

CHAPTER 4: BEFORE THE STORM

*The sky is darkening like a stain
Something is going to fall like rain
And it won't be flowers.* W H Auden

An emergency session of parliament on 15 December 1983 was debating a Supplementary Appropriation of \$5 million Christmas 'Cost of Living Adjustment' payment to civil servants as part of their settlement under the Nicole and Hurst job evaluation report. Siddiq Koya was on his feet, and in his speech referred to Alliance backbencher and millionaire Jim Ah Koy's challenge to the Opposition parliamentarians to accept a pay cut in view of the dire state of the economy. Finance Minister Charles Walker had already resigned his portfolio rather than authorise pay increase for civil servants of up to \$25 million. But the cabinet had already agreed to fund COLA and was seeking an additional sum of money for that purpose. Speaker of the House Tomasi Vakatora reminded Koya that Ah Koy was not the subject of discussion. 'Yes,' Koya retorted, 'but he was allowed to say and I am simply saying.' He meant the pay cut. Before he could complete the sentence, Vakatora asked Koya 'to come to the Head.' 'He was allowed, Sir,' Vakatora: 'Would you please resume your seat?'

Jai Ram Reddy, Koya's parliamentary leader, leapt to Koya's defense. 'But he was allowed to say it.' Vakatora, a man of explosive temper, was visibly angry as he glared down at Reddy. 'You know the Standing Order says that when you speak, you should stand up and address the Speaker.' Remaining seated, Reddy shot back, 'I do not propose to stand up to you.' 'All right,' Vakatora declared, 'I order you to get out now.' 'You have me removed,' retorted Reddy angrily. He, too, was a man of quick temper.

Vakatora: 'Police, escort him out. Take him out, out of the precincts of the House.' 'You can run this circus on your own,' Reddy fired back as he flung his glasses down on the table, picked up his papers and walked out, followed by all twenty members of the Opposition. No one was quite prepared for this dramatically unexpected turn of events. It all happened within a matter of minutes, leaving everyone bewildered. How did all this come to pass, some parliamentarians asked themselves as they walked out.

The die was not cast in stone just yet. Reddy was persuaded by his colleagues to write to Ratu Mara to see if there was a way out of the impasse. The following day, he wrote to 'Dear Kamisese' about the previous day's events.¹ 'I do not know how you view the events in the House but I will be pleased to discuss the matter further with you should you feel that such discussion will be useful.' Mara saw the Opposition's quandary and the experienced and wily politician was just not going to let Reddy off the hook. On 21 December, Mara wrote to 'Dear Jai Ram,' saying that there was little that he could do to extricate the Opposition from the tangled web it found itself in. The NFP parliamentary board's decision seemed to him to have 'assumed an air of finality.' In that event, he told Reddy, there was no 'possibility of discussion with me as an option.' Reddy, the experienced politician that he too was, expected the predictable response.

On 29 February 1984, Ratu Mara rubbed the salt in a very raw wound by saying in a radio interview that the letter Reddy had written to him after the walkout was the first communication he had received from him since 'he returned the paper on Government of National Unity under the door of my office,' some three years back. If true, that would have been a reprehensible dereliction of duty on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. But Mara's claim was 'totally baseless,' and Reddy had Mara's replies to his letters to prove it. He had written to the Prime Minister on at least five separate occasions over a number of matters concerning the appointment of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the 1982 elections, the Government of National Unity and the boycott of parliament.² These did not include routine consultations between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the

Opposition required by the constitution for senior appointments in the civil service and the judiciary. Mara's reaction simply reinforced Reddy's decision to leave parliament. This kind of politics, based on patently false facts, was not his cup of tea. His decision to stay out of parliament was 'irrevocable.'

DEPARTURE

Reddy's decision plunged his party into disarray once again, undoing all the thankless hard work he had of uniting the warring factions under a single leader over several years. But it also set him on a course which would change the direction of the subsequent history of Fiji. National Federation Party supporters throughout the country were distraught. Reddy had worked so hard for party unity and now he was on his way out. Many simply could not conceive of a bright future for the NFP without him at the helm. Without him, they feared, correctly as it would turn out, the party would revert to its old, destructive ways of factionalism and intrigue and self-destruction. Every branch president pleaded with him to re-consider his decision. Krishna Datt, addressing a thousand teachers at the 54th annual convention of the Fiji Teachers Union in Nadi, asked Reddy to return 'in the name of democracy,' for the sake of 'stability which is important for a fledgling democracy like Fiji.'³

Reddy would not budge. 'Decision of the kind I took is not taken lightly,' he responded, 'and they are not changed lightly,' but he was touched by the warm support he had received. 'Not in my wildest dreams had I thought that so many people placed so much faith in me.'⁴ Irene Jai Narayan said she was 'deeply saddened,' by Reddy's resignation from the parliament, and another senior member, Anirudh Kuver, lamented that 'we have no one among our ranks of his calibre.'⁵ He was indispensable to party unity and future, everyone said. But as Reddy would later say, echoing the words of Charles de Gaulle, the graveyards of the world were full of people who were once considered, or considered themselves, to be indispensable. He had had enough of the sniping in the ranks of his own party, and relentless racial provocation from the government benches. He

probably thought that he would achieve little by remaining in the House. But what precisely he would do outside he did not know. He was resigning from parliament, not from public life, he told his friends who pleaded with him to stay on.

Reddy's decision was at first welcomed by his parliamentary colleagues almost in a pro forma way. If nothing else, loyalty to the leader dictated that they walk out with him. But many had not contemplated a prolonged absence from the parliament, perhaps boycotting a sitting or two at most. That was what Vakatora had thought, too, he later said. But when the import of Reddy's decision finally sunk in, opinion divided quickly in the NFP parliamentary ranks. There were some, like Irene Jai Narayan, who thought that the walkout would be short-lived. Why should the party let a single man [Vakatora] defeat it, she asked her colleagues? Reddy's 'removal hardly warrants a full scale boycott,' she said.⁶ Siddiq Koya pressed for continuing boycott because Vakatora, he said, had insulted not only Reddy but the entire party. He would soon change his mind. Iqbal Khan, a Koya man, said sarcastically: 'We were elected to serve the people, not run away from parliament.'⁷ 'I think the party has made a silly decision [to continue the boycott]. The party leader takes too much for granted, and his popularity is declining.'

Quite a few of his colleagues shared that view privately, though not the declining popularity part. Harish Sharma spoke words which stuck with Reddy for a long time, words which were true enough in the theoretical sense but hurtful in the context of the moment. 'Party leaders come and party leaders go, but the party must go on.' The rift with the Speaker was too minor an issue to take such a big step. And if they stuck with Reddy and Vakatora remained in the Speaker's chair, they would stay out and fight a by-election to return to parliament. But what if Vakatora was still in the Speaker's chair? If by-elections were held, some feared NFP would lose closely contested seats, such as Iqbal Khan's which the NFP had won by a mere 407 votes, or Filimone Nalatu's which was won from the Alliance's Sakiasi Waqanivavalagi by 244 votes. The remaining Doves in the party

would not be sorry to Reddy go. In fact, they quietly welcomed the opportunity to see him out of parliament for good.

Questions about loss and gain, about an appropriate and measured response, swirled in the Opposition room causing concern and friction. Nonetheless, when the time came, the NFP parliamentary caucus decided to uphold the decision of December 15 to continue the boycott. Only one NFP parliamentarian disobeyed the boycott decision and returned to parliament: Vijay Parmanandam. Meanwhile, at a meeting of the NFP parliamentary group at Tanoa Hotel in Nadi soon afterwards, a vote of confidence was passed in Reddy. 'Nothing will be greater than to see that bonds between the leader and the people kept united,' said Sir Vijay R Singh. 'In the process, we will be losers if we leave Mr Reddy's company, his contribution and the solidarity he gave to the party. We want Mr Reddy to reconsider his decision and continue as party leader in the interests of the party and the country.'⁷⁸ Reddy resigned on 15 May (The month of May has a curious resonance in Fijian political history!)

