's and because Federation in all probability would insist on the exclusion of Indo-Fijian members of the Alliance Party from the Executive Council as a precondition for participating. This Mara would be loathe to accept because it would in effect undermine the Indo-Fijian members of his party and hand Patel a victory of sorts.²⁹ In any case, Patel had in the meantime accepted the role of the leader of the opposition, and the matter was allowed to rest.

The Alliance government faced the normal teething problems of all new administrations: limited resources, unskilled personnel, demands for development from all sides, the negotiation of grants and experts from London and the politics of patronage, but for the most part it had acquitted itself well. Jakeway was concerned about the emigration of skilled people from Fiji to Canada and the United States in particular and sought CO advice on how to curtail it.³⁰ The government could do very little was the short reply, because any undue restriction on the movement of people would breach human rights conventions. Perhaps a bond system requiring scholarship holders and other beneficiaries of subsidised training to work in the country for a specified length of time might be the solution. The CO saw a silver lining in the departure of Indo-Fijians from Fiji: an improvement in the racial balance between the two communities.³¹ When Secretary of State, Fred Lee, visited Fiji in August 1966, he alluded to other pressing problems. Among them was the need for racial integration, especially in education. In the past, this had been opposed strenuously by Fijian provincial schools, fearing that integration would submerge their unique identity into something amorphous and loathsome and threaten their cultural foundation. 'There may be room for argument about timing and methods, but not for doubt

of the principle itself,' Lee concluded. He advised the people to accept change, to 'assimilate it into the structure of society without allowing tradition either to impede it or to be swept away by it'.³²

The uncertain future facing expatriate civil service officers — employed not on permanent or pensionable terms since a new policy came into effect in 1962, but on contracts in the territories where they were serving — was also a matter of grave concern not only to the officers concerned but for the orderly transition to independence.³³ The interests and welfare of the expatriate officers had to be balanced against the imperatives of localisation. Under the existing constitution, the governor, not his elected ministers, was responsible for staff matters, but with a full ministerial form of government on the books, the equation had changed. In particular, Ratu Mara was adamantly opposed to the continuation of the old arrangement, which involved differential rates of pay for local and expatriate officers. He had himself been a victim of the old system in the early 1960s, and was determined that it should go. He wanted the Overseas Services Aid Scheme (OSAS) and Her Majesty's Overseas Colonial Service dismantled, with appropriate compensation, and all future expatriate officers employed on contract or on secondment. For obvious reasons, Mara wanted accelerated localisation.³⁴

Mara's opposition caught London in a dilemma. It understood the depth of Mara's personal feeling on the issue and its political ramifications in Fiji. For that reason, it could not confront him publicly. Antagonising him at a critical moment in the transition to independence held grave dangers. Neither could London disregard the welfare of senior, long-serving civil service officers who were caught in a dilemma not of their making. Matters became more complicated with Mara's refusal to go to London to discuss the issue with ministers there. He was adamant that it be discussed in Fiji, with many like-minded colleagues, where he could resist pressure that he might have to succumb to in London. There was little London could do except 'to do everything possible to persuade Ratu Mara to see the difficulties of the course he has suggested and to accept that it is preferable that OSAS should continue, despite the problems it poses for him'.³⁵

Another major area of concern for Fiji was the implication of the United Kingdom's application for entry into the European Economic Community (EEC), in particular for the future of the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement. Sugar was, and long had been, the backbone of the country's economy. There was, moreover, a political dimension to the problem as well. A major success on the sugar front would augur well for Mara politically with his fledgling support in the Indo-Fijian community. It would also undermine Patel's standing among his strongest supporters in the cane belt, which was probably why Mara withdrew an invitation to Patel to accompany him to Geneva for sugar talks. To safeguard

Fiji from any potential fallout from Britain's entry into the EEC, Mara revived his 'integration' proposals. Britain was not encouraging and Mara dropped the idea, but privately, London conceded that some form of associate-state status was 'probably the right goal for Fiji'.³⁶ Associated status was in any case preferable to independence, a point that was not to be divulged to Mara when he came to the UK in September 1967 as part of a world tour.

The recommendation to avoid independence if possible was made after a further round of official talks about the Pacific in Washington in April 1967 involving the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The UK delegation was led by Trafford Smith. The talks proved to be detailed and, in the case of the United States, unusually candid. While admitting that Washington had yet to formulate clear policies for the Pacific, US officials made clear that they preferred association arrangements to independence. This was a view shared by the Australian delegation and Australia emerged at the talks as the most beleaguered of the four powers. Nauru and Papua New Guinea were onerous responsibilities, and the stand taken on both by the UN Committee of Twenty-Four was resented in Canberra. All four powers — New Zealand to a lesser extent — were concerned to limit UN involvement in the region. A major preoccupation of the Australians was the danger of penetration by 'hostile influences'; 'Indonesia and Asian communists seemed uppermost in their minds,' according to the UK report on the talks. The Australians also claimed to have a 'national interest' in Fiji's stability. They regarded Fiji as 'the key to the island region', and they voiced strong opposition to 'any forward movement there'. Throughout the talks, the UK delegation steered a middle course, emphasising that stability in the Pacific was a concern of all four powers; individually their aim should be to avoid 'competitive constitutional escalation' and to consider the interests of other powers in making decisions about their own territories.³⁷

Two observations might be made about the wider significance of the Washington talks in April 1967. First, despite the claim to have a national interest at stake, Australia appeared less keen to involve itself in assisting financially with Fiji's development plans. The suspicion always lurked in Canberra that the United Kingdom was seeking to offload its Pacific responsibilities.³⁸ Secondly and rather unexpectedly, Nauru, the subject of extended discussion in Washington, became an independent republic in January 1968. With an area of only eight square miles and a population of just 5561 (an 'English village', according to officials in London), Nauru was perhaps the best example of where — according to the criteria established in Washington — independence was to be avoided. The United Kingdom went along with the decision to grant independence, believing that if Australia and the United States — who had more at stake in the Pacific — were prepared to acquiesce, it made little sense for the United Kingdom to object. By implication, if Nauru could become independent, so could Fiji.

Earlier, in February 1967, Herbert Bowden, secretary of state for Commonwealth affairs, visited Fiji as part of a familiarisation tour of the South Pacific. He gave assurances that the new departmental arrangements in Whitehall — Jakeway described the merger of the CO and Commonwealth Relations Office as a ‘betrayal’ of dependent territories³⁹ — did not mean any change in the British government's policy on Fiji.⁴⁰ Britain would not rush Fiji to independence, but would act only if Fiji asked for and was ready for it. It was advisable, he said, for Fiji to progress gradually.⁴¹ On the future of the contested constitution, Bowden said that since it had been in existence for a short while, ‘it should be given a chance to work and see if it is a viable one that meets the needs of Fiji’. On the surface it appeared an innocuous statement, but the words angered the Federation Party, which had accepted the constitution under protest in the first instance, had been politically disadvantaged by it and was committed publicly to its revocation. Patel recalled a conversation — which the CO denied ever took place — in which Anthony Greenwood allegedly said that the 1965 constitution would have a short life of two years after which another constitution would be drawn up.⁴² The prospect of the contested constitution having a longer life caused him alarm. As Patel put it, if the constitution was not changed immediately, the Indo-Fijian community would be consigned to ‘the wilderness of frustrated and possibly endless opposition’.⁴³

Patel's criticism of the apparently unilateral manner in which the Alliance government conducted itself, hastily using the guillotine in the legislature to cut off debate on important issues — a charge steadfastly denied by Mara and the governor — soured political relations even further. So, on 1 September 1967, exactly a year after the elections, Patel moved a motion in the Legislative Council rejecting the constitution and asking for a fresh conference to devise a new constitution. The longest single-sentence motion in the history of the Fijian Legislative Council read:

Undemocratic, iniquitous and unjust provisions characterise the existing constitution and electoral laws of Fiji and their operation have caused alarm in the minds of right thinking people and have hampered the political advancement of Fiji along democratic lines and this House therefore is of the opinion that Her Majesty's government of the United Kingdom should call a constitutional conference immediately to ensure that a new constitution is worked out and based on true democratic principles without any bias or distinction on the grounds of colour, race, religion or place of origin or vested interest, either political, economic, social or other so that Fiji may attain self-government and become a nation with honour, dignity and responsibility as soon as possible.⁴⁴

As Vijay R. Singh was replying to the motion on behalf of the Alliance, condemning it in ringing terms, the Federation Party walked out.