Tomasi Vakatora was roundly condemned by the NFP as the culprit who had precipitated the whole crisis by making 'perverse' decisions for the partisan political gain of the Alliance Party. Reddy believed Vakatora was being deliberately provocative and insulting to his side of the House. The Speaker's position in the Westminster system of democracy is a unique one. The Speaker enters parliament on a party ticket, and is appointed, with mock reluctance, to the Speaker's Chair with bi-partisan support. Once ensconced, he is expected to be fair and impartial in his rulings to all the members of the House and to conduct its business with decorum and dignity. Vakatora, it will be recalled, was elected Speaker unilaterally by the Alliance after the bitter 1982 general election and his deputy, Vijay Parmanandam, a renegade NFP member, offered his services without the approval of his party. The initial circumstances surrounding the appointment did not augur well for a smooth running of parliament. Opposition dissatisfaction with Vakatora grew with time.

In June 1983, the Opposition moved a vote of no confidence in him over his decision not allow a parliamentary debate about the Transport Control Board because the matter was before the courts and, therefore, allegedly *sub judice*. It involved the circumstances surrounding the granting of an around-the-Viti Levu bus route to KR Latchan, an old political foe of Sir Vijay Singh's and a benefactor of the Alliance party. Vakatora held his ground and won the day although, as Sir Vijay correctly pointed out, 'Just because the Transport Control Board was a party to an action, it cannot place the Transport Control Board in such a manner that no reference may be made and no discussion about its activities takes place in the House.'⁹ 'No chair can really rule on *sub judice* until he hears what the Member has to say,' he argued, himself a former Speaker. Courts should not be used to stifle debate on important issues of public policy. It was a fine point of some subtlety which many a later Attorney General did not fully grasp.

Tomasi Rayalu Vakatora was a proud Fijian, a Fijian nationalist in the old, conservative sense, believing that Fijians, as the first settlers of the land, had certain rights and privileges which should automatically give them prior consideration in the nation's affairs. It was not for no reason that he twice defeated Sakeasi Butadroka in the heartland of strong Fijian nationalism in south-eastern Viti Levu. He was a strong and loyal supporter of Ratu Mara, their association going back to the 1950s, when he began his career as a primary school teacher in Lau, and met his wife, Wainiqolo, there. He took any criticism of his party leader and high chief personally. He was reflecting a widespread Fijian displeasure with Jai Ram Reddy's 'toilet remarks' and the allegations made on the *Four Corners* program about chiefs clubbing and eating their way to power.

Vakatora was pro-Fijian, to be sure, but he had also overturned Deputy Speaker Parmanandam's ruling that matters relating to Fijian chiefs should not be raised in parliament because chiefs were like royalty and, therefore, above public comment. Fijian chiefs were in the House as elected parliamentarians, not as chiefs, Vakatora ruled, and therefore legitimate subjects for debate and discussion. And he was one of only three Fijians, it will be

recalled, who had voted against the Bau motion discussed in the last chapter. Vakatora was a stubborn man, too. Once he had made up his mind, nothing could change it. When accused of being politically active while still the Speaker, he said, 'I will not bow down to any political pressure in the exercise of my duty; [I] will continue to attend political meetings, but not speak.'¹⁰ (One of his predecessors, RD Patel, not only attended political meetings but actually spoke at them: on the Sugar Price Stabilization Fund, for example).

There is another plausible explanation for Vakatora's behaviour other than his stubborn Fijian nationalism and his fierce Alliance loyalties. This was his almost religious regard for the observance of proper parliamentary protocol. Vakatora, as I found out later, was a stickler for standards and correct observance of procedure. In that regard, he was like many Fijians of his generation who had come of age in the late colonial period. He had risen from a primary school teacher to become Fiji's first local Commissioner for Labour and later a Permanent Secretary. After retiring from the civil service, he was appointed an Alliance senator. For a man from humble beginnings in the Rewa delta, from the mangrove swamps, as his autobiography says, he was justifiably proud of his personal achievement.¹¹ He had advanced in life by observing the rules, and he expected others to do the same. He was, he told me, hugely irritated by the constant interjections from two former University of the South Pacific academics, Ahmed Ali and Satendra Nandan, who were treating the parliament 'like a classroom,' compromising its dignity. People walking in and out of parliamentary sessions without recognizing the Speaker and bowing to him, annoyed him greatly. He felt that the Opposition members were treating him with disrespect and discourtesy, and some of them probably were. So when Reddy refused to stand up and address the Speaker, his anger boiled over and he ordered the Leader of the Opposition out of the House. It was not a premeditated move on his part, though many Opposition parliamentarians at the time thought otherwise. Vakatora later called the incidence 'unfortunate' and expected the boycott to last for a day or two at most.¹² That was not to be.

Reddy's departure from parliament was unanimously greeted with regret and sadness. Letters of support and sympathy and understanding for Reddy poured in, from as unlikely persons as the former University of the South Pacific Vice Chancellor James Maraj, who hoped that Reddy would someday re-enter the political arena.¹³ New Zealand High Commissioner Lindsay Watt wrote on 30 May 1984: 'The political scene here is such that some peculiarly Fiji yardsticks probably need to be used in measuring political achievements.' 'Regardless of that however,' he continued, 'you are certainly assured of a worthy place in Fiji's political history.' His letter ended with the comforting suggestion that he would be 'bureaucratically benevolent' in expediting the renewal of his multiple visas to New Zealand when it expired in September.

INSTANTLY, INSTANTLY

As the NFP parliamentary board prepared to meet to elect a new leader now that Reddy was gone, the competition for leadership intensified. There were predictably two leading contenders, Mrs Irene Jai Narayan and Siddiq Koya, two old, unforgiving foes joined in the leadership battle once again. Narayan had held her Suva Indian communal seat continuously since 1966, and was a star performer on the party's stage, a compelling and charismatic speaker and a favourite with the grassroots supporters. She felt she had earned her dues to make a bid for the top position. Koya was one of the principal founders of the party, its battle-hardened field commander, who had been in parliament since 1963. Some branch presidents argued that the NFP leader should come from western Viti Levu where the party was founded and which was its power base.¹⁴ Balwant Singh Rakkha, president of the Ba branch and then an ardent Koya loyalist, arranged pocket meetings to lobby for Koya, much to the annoyance of the NFP Youth president, lawyer Anil Singh, who wanted the selection of the parliamentary leader to be left to the parliamentary board alone.¹⁵

That certainly would have been the correct procedure. Branch presidents should have had no hand in publicly influencing the selection of

*Reddy, RS Goundar
and Siddiq Koya in
happier times ca early
1980s. Photo courtesy
of Fiji Times.*



the Leader of the Opposition. That is the responsibility of the parliamentary caucus. But Koya knew that support for him among his own parliamentary colleagues was shaky. He prevailed and branch presidents, as well as the defeated leader of the Western United Front, Ratu Osea Gavidi, were allowed to address parliamentary caucus before the vote was taken.

For his efforts, Koya would reward Rakkha by nominating him as the official party candidate in a future by-election. The first ballot was a 9-9 tie. It was all eerily a repeat of 1977. Koya was elected, on the second ballot, by 10-8 votes with the support, it was speculated at the time, of Isikeli Nadalo, Ram Sami Goundar, Mohammed Sadiq, Subramani Baswaiya, Ratu Soso Katonivere, Iqbal Khan, Filimone Nalatu, Shardha Nand, Anirudh Kuver and HM Lodhia.

Mrs Narayan had the support of the rest, including that of Sir Vijay R Singh who would normally have been expected to support his cane belt colleague and Ba resident Siddiq Koya. Many things countered against Mrs Narayan, wrote Robert Keith-Reid. 'Male chauvinism, the fact that she was born in India and not Fiji, and some sentiment that it had been wrong of her to let it be publicly known that she disapproved of Reddy's boycott of parliament, were held to have been what went against her.'¹⁶ Vijendra Kumar saw Reddy's hand in Narayan's defeat. Her chances dimmed 'because it is evident that Mr Reddy does not to see her as leader,' he wrote. Reddy had apparently hinted that Koya was likely to emerge victor, which, Kumar surmised, was a 'clear indication as to where his choice lies.'¹⁷ Reddy denies endorsing either candidate, though there is little doubt that he had a preference for Koya over Narayan.¹⁸ It made sense: he was a founder of the party, he was from the cane belt, and his hold on the loyalty and support of the grassroots supporters was solid. Koya's victory was orchestrated by Shardha Nand, an astute strategist and an operator par excellence and a former senior civil servant (in the Cooperatives Department), who had once said he 'would lay down his life for SM Koya.'¹⁹ A few years later, the two would part company permanently amidst great acrimony. Koya said that he had won the leadership because 'they'd rather the devil you know than the devil you don't.' But there were doubts about future stability in the party. Keith-Reid: 'The circumstances of Koya's restoration hint that he will have to exercise extreme patience and personal restraint if he is to keep the NFP together — two requirements which even the closest of his admirers agree he will find difficult to meet in view of his difficult and demanding character.'²⁰

The parliamentary caucus unanimously voted Irene Jai Narayan the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Still, there was no peace in the top echelon. Old hatreds and suspicions, plotting and infighting, once again returned with a vengeance. Koya could not forgive Mrs Narayan for her audacity in challenging him for the leadership and nearly succeeding in defeating him and for making snide remarks about his part-time leadership

behind his back, according to a Koya supporter. A few months after being elected, Koya rang Speaker Vakatora and asked him to stop renovating an office in the Leader of the Opposition's chambers which the Deputy Leader proposed to use. She used to use Reddy's office when he was away from Suva. 'I don't want any changes,' he told Vakatora. Crossing Koya could be full of peril. But it also unnecessarily revived old animosities which lay just beneath the surface.

Within a year of assuming parliamentary leadership, Koya's once-dominant political career would effectively be over. His undoing unfortunately was largely the result of his own *modus operandi*. Koya's downfall accelerated when he alienated the Youth Wing of the party comprising some fine young talent and faithful workers. The Youth Wing wanted greater role and acknowledgement of the work they were doing, and had done, for the party. Youth were youth, Koya felt strongly, to be seen and not necessarily heard. As the party leader, and one of the founding leaders at that, he had every right to expect complete loyalty and support from them, subservience even, but not a seat at the table, which he thought should rightly be reserved for the adult members of the family. Koya spoke of father-son relationship and expected the son to respect the father. Anil Singh, the Youth president, retorted that while Koya expected respect from the son, he did not hesitate to kick him out when it suited him. 'Respect is a two-way thing. If he wants respect from us, he must also show us respect.'²¹ Singh resigned from the party in December 1984 when Koya refused to allow a Youth delegation to participate in the annual NFP convention.²² Koya dismissed the Youth Wing disparagingly: 'God created both elephants and dogs. The elephant works and the dog bites. The elephant will go on working even if the dog keeps biting.'²³

The dismissal proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Singh, a young Lami lawyer and former mayor of the town, represented not only the youth wing of the party, but he also had the support of the party's traditional establishment, including the business community, which had long been disenchanted with Koya's style of politics and his latent antipa-

thy towards the Gujarati business community, a legacy, Karam Ramrakha recalled, of his old Kisan Sangh days of the 1950s. There was thus more to Singh's support base than met the eye. Singh asked Koya to resign and 'make way for a more enlightened leader who does not carry the prejudices and excess baggage of 1977.' 'The entrenchment of an incompetent clique of sycophants has become the major preoccupation of the party,' he continued. 'In the process of installing this clique, intelligent and sincere party workers are sidelined and democratic decisions of the majority are continuously revoked to suit the whims of the few.'²⁴ What few had expected or predicted was the great passion and tenacity with which the Youth Wing would pursue its cause to get Koya removed as party leader.

Their opportunity came when the by-election for Reddy's seat was announced. Fourteen people applied but since Reddy and Koya could not agree on a single name, they referred the matter to the selection committee appointed by the party's Working Committee which would have both Koya and Reddy on it. The Committee, comprising LP Maharaj, Hari Sahay, Dr Subramani Govendar, Jai Raj Singh, Koresi Matatolu and Koya, met while Reddy was away in New Zealand. It chose Balwant Rakkha, a Ba-based medical practitioner, the man who had campaigned for Koya for the Leader of the Opposition against Irene Narayan. Wilfrid Sugrim, a former local Lautoka mayor, offered himself as a parallel NFP candidate if it came to that, evoking memories of the bitter September 1977 elections. Others who indicated availability included Lautoka lawyer Ram Krishna, accountant Mumtaz Ali and Michael Joseph Paligaru. The alternatives were credible. There was much praise and respect for Ali, a chartered accountant 'admired by many Fiji citizens of all races for his urbanity and diplomacy' who would have made 'an admirable compromise candidate for the Lautoka seat had the party factions been able to agree.'²⁵ Reddy himself liked Ali. But Koya had a visceral dislike of the man and that sealed Ali's fate. Ali's independent-mindedness and liberal ways were too much for the NFP leader.

Rakkha's selection caused a furor, a Ba man chosen to contest a Lautoka communal seat. Was this a slap on Lautoka's face, the Youth

supporters asked? But didn't Sir Vijay Singh contest from a constituency in which he did not live, Rakkha supporters asked in return? That was true, but he was contesting a national seat that traversed a large area, not a communal seat, Singh's supporters responded. He was, moreover, a 'senior politician' and a frontbench material with something to offer.²⁶ Wasn't Ba less than an hour's drive from Lautoka, asked Rakkha's people? And so it went. But more important, Rakkha was a Koya man and Koya needed all the support he could get in the parliamentary caucus. Heated debate ensued during the selection process, and numbers were marshalled by both sides. Matatolu, the chair of the Selection Committee, pleaded — 'begged' to use his own word — for unity. 'You cannot have external power without internal discipline and integrity,' he remarked.²⁷ His concern indicates just how deep the rifts in the party were.

In January 1985, the NFP Youth chose Devendra Singh, a new comer to politics, ahead of another former Lautoka mayor Vinubhai Patel. Because of the tussle between Koya and the NFP Youth Wing, what should have been a straightforward by-election victory for the party in a blue ribbon NFP seat became, in effect, a referendum on Koya's leadership. As Vijendra Kumar, the *Fiji Times* editor, wrote, 'The entire party split and formed blocks behind the two candidates, making few bones about the appearance that they had made their decisions on the basis of whether they were pro, or anti, Koya.'²⁸ Koya dismissed the division in the party as a manifestation of its internal democracy. There was nothing to worry about. Perhaps so, though a *Fiji Times* editorial put the matter this way: 'It also can be said of the NFP that it is lacking in discipline and has been buffeted by intrigues and back-stabbing. In a truly democratic and disciplined party, all differences and disputes are resolved within the party. Those who defy party decisions are expelled. At election time, the party presents a united front — not rival candidates from within its own ranks. It seems the NFP leaders have not learnt a lesson from their 1977 debacle.'²⁹ They evidently had not, or did not care.