The boycott caught everyone by surprise and complicated London's plans for a gradual transfer of power at a pace acceptable to the Fijians. The boycott gave rise to the need for by-elections for the Indo-Fijian members. The Federation Party's by-election platform was a reiteration of its demand during the 1966 election for complete and immediate independence for Fiji on the basis of common roll. 'Independence Our Salvation', the party's election slogan had said. The Federation Party was out to prove that the overwhelming majority of Indo-Fijians rejected the constitution. The occasion also provided the Alliance Party, and Ratu Mara in particular, the opportunity to test their strength in the Indo-Fijian community and to prove that they too had a substantial base of support. Mara told the CO that he was optimistic of making inroads into the Indo-Fijian electorate,⁴⁵ expecting to win one or two Indo-Fijian communal seats. The Indo-Fijians were beginning to realise that 'he was genuinely determined to safeguard their interests', he said. He was receiving support from Indo-Fijian workers and Gujarati businessmen opposed to Patel, but not from the Indo-Fijian middle classes, who saw better prospects for advancement under the Federation Party. Patel was himself 'clearly losing ground', Mara said hopefully.

Mara's optimistic assessment of his political support among Indo-Fijians was misplaced for — and not for the first time — the by-elections returned all the nine Federation members with increased majorities (from 65 per cent of the Indo-Fijian communal votes in 1966 to 76 per cent in 1968), with Patel returning with the largest majority of them all.⁴⁶ The Federation's win came as a result of the party representing itself as the only authentic voice of the Indo-Fijian community, its superior list of candidates compared with those of the Alliance, a professional campaign and a promise to secure a new sugarcane contract favouring the grower. The tension and animosity and the solid Indo-Fijian support for the Federation Party and the dismal performance of the Alliance among Indo-Fijians — Mara's strenuous efforts to woo them over notwithstanding — took Fiji to the brink of racial riots amid loud calls to deport Indo-Fijian leaders, and to cancel land leases to Indo-Fijian tenants. The fragile experiment in multiracialism was tested. Patel had proved his point that he was the dominant leader of the Indo-Fijian community, who could not be ignored or sidelined in any future constitutional negotiation. This proof had come, however, at a great cost to race relations, and hardening attitudes on the Fijian side that saw the increased support for the Federation Party as an Indo-Fijian attempt to control political power. The Fijian determination to stand their ground and not concede to demands that might threaten their interests was also out in the open. The Fijian leaders also realised the realities on the ground. They could not oppose independence for ever. It would be better for them to negotiate independence while they controlled the government. They therefore shifted to a stance aiming for early independence, with them in control. The by-election was the sobering wake-up call to all parties to begin negotiations on a more realistic basis.

Throughout the 1960s, London hoped that it might be able to resolve Fiji's constitutional and political problems outside the glare of international scrutiny, and it devoted a great deal of its diplomatic energy to that end — at the United Nations as well as with fellow members of the Commonwealth (not to mention the UK Parliament itself). It was not entirely successful, for Fiji frequently came to the attention of the UN Committee of Twenty-Four throughout the decade. The committee had shown intermittent interest in Fiji earlier, but after the 1965 conference, it did so with the active encouragement and even lobbying of the Federation Party, which alleged misconduct of government and breaches of undertaking by the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ In 1968, Fiji was on the committee's agenda, in the unexpected and uncongenial company of the Portuguese colonies, French Somaliland, British Honduras and the Falkland Islands.⁴⁸ There were many issues that had the potential to cause severe embarrassment to the governments in London and Suva, including the racial system of voting, European over-representation in the legislature and the delaying of independence.