As the campaign proceeded (Ba vs. Lautoka, some placards said, referring to the old football rivalry between the two districts) and the race tightened, Koya unnecessarily raised the stakes, and so stiffened the resolve of his already determined opponents, by promising to resign if his candidate lost the election. 'If the Indian community of Lautoka defeats Dr Rakkha, I am out politics. I will resign from public life,' 'instantly, instantly.'³⁰ In an election marked by a low voter turnout (4221 from the registered 12, 260) Devendra Singh beat Rakkha by 2209 votes to 2196. It was the narrowest of victories for a person who had burst upon the political scene from nowhere unannounced, but victory it was. Koya refused to resign, much as Mara had refused to do after he had won fewer than thirty seats in 1982. The threat of resignation was a gamble, theatrical gesture, not meant to be taken seriously. But times had changed. What might have been an acceptable campaign tactic a decade or so before sounded incongruous now. The electorate was different, more demanding; and the media was watching closely. Mara could 'do a Mara' and escape censure, but Koya did not have Mara's mana in his own community. The contrast with Reddy in this respect could not have been greater, a man of his word who had honoured his promise even at great cost to his party. During the campaign, Reddy stayed out of the fray completely even though he was then the party president. The Youth Wing placards carried pictures of himself and AD Patel, which insinuated Reddy's backing even if it was not formally given. Reddy called the gesture irresponsible, but refused to get dragged into the saga.

Reddy's absence from the campaign trail, and as president of the party no less, came in for criticism. Former NFP president, RS Goundar, said he was 'aggrieved and surprised' that Reddy had not given 'open and unqualified' support to the party's official candidate.³¹ Reddy rejected this as 'absolute rubbish.' He said he had been in New Zealand when a meeting in Sigatoka made the selection. The Youth Wing had approached him several times, but he had 'decided to keep himself completely out of the controversy.'³² In any event, the fight was 'an internal party problem and he should not take sides because each camp was within the party.'³³ That said, he also

did not have any good reason to make Koya's life any easier either because the latter had refused to discipline the unyielding Doves when they had continued to make life difficult for him after 1977. What goes around comes around, as the saying goes. There was another reason. Koya had picked Dr Rakkha long before the Working Committee met, making 'the whole selection procedure was a farce.'³⁴ Rakkha had himself told Reddy as much.

To have made a unilateral decision clearly in breach of party procedures for selecting candidates and then expecting the president to endorse it unreservedly seems strange. Reddy is, if anything, a stickler for following the correct procedure. This behind-the-scenes way of doing things Reddy abhorred and sought to discourage. For Koya, though, there was nothing strange or peculiar about it. He was the leader; he knew who the best candidate was and that, as far as he was concerned, was that. Koya needed a loyalist in his camp, and he knew Rakkha would be solid in his corner. But there was no lingering animosity between Reddy and Rakkha, and if there were hard feelings at the time, they did not last long. The two became very close friends and colleagues in the 1990s when Rakkha became the party president. 'I would not have lasted long with Koya,' Rakkha once told me. 'His time had passed,' another staunch Koya loyalist, Ujagar Singh, said. The irony of the result was not lost on the people. The by-election which had caused 'all the trouble' came about because Reddy 'did honour a promise to resign. But his political spirit stayed around to haunt his successor.'³⁵

Koya refused to accept defeat and proceeded with unseemly haste to make life as difficult for Devendra Singh as possible. When parliament reconvened, he called the police to bar Singh from entering the Opposition Office, which as an experienced parliamentarian he knew very well he could not do. Clerk to parliament, Lavenia Ah Koy, reminded Koya that Singh was entitled to use the Opposition Office and its facilities even if he was not a member of the NFP. He was still an Opposition member of Parliament.³⁶ When Speaker Vakatora endorsed Ah Koy's advice that all non-government politicians and parties were entitled to use the Opposition Office, Koya told Ah Koy that a concrete wall be put up to separate his

parliamentary office from that to be used by Singh.³⁷ Precisely what Koya, a senior leader of the Indo-Fijian community, hoped to achieve by this kind of heavy-handed behaviour is difficult to fathom. Perhaps Koya, being Koya, was out to demonstrate to the world that he was the leader whose views on party matters must invariably prevail. Common sense should have dictated building bridges with his opponents, not rubbing their noses in the mud. In retrospect, Koya's request seems so unfortunate. The whole unsavoury incident reflected poorly on his lack of generosity and magnanimity, and deepened feelings against him in the parliamentary caucus.

BAD OLD DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

Throughout 1985, the NFP was quietly descending into chaos, reminding everyone of the futile battles of the past. The continuing spectacle of internal squabbling reached such a level that seven Fijian and General Elector members of the parliamentary caucus threatened to break away if the party did not resolve its internal problems. They included Isikeli Nadalo, Filimone Nalatu, Ratu Soso Katonivere, Arthur Jennings, Jim Smith and Temo Sukunaivalu. Koresi Matatolu was elected the leader of their group.³⁸ It was a sad and embarrassing indictment of the state of affairs in the party, coming ironically from its non-Indian members. 'As long as Mr Koya remains leader, we will have conflict within the party,' one of them told the media. 'At the moment the party is divided because of the infighting and if a snap election is called tomorrow, we will be destroyed. The morale of the members and the party supporters is at all time low.' Koya's leadership was the main issue. 'In the ten months since he took over from Mr Reddy,' wrote Robert Keith-Reid, 'Mr Koya has arrived at a point at which all the work of construction achieved by the NFP since the shambles of 1977 has been undone. Half way through the life of the present parliament, the Opposition is a shattered force.'³⁹ Shardha Nand, Iqbal Khan and Noor Dean signed petitions asking Koya to remain leader while another rival group threatened to collect twenty thousand signatures calling for his removal. Temo Sukunaivalu threatened to resign from the

party altogether 'because I am disgruntled with the leadership struggle and fragmentation within the party.'⁴⁰ Temo, from Ratu Mara's blue-ribbon Alliance province of Lau, was one of the most loyal members of the party. After all these years of ups and downs, he still remains a loyal NFP member. His threat to resign was a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting the party, its rapidly declining fortune.

Things went from bad to worse as bad blood spilled out into the public. In July 1985, Koya fired Irene Narayan as his deputy, without notifying her of his decision in advance, as courtesy demanded when dealing with one of the most senior members of the party.⁴¹ 'Not once did he give me the slightest indication of what he was up to,' she said somewhat incredulously, despite an hour long meeting the day before.⁴² Satendra Nandan, who had resigned his Education portfolio a month before, said that Narayan 'was unanimously elected the deputy parliamentary leader by the parliamentary board and Mr Koya has no power to remove her.'⁴³ The difference between Reddy and Koya, Nandan said, was that one kept his word, the other did not. 'There is no doubt that the resignation of Mr Jai Ram Reddy from that position [as party leader] has created high moral, political and personal standards for others to follow.' 'We can now all see that the emperor has no clothes,' he said.⁴⁴ HM Lodhia resigned his shadow Finance portfolio, but refused to vacate his seat. 'If anybody should have been displaced, it should have been Mr Koya,' said the new NFP Youth leader Chandu Lodhia. Vimal Madhavan wrote that Koya's 'dominating, at times arrogant, attitude towards his colleagues has not helped to continue the process that under Mr Reddy was welding the party back into one entity.'⁴⁵ 'Where else would a party leader — and one elected by his parliamentary colleagues with a majority of one — dismiss his deputy who was elected unanimously by those colleagues? Isn't that just asking for trouble from fellow members of parliament and party's rank and file?' The Indo-Fijian community was better educated now, and was looking for a real alternative. Old style of doing things would not do. 'The NFP supporters cannot be rounded up by traditional leaders and delivered to the voting booth in droves. The poten-

tial voters want proof that the party can deliver the goods before they will cast their votes for it.'

This was sound assessment, but Koya was not one to listen to a 'mere' journalist's judgment, even though that journalist happened to be the son of one of Koya's long time supporters and colleagues, James Madhavan. Koya argued that as the parliamentary leader, it was his prerogative to appoint whoever he wanted as his deputy. That may have been true in the narrow sense, but it also displayed poor political judgment, perhaps a reminder of how things were done in the past. Koya chose Koresi Matatolu, the leader of the rebel Fijian and General Elector group, as his deputy. This was partly to heal the widening rift within the party and partly, he said, to increase Fijian support for it to counter the inroads made among Fijians by the newly formed Fiji Labour Party. It did not need to be said that Matatolu, without a solid base of his own in the party, would be no threat to Siddiq Koya. A better course of action for Koya would have been to appoint two deputies, just as Mara had two Deputy Prime Ministers at the time. By the time this suggestion was put to him, he had already sacked Narayan.⁴⁶ The following year, Koya won further skirmishes over party leadership by denying Senator Mumtaz Ali the position of party secretary at the NFP's Nausori convention, leading eventually to Ali's resignation from the NFP altogether. Whatever his motives, Koya's old ways, when he invariably had his way, when everyone listened respectfully and unquestioningly to the leader, raised serious questions about his suitability as the head of a party seeking the reins of power. Koya may have won a few battles, but he was, unfortunately for him, also rapidly on his way to losing the war. Sadly, the once great leader was imploding in full public view.

In December 1985, Koya's closest colleagues, Shardha Nand and Subramani Baswaiya, finally agreed that he had to go. 'There is no disagreement at all between us that Mr Koya should go,' said a spokesman for the Koya group (Nand). 'But there is a slight misunderstanding as to who should replace him.' They wanted their leader to go gracefully and not be 'removed by force' as that would upset Koya's grassroots supporters. But if

he refused, they would write to the Governor General to appoint another Leader of the Opposition. 'We do not want to use this method but we will have to if Mr Koya does not see sense.'⁴⁷ A confidential report prepared by Harish Sharma, Shardha Nand and NFP treasurer Navin Patel was critical of Koya's decisions and appointments.⁴⁸ Why had he appointed Kallu Karan Singh to the Public Service Commission when the man had no apparent qualifications for it? Why had he appointed Ratu Osea Gavidi to the Senate when the Fijian leader had no real support? His sacking of Irene Jai Narayan was mentioned. And so it went. There was some talk of making Koya a shadow minister for sugar and putting him on the front bench next to the Leader of the Opposition, as a public recognition of his seniority in the party. 'He will be like a guru in the Opposition giving advice on every important issue.' But all this was no more than a symbolic gesture of contrived respect which could not hide the painful reality of the fall. It was a sad ending to a long career in the party. There was no other alternative. Koya relinquished the Opposition Leader's post to Harish Sharma in early May 1986, saying that it was time for change. It indeed was.

Further disaster for the NFP came in the by-elections caused by the resignation in July 1985 of Sir Vijay R Singh to accept the position of chief executive of the newly formed Sugar Cane Growers Council, to Koya's quiet satisfaction, as he had never worked well with the former Indian Alliance president nor forgiven him the insults and the barbs of the 1960s. Those memories were deep in the older generation. NFP chose James Shankar Singh, former president of the Indian Alliance, as its candidate for the North-Central Indian National Seat, the Alliance fielded wealthy Ba farmer Uday Singh (James' cousin) and the Fiji Labour Party chose Mahendra Chaudhry, the powerful General Secretary of the Fiji Public Servants Association and future long-term leader of the party. There was some debate whether the newly formed Labour Party should contest elections so soon, especially in a rural constituency where its strength was untested, but the decision prevailed to test the waters regardless. Chaudhry may have been a political novice, but he came from the sugar cane's heartland in western

Viti Levu and was the General Secretary of the National Farmers Union. Chaudhry also had the publicly-declared support of Irene Jai Narayan. 'The Opposition is now so totally ineffective, it would be good to have a man of his calibre there,' she said.⁴⁹

Labour, James Raman recalls, was confident of victory and prepared for a victory celebration long into the night, but the result surprised everyone. In the intensely fought campaign, Uday Singh won, capturing 8031 votes to James Shankar Singh's 5087 votes and Chaudhry's 7772. Uday Singh's victory was not altogether surprising; he was wealthy, well-connected and active in the local area, serving on various local bodies and committees. Two things though were surprising about the result. One was the low number of votes that the experienced former Cabinet Minister James Shankar Singh got. Most commentators in Fiji believed that the result would have been much worse for the NFP if they had fielded anyone other than James Shankar Singh.⁵⁰ And the other was the surprisingly strong support for the political novice Mahendra Chaudhry.⁵¹ What he got was Labour's *minimum* vote, it was clear to everyone. The writing for NFP was on the wall for all to see. Its days as the sole voice of the Indo-Fijian farming community were on the way out. 'The popular view now,' wrote Vijendra Kumar, 'is that the NFP and Sid Koya are spent forces in Fiji politics and that if Mr Koya continues in the leadership, then the NFP will continue to decline into political oblivion.'⁵²

Reddy watched the depressing fratricidal warfare in his party with growing concern. Old ways, the old divisions, old style of doing things, had returned to the party he had once united and led after the debacle of the mid-1970s. Reddy was elected president of the NFP in 1984, replacing Ram Sami Goundar, because its members wanted him to stay engaged and provide advice as an elder statesman. But he resigned from the position in 1985 and was replaced by Harish Sharma, the Nadi politician and lawyer. Reddy was out of active party politics, but he was constantly in demand at public functions. He had been instrumental in inspiring the revival of the Sangam from its moribund state caused by factionalism and frictions through a

long-remembered speech about unity and purpose. He had become the organization's legal advisor in 1976. Sangam is a non-political organization, but with Reddy in the ranks, many of its members quietly joined his camp. He played a major though un-heralded role in the sugar industry's Master Award, providing legal advice for a nominal fee. And there were numerous community obligations to attend to.

Despite the well earned break, though, politics was never far from Reddy, nor would he be left alone. He was still the unquestioned leader of the Indo-Fijian community, the man to whom they turned in their hour of need even though he was not in parliament. No one could conceive of the NFP without him, party president or not. They valued his counsel and advice. He kept his ears close to the ground, though from a discreet distance and largely out of the public eye. Reddy realized that if the status quo prevailed, with the same players on the scene playing their old games, the divisions would continue and the party would eventually self-destruct completely. The lessons of the by-elections were not lost on Reddy or on any other close observer of the Fiji political scene. The NFP was imploding, losing its grip on its traditional constituency. The advent of the new, rhetorically left leaning and nominally multiracial Fiji Labour Party had changed the political equation which could not be ignored, or ignored at the NFP's peril. Equally, Labour realized that it too could not go it alone if it was successfully to challenge the Alliance.