Fijian leaders had always dismissed the committee as a nuisance that should not be allowed to visit Fiji at all, but Britain could not afford to take that position. 'We should aim to be as forthcoming as we can,' the CO advised when inquiries came from the committee, 'some of the questions posed do raise difficulties, particularly as regards any premature disclosure of the substance and timing of changes to the constitution.'⁴⁹ As broad policy, the Commonwealth Office suggested that on matters of further constitutional development, London should say that it would listen to the Alliance government's proposals for the extension of cross-voting, which were under consideration, and that the gross over-representation of Europeans in the legislature would be corrected at the next constitutional conference. The aim was to deflect attention from Fiji with soothing words of reassurance about timely constitutional advancement. The UK delegation at the United Nations found a surprisingly friendly ally in India, which had accepted the UK 'argument that pressure to introduce a common franchise would jeopardise the fragile dialogue in Fiji',⁵⁰ and which encouraged moderation on debates and resolutions concerning Fiji. Mara's own chance meeting with Indira Gandhi, India's prime minister, in Malaysia and favourable reports of Mara's multiracial posture by the Indian High Commissioner in Fiji, all contributed to India diluting its former hardline position on Fiji.⁵¹ For the time being at least, it suited the United Kingdom to have support from New Delhi.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Fiji Special Branch report of a Fijian Association meeting, 18 January 1965, CO1036/1215, no. 71.
- ² 'Interviews with political leaders in Fiji', a note by Trafford Smith, March 1965, CO1036/1551, no. 1.
- ³ Letter from Trafford Smith to Sir D. Jakeway, 31 August 1964, CO1036/1458, no. 64.
- ⁴ L. G. Usher, editor of the *Fiji Times*, was suspected widely of having done the leaking. See Governor to Secretary of State, 6 August 1965, CO1036/1216, E/1/85 at 83.
- ⁵ Lal, Brij V. 1992, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the 20th Century*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, p. 197 (n. 3).
- ⁶ Sir D. Jakeway to Trafford Smith, 16 November 1965, CO1036/1054, no. 12, enclosing draft address to the Legislative Council.
- ⁷ CO note on the views of the Fijian delegates, July 1965, CO1036/1127, no. 3.
- ⁸ Opening address by Mr Greenwood, 26 July 1965, CO1036/1128, no. 1.
- ⁹ The three opening speeches by Ratu Mara, John Falvey and A. D. Patel are in CO1036/1128, no. 1, 26 July 1965.
- ¹⁰ I owe this connection to Rod Alley.
- ¹¹ See, however, Norton, Robert 2002, 'Accommodating indigenous privilege: Britain's dilemma in decolonising Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. xxxviii, p. 155 (n. 69), where he writes that Patel's rigidity was a 'strategic error'.
- ¹² Constitutional conference report (FCC 965) 15 (Final), 9 August 1965, CO1036/1129, no. 18.
- ¹³ The term 'general elector' referred to anyone who was not designated Indo-Fijian, European or Pacific Islander. It included, among others, Europeans, part-Europeans and Chinese, though the Europeans exercised the dominant influence.
- ¹⁴ See Lal, Brij V. 1997a, *A Vision for Change: A. D. Patel and the Politics of Fiji*, National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, p. 192 (n. 4).
- ¹⁵ Note by the Indian group, July 1965, CO1036/1129, ff. 55–61. Patel's letter to Anthony Greenwood is in Lal (1997a:209–11 [n. 4]).
- ¹⁶ Quoted in Lal (1992:199 [n. 3]).
- ¹⁷ Letter from Trafford Smith to P. D. Macdonald, 17 August 1965, CO1036/1119, no. 73.
- ¹⁸ It is important to point out that Deoki, who made the proposal, was strongly anti-Patel.
- ¹⁹ CO note on the views of the Fijian delegation, July 1965, CO1036/1127, no. 3.
- ²⁰ Letter from Trafford Smith to P. D. Macdonald, 17 August 1965, CO1036/1119, no. 73.
- ²¹ Minute by A. J. Fairclough, 9 January 1967, CO1036/1667, no. 6.
- ²² Report on a visit to Fiji, August 1968, FCO32/429.
- ²³ Letter (reply) from Trafford Smith to Sir D. Jakeway, 13 December 1965, CO1036/1067, no. 47.
- ²⁴ Davidson, J. W. 1966, 'Constitutional Change in Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 1, p. 167 (n. 57).
- ²⁵ Letter from Trafford Smith to Sir D. Jakeway, 14 December 1965, CO1036/1067, no. 47.
- ²⁶ Sir D. Jakeway to Trafford Smith, enclosing draft address to Legislative Council, 16 November 1965, CO1036/1054, no. 12.
- ²⁷ Conference report (FCC65) 15 (Final), 9 August 1965, CO1036/1129, no. 18.
- ²⁸ 'Membership of the Executive Council', by Trafford Smith to Sir A. Galsworthy, 18 January 1967, FCO32/18.
- ²⁹ 'Fiji: Alliance Party government', dispatch from Sir D. Jakeway to Mr Thomson, 11 January 1968, FCO32/37.
- ³⁰ 'Emigration from Fiji', letter from C. A. Axworthy to A. J. Coles, 8 March 1966, CO1036/1645, no. 4; also, Reply, 27 April 1966, CO1036/1645, no. 5.
- ³¹ Letter from H. P. Hall to Sir D. Jakeway, 15 November 1965, CO1036/1510, no. 2.
- ³² Suva broadcast by Lee during his Pacific tour, 22 August 1966, CO1036/1721, no. 33.
- ³³ A brief on staffing problems prepared by the Ministry of Overseas Development, 18 July 1966, CO1036/1663, no. 13.
- ³⁴ 'Fiji: Overseas Aid Scheme', 26 February 1968, FCO32/23, no. 108.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 'Fiji integration proposals', minute by A. J. Fairclough to Mr Bowden, 20 June 1967, FCO32/59.