FIJI LABOUR PARTY

The Fiji Labour Party was formed for many reasons. Many supporters of the NFP had long been disenchanted with the party's incessant, crippling internal warfare over the battle for leadership for well over a decade. With the way things were, NFP was no longer seen as a viable alternative to the Alliance as the government-in-waiting.⁵³ The ineffectiveness of a divided and drifting opposition was brought into sharper relief by the manner in which the Alliance government was able to promulgate a number of far-

reaching policies without much debate in parliament. The signs of a party entrenched in government and unheeding of public opinion were clearly visible. *The Economist* commented on a persistent source of complaint about 'rot setting in, an excessive use of influence through ministers and an increasingly fuzzy line between politics and business. This is not serious enough to cause alarm,' it concluded, 'but it is said to have worsened rapidly in recent years.'⁵⁴

On the domestic front, education and the economy occupied the centre stage, and the government's handling of both attracted much adverse publicity, once again helping the cause of the Labour Party. The Ministry of Education's policies, under Ahmed Ali, touched sensitive chords in the teaching fraternity, initiating a long and bitter dispute. The controversy revolved around a number of specific issues. One was the new Volunteer Service Scheme under which the government proposed to give new graduate teachers employment for up to two years, on reduced salary, until permanent teaching positions became available. Under the Scheme, the government agreed to pay a salary of \$3000 with the committee-run schools in rural areas meeting other costs such as housing for the teachers. This was a move away from the former practice of 'automatic absorption,' with the government justifying it in the name of fiscal constraint. Attorney General Qoriniasi Bale argued that the 'the obligation on the government is only to see the training of the student and on the student to serve. If he is not called on to serve, then the obligation is at an end.'⁵⁵ The Fiji Teachers Confederation called the Scheme unprofessional, ill-conceived, exploitative, and, above all, imposed by the Ministry of Education without consultation with it. The student graduates dramatized their cause by staging widely publicized and emotionally charged hunger strikes. The Confederation embarked on a massive two week protest strike in which reportedly 90 per cent of the teachers participated. In late November 1985, an independent arbitrator ruled the Volunteer Scheme unlawful, but by then much damage had already been done to the government and the suspicion entrenched of a party unheeding of public criticism.

Equally vehement opposition greeted the Education Ministry's attempt to 'desegregate' the country's schools which happen by historical and geographical factors rather more than by careful design to be communal.⁵⁶ In many cases, children in Fiji complete their entire primary and secondary education without contact with children of other ethnic groups. Fortunately, in the last decade or so, this feature has diminished as parents have tended to send their children to the best schools they can afford rather than to schools which prefer to have students of a particular ethnicity. In 1985, the Ministry of Education instructed three urban government schools to re-structure their admissions policy to ensure that the new intake was made up of 40 percent each by Fijian and Indo-Fijian children, with remaining 20 per cent filled by children from other ethnic groups. This initiative, the government hoped, would enhance its avowed goal of promoting some semblance of ethnic balance in the schools' student population, especially in elite ones with the best facilities and pass rates. The Education Ministry also required that 80 per cent of the places in the new intake for the selected schools be reserved for children from families with a joint income of less than \$3500. This, it was hoped, would demonstrate the government's commitment to the poorer sections of the community. And, finally, as an integral part of its reforming effort to promote ethnic integration, the Ministry planned to transfer teachers, sending Indo-Fijian teachers to Fijian schools and vice versa.

These policies attracted opposition from diverse quarters. The Fiji Teachers Confederation, whose members would be affected by the transfers, complained of lack of consultation. Their ire focused on the Minister of Education whose frankly adversarial 'I-know-best' approach hardened attitudes. Some teachers complained of victimization in transfer decisions because of their active role in the teachers' unions. The Fijian Teachers Association told the Minister that his policy 'was not in the interest of developing Fijian education, the preservation of Fijian culture and language and developing Fijian cultural values.'⁵⁷ Tupeni Baba, a prominent Fijian educator himself, told the Fijian Teachers Association

Convention in January 1985 that while there was some need for special assistance for Fijians, probably for some time yet, it should 'be removed as soon as the need is not there and such a move should be initiated by the Fijians themselves. They should now be working out ways of removing such a special treatment because in the long run it will do damage to their self esteem and pride as a race.' He added that 'at no time in our history have we experienced as much politicization of education as we are experiencing now, and if this is allowed to continue it will undermine the development of professionalism of teachers, educators, educational administrators, and will open the schools to political abuse.'⁵⁸

The depth of the teachers' anger at the government showed in the extent to which the two racially divided unions, the Fiji Teachers Union and the Fijian Teachers Association, were able to minimize their internal differences and join forces to oppose the government. In at least one area of the teaching profession, the Ministry of Education was able, albeit unwittingly, to bring about a semblance of integration. Getting the teachers offside was a major strategic mistake for the government. Teachers play a powerful role in Fiji society. In rural areas, they are respected as guides and mentors, as exemplars of good behaviour, as interpreters of the outside world to the people. Their influence extends far beyond the reach of the classroom. By antagonizing them, the government had by extension antagonized a very large and well-connected section of the community. The teachers would form the backbone of the Fiji Labour Party. High school principal, Krishna Datt, would become its founding Secretary General.

On the economic front, too, the government faced much opposition. The years 1983 to early 1985 were bad for Fiji. A succession of tropical hurricanes and droughts had devastated the economy, causing damage estimated at \$150 million. Sugar production in 1983 declined by an alarming 46 percent, and this was accompanied by a sharp drop in the world sugar price by 25 percent since 1980. Funds earmarked for public expenditure had to be diverted for relief and rehabilitation work; in 1985, \$7 million had to be diverted for this purpose. This was a severe setback for the government,

especially since in 1985 the economy was expected to grow at a meagre 1 percent compared to 7.8 percent in 1984. There were other problems as well. The external debt was rising. It had increased at an average rate of 21 percent from \$194 million in 1980 to \$399 million in 1984. The government also had to deal with the burgeoning employee salary bill which already accounted for nearly half the annual budget and promised to become worse with the implementation of the Nicol and Hurst report (over which the Finance Minister Charles Walker had resigned).

To cope with the grim economic situation, the government unilaterally imposed a wage freeze for a year from 1 November 1984. The government explained its rationale for the drastic (draconian in the view of its critics) measure at an Economic Summit, which both the Opposition as well as the Fiji Trade Union Congress boycotted. 'Fiji is not bankrupt,' Prime Minister Mara told the Summit, 'but unless we bring some discipline and sacrifice into our national life we could move in that direction.'⁵⁹ The government expected the wage freeze to save about \$36 million which it proposed to use to create jobs in the agricultural sector, in areas such as irrigation for rice farming, cocoa projects, forestry re-planting and the construction of fisheries-related facilities. The savings would also alleviate the deteriorating balance of payment situation. The Fiji Trade Union Congress opposed the wage freeze, accusing the government of bypassing the Tripartite Forum. The Forum, comprising the FTUC, Fiji Employers Consultative Association, and the government, was formed in 1976 to reach 'a common understanding which affect the national interest such as industrial relations, job creation, greater flow of investment and general social and economic development in the country.' Although it had no statutory authority, all the three parties had 'voluntarily agreed to abide by the Forum's decision.' The government's decision now to act on its own, unilaterally, was seen as a slight, if not a slap in the face, by the FTUC.⁶⁰

The trade unionists saw the wage freeze as yet another sign of a concerted effort to suppress the trade union movement in Fiji. Some saw in the wage freeze policy a collusion between the political elite and big business to

keep wages down. Economist Wadan Narsey argued that a blanket wage freeze would especially affect the lower income families already near the poverty line.⁶¹ ‘The net effect,’ he said, ‘is the wages and salaries freeze means a transfer of employees’ savings to the employers, regardless of whether the employers will invest the extra savings.’ He questioned the logic of asking the people to sacrifice their meagre income to improve the balance of payment. ‘One must not kill the patient to cure the disease.’ He also questioned the government’s acceptance of the International Monetary Fund’s argument — which was used in part to justify the wage freeze — that the Fiji salaries were too high by 15 percent. Too high compared to what, Narsey asked. In any event, he went on, the figure was misleading as it covered a very diverse range of people, from the grossly exploited labour force in the garment industry to highly paid senior civil servants who were already beneficiaries of pay increases. All workers were not peas in the same pod.