³⁷ 'Pacific Island talks: Commonwealth Office notes on four-power talks in Washington', April 1967, FCO32/343.

³⁸ 'Fiji and Australia: Commonwealth Office note on Australian aid to Fiji', 30 July 1968, FCO32/364, no. 8; also FCO32/364, no. 9.

³⁹ 'Merger of Commonwealth Office and Foreign Office', letter from Sir D. Jakeway, 29 April 1968, FCO77/32.

⁴⁰ Broadcast by Bowden in Fiji, 13 February 1967, FCO32/36, no. 79.

⁴¹ Commonwealth Office talking points for Bowden's visit to Fiji, February 1967, FCO32/11, no. 2.

⁴² Patel's letter to Greenwood is in Lal (1997a:209–11 [n. 4]).

⁴³ Lal (1992:201 [n. 3]).

⁴⁴ See Lal (1997a:229 [n. 4]).

⁴⁵ A. J. Fairclough to Sir D. Jakeway, 29 June 1967, FCO32/59, no. 6, enclosing record by O. G. Foster of a meeting between Bowden and Mara.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the by-elections, see Anthony, J. M. 1969, 'The 1968 by-elections', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 4, pp. 132–5.

⁴⁷ Letter from J. H. Lambert (head of UN Political Department in FO) to J. D. B Shaw (UK Mission to the United Nations, New York), 10 September 1968, FCO32/31, no. 35.

⁴⁸ J. D. B Shaw to A. M. Warburton (FO), 24 June 1968, FCO32/31, no. 8.

⁴⁹ 'Fiji and the Committee of 24', minute by Sir A. Galsworthy, 10 July 1968, FCO32/31, no. 14.

⁵⁰ Norton, Robert 2004, 'Seldom a transition with such aplomb: From confrontation to conciliation on Fiji's path to independence', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 39, no. 2, p. 171.

⁵¹ For more on this, see *ibid.*, pp. 170–1 (n. 171).