When the government announced its wage freeze policy, James Raman, the General Secretary of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, went to Mara to explore ways of resolving the impasse. Raman was widely considered a moderate compared to Mahendra Chaudhry, who reportedly refused to accept any compromise at all. As far as Chaudhry was concerned, the government had to meet its obligation; how it did it was its business. ‘I will not be able to control my members unless the government does something about the wage freeze,’ Raman told Mara, with whom he was on cordial, golf-playing terms. The Prime Minister was caught in a dilemma. He had already lost one Finance Minister, Charles Walker, over the Nicol and Hurst report, and he did not want to lose another, he told Raman. Mosese Qionibaravi, the new Finance Minister, argued that the government had an obligation to govern, and if tough decisions had to be made, he would not be afraid to make them, and face the consequences whatever they might be. Mara said to Raman, without rancour or anger: ‘I have to do what I have to do, and you have to do what you have to do.’⁶² With those words, the two men parted company, each taking a path which would alter the course of Fiji politics forever.

The Fiji Trade Union Congress organized its own summit in May 1984 to explain its opposition to government policy. Among Raman's list of grievances included the invoking the dormant provision of the Trade Disputes Act, restricting collective bargaining, implementing rates of pay inferior to negotiated scales, and resorting to supply side economics. 'We seem to have reached a point of no return in our relationship with the government,' Raman lamented, 'so much so that threats have been held out to declare a state of emergency and calling out troop to man essential services in case of legitimate industrial action.'⁶³ On 6 December 1984, Raman told an anti-freeze rally in Lautoka: 'We must think whether this dictatorial kind of governing should go unchallenged. The time has come when we must analyze government actions and if the policies oppress us, we can also organize a party and run government. It will be the government's policies' he said, 'which will make the trade union movement political.'⁶⁴ In March 1985, the Fiji Public Servants Association, a large and powerful member of the FTUC, changed its constitution by 2914 votes to 326 to be 'free to associate itself with any organization in pursuit of workers rights.' On 6 July 1985, the Fiji Labour Party was formed, capitalizing on a groundswell of discontent with the wage freeze and a generally deteriorating economy. Dr Timoci Bavadra, a retired government health specialist, was elected President and Suva Grammar principal, Krishna Datt, the Secretary General.

The new party, its founding manifesto proclaimed, was intended to 'provide a real alternative to the political groups that currently dominate the affairs of our country.' At the heart of its ideological foundation was a commitment to democratic socialism. 'In seeking ways to overcome the many problems that face our nation and in choosing a path of national development we are committed to ensuring that this is done with the interest of the mass of the people as the foremost consideration. We believe that this is possible only through an adherence to the principles of democratic socialism.'⁶⁵ The Alliance government had run out of steam, 'blaming others for the overwhelming problems that currently face our nation, while ensuring that what little surplus we do produce goes increasingly to its wealthier

supporters.’ And the NFP, Labour argued, was a party that represented ‘no real alternative.’ It was dismissed as a party ‘that represents the interests of a handful of businessmen and lawyers, often at the expense of those who they claim to represent.’ It was, therefore, ‘highly unlikely that the lot of most Fijians would be improved under NFP rule. There would only be a new cast of self-serving characters at the top.’

COALITION

Soon after the launch of the Fiji Labour Party, talk began of a coalition. Since the Alliance was out of the picture – nor would the Alliance have countenanced a coalition with Labour under any circumstances – the focus shifted to the National Federation Party. The Ba by-elections had taught Labour the lesson that competing with the NFP in the cane belt would be suicidal and play straight into the hands of the Alliance. Going it alone was not an option. And Reddy was convinced that a three-way battle between NFP, Labour and the Alliance would be ruinous for his party, many of whose members were already looking for another alternative. But there were dissenting voices in both camps. Some Labour members, such as Simone Durutalo, an academic and a fine political thinker who died tragically young, felt that Labour should not make a bid for power at the next elections, but instead consolidate its support across the board and make a serious bid for government after the next one. Coalescing with the NFP, he felt, would play straight into the hands of the Fijian nationalists who would portray Labour as simply yet another ‘Indian’ party, or a puppet of the National Federation Party.

Even Krishna Datt had said in July 1986 that as ‘as both the Alliance and the NFP work within the framework of capitalism and FLP cannot share their ideologies.’⁶⁶ But he was overruled by the party hierarchy. Not ideological purity but defeating the Alliance and getting into government were the main priority. Some within the NFP were also concerned about political affiliation with Labour whose left-leaning ideological rhetoric they feared, while there were some who thought that the NFP should remain a

purely 'Indian' party. Among them was Siddiq Koya, concerned about a coalition with Labour diluting NFP's role as the communal voice of the Indo-Fijian community. He reportedly floated the idea of a NFP coalition with the Fijian Association to counteract Labour. What dowry would Labour bring to the party, some asked? Reddy was unmoved by the critics. Perhaps more than the fate of the party itself, he was concerned about the impact of the division on the future of the Indo-Fijian community. He knew only too well from personal experience what long-lasting havoc division could cause. When the issue of the ideological differences between Labour and the NFP were raised with him, he dismissed the concern as of little importance. Mahendra Chaudhry might be a trade unionist or a socialist or whatever, he would say, but first and foremost he was an Indian who would never do anything to injure the broader interests of the Indo-Fijian community. He spoke from experience, having known Chaudhry as a strong supporter of the NFP in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The two men were friends, if not necessarily close.

In any case, Reddy asked, what alternative was there for the party in its current state of division and disarray? By October 1986, informal contacts began between Labour and NFP. Mahendra Chaudhry had several private meetings with Harish Sharma, with whom he got along well privately and whom he thought he could persuade to accept his point of view.⁶⁷ Sharma was then the Leader of the Opposition. He was a cultured man, a published poet and a scholar of Hindi language and literature, but not a political animal like Chaudhry. The Western United Front also began to re-enter the picture, on the grounds that its 1982 coalition with the NFP was still alive and binding. For them, too, Sharma was the first point of contact. On 10 October, Sharma speculated about a three-way coalition involving Labour, NFP and the Western United Front, with WUF demanding to have a representative of its own on the selection committee.⁶⁸ Sharma said the WUF was an 'equal partner with the NFP and its members have as much right to make suggestions as any member of the NFP,' adding that this had been the understanding since 1982 and it had not changed.⁶⁹

When he realized the infeasibility of the idea, Sharma said that the Western United Front did not have the same pulling power it had in 1982, and that it would not be able to win a single Fijian communal seat on its own. As for the Fijian national seats, the NFP and Labour would be able to win these on their own in any case. As the Western United Front was a Fijian party, Sharma told Gavidi, 'and Labour has greater Fijian following, WUF would have to negotiate directly with that party about the Coalition.'⁷⁰ Sharma knew very well that Labour would not concede an inch of anything to anyone, let alone to a political party which was in its twilight. And WUF had nothing to offer which Labour would approve or could not itself offer. The truth was that NFP–WUF Coalition had, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist soon after the 1982 general elections, and the WUF approach now was little more than a last minute attempt to revive the party's flagging fortune.

The early informal discussions were discarded by the NFP's Working Committee which met in Ba on 9 October, much to Labour's chagrin which thought it had much better chance of success with Sharma at the helm. At that meeting, the party settled on a coalition arrangement with Labour in principle, and authorized Jai Ram Reddy to negotiate the pact. His negotiating team included Harish Sharma, President Balwant Singh Rakkha, Treasurer Vinod Patel, Legal Advisor Bhupendra Patel and the party General Secretary Harnam Singh Golian. It was a formidable group that meant business. It is interesting, too, that two of Koya's formerly staunch supporters, Rakkha and Golian, were with Reddy now and not with Koya who, as we shall see, would be singing a different tune altogether. The Fiji Labour Party delegation was led by Party President Dr Timoci Bavadra, Assistant General Secretary Mahendra Chaudhry, General Secretary Krishna Datt and Joeli Kalou. By November, the negotiations were complete. There is no written record of the proceedings, but its main features soon became clear. It was agreed that Dr Bavadra would lead the NFP–FLP Coalition, and Harish Sharma would be the Deputy Leader. Reddy would not stand in the elections, despite pleas from all sides.

Leadership decided, there was the more contentious issue of seat allocation to consider. Half the Indian communal seats and half of the winnable national seats would be shared equally between the two parties. For Reddy the Coalition was broad church, a big family, all on the same side of the political divide, where minor matters of privilege, of who got what, did not matter much in the end. Those in the Labour camp had other ideas, though, hoping to use the opportunity of sharing seats to eventually displace, if not annihilate, the NFP altogether. Mahendra Chaudhry, the future would reveal, was not one to share the limelight with anyone. For him, as we shall see, associating with another political party or organization was always a strategic move. For the moment, it made sense to work within a broader structure to consolidate his position from which a bid for power could be made later.

The seat-sharing formula enabled Labour to project itself into the hitherto impregnable Indian communal constituencies, guaranteeing them six seats in parliament, while the NFP was spared the almost certain humiliation of losing some of its blue ribbon communal seats either to Labour or, more unthinkably, to the Alliance in the event of a serious split in the communal votes. Another notable feature was the acceptance by the predominantly Indo-Fijian NFP of Dr Timoci Bavadra as the leader of the Coalition. It represented a significant shift of opinion in the party which, just a decade earlier, had not accepted Ratu Julian Toganivalu as its leader. Jai Ram Reddy's hand is evident. It was not important who the leader was, he would say often; what was important was that your fundamental interests were protected. Balwant Singh Rakkha added that he would have no difficulty working with Labour under Dr Bavadra because 'in reality Labour was part of the NFP,' a characterization many in Labour would have scoffed at.⁷¹ And Reddy, like everyone else, saw in Dr Timoci Bavadra an essentially decent man, a bit naïve perhaps, but not politically manipulative or ambitious for himself, a man with a caring heart and an overarching vision for the country as a whole. In 1999, he would express the same view when the NFP agreed to have the leader of the SVT as Prime Minister and

the NFP's leader Deputy Prime Minister if the NFP–SVT Coalition won the election. Reddy would be roundly condemned as a defeatist by the Fiji Labour Party, 'selling out' the Indian interest by accepting a subservient position, but Reddy's assessment was both realistic as well as visionary. The reality was that for the NFP to achieve any measure of power a coalition with another party with a Fijian leader and a political philosophy broadly compatible with its own, was the only route to proper representation in government.

Another result of the coalition arrangement was the formulation of a compromise manifesto which whittled down some of Labour's more radical sounding economic policies, such as encouraging worker participation in the management of industry, the imposition of a minimum wage, the nationalization of selected industries, reforms in the Fijian military which was in the danger of 'becoming little more than a band of mercenaries.'⁷² To remove any lingering doubt about where Coalition stood on the role of the private enterprise, Dr Bavadra said in his concluding election address: 'We plan to offer special assistance to foreign investors and streamline official procedures so as to prevent bureaucratic red tape from stifling business incentives. I reaffirm the Coalition's recognition and acceptance of the vital role of the private sector in the development of the nation. There is no threat. The private sector must remain. It will remain.'⁷³

The Coalition had half-heartedly talked about promoting a nuclear-free Pacific. It was an almost obligatory gesture to the Labour's Party's vocal, intellectual left. The platform caught some international attention, especially at a time when New Zealand was vigorously pursuing its anti-nuclear policy under Prime Minister David Lange. The United States was worried about losing its long-time Pacific ally, Ratu Mara. The Cold War was still on. But during the campaign, Harish Sharma indicated his 'personal view' that he favoured strong links with the United States. Even the future Foreign Minister Krishna Datt told General Vernon Walters, United States ambassador to the United Nations then visiting Fiji: 'We are collecting a series of formula from other countries; we even have sought some

assistance from the US as to their own collection of formalities which they might have with some other countries.⁷⁴ Such pragmatism was common sense as foreign policy never played a major role in Fijian politics anyway.

From the outset, Labour insisted that they start with a clean slate of candidates and discard the old guard of the NFP who had been the cause of so much friction and factionalism in the party and the Indo-Fijian community generally. They did not want bad baggage imported into the new structure. It was therefore ironic that in later years, Labour would lament the fate of these people, including especially that of Siddiq Koya, and blame Reddy for it! The Coalition selection committee endorsed only five of the sitting parliamentarians, two of whom, Devendra Singh and Satendra Nandan, were already in the Labour camp (by crossing the floor): Navin Patel, Harish Sharma, and Temo Sukunaivalu. Among those who missed out were Siddiq Koya, Shardha Nand, Subramani Baswaiya, Iqbal Khan (mostly old Doves), Anirudh Kuver, WUF's Ratu Osea Gavidi, Isikeli Nadalo along with many other old stalwarts of the National Federation Party, including its Vice President, Koresi Matatolu, who had to make way for Dr Bavadra. Balwant Singh Rakkha was retained despite vigorous objection from Labour. Dropped parliamentarian Anirudh Kuver characterized NFP's seat allocation approach as a 'perfect example of extravagant zeal and a clear manifestation of political immaturity of the highest order.'⁷⁵ His disappointment was understandable: he was once the General Secretary of the party

As was to be expected, the dropped and the discarded would not accept their fate 'lying down,' as a favourite Fiji phrase goes. Once they got an inkling of the decision of the selection committee, they mobilized their troops into action. Throughout December 1986 and January 1987, they arranged a series of private meetings to mount a counteroffensive against the NFP team which had negotiated with Labour. Siddiq Koya told a motley NFP convention in Nausori organized by Shardha Nand, the principal instigator of the move, that the coalition agreement with Labour 'had many deficiencies and must be revised without delay.' 'I did support

the Coalition,' Koya said in his message to the meeting (he did not attend in person), 'but regrettably I cannot support the procedure or the terms upon which the selection was carried out.'⁷⁶ 'The NFP is not for sale,' Koya thundered, 'and neither is the Indian community.'⁷⁷ Had he known 'what I know now, I would most certainly have vetoed any attempts to have a committee to negotiate Coalition.'⁷⁸ That was an empty threat. Koya could not have 'vetoed' anything, let alone the selection of the candidates authorized by the party's Working Committee, because he was neither the President, nor the Secretary nor the Leader at that time. Harish Sharma recalled: 'Mr Koya was present in two meetings in Ba in which the Coalition issue was discussed. Mr Koya was present when the mandate was given to Mr Jai Ram Reddy to lead the negotiating team to talk to Labour. Mr Koya was also present when the selection procedure was announced. It's a bit late in the day to raise an objection.'⁷⁹

The Nausori meeting decided to appoint Koya, even in his absence, to head a team of five to re-visit the terms of the Coalition. The committee was authorized to re-negotiate the selection of candidates with a 'view to ensuring the true representation of the people,' whatever that meant, to make the terms and conditions of the coalition public, and to have them formally approved by the joint NFP–WUF Working Committee.⁸⁰ To boot, the Nausori convention resolved that the Ba meeting, which had authorized Jai Ram Reddy to lead the NFP negotiating team, was unconstitutional. Early in February, 1987 Shardha Nand filed a Supreme Court writ to have the Ba meeting annulled.⁸¹ It was NFP politics old style. Nand had been in this game for sometime, a clever, smooth operator, adept at bureaucratic infighting, manoeuvring to get himself into a position of power in the party. In December 1986, for example, he had tried to organize a petition by some of the sitting NFP parliamentarians to have Harish Sharma replaced as the Leader of the Opposition by himself.⁸² 'Labour got everything,' he said, 'and gave nothing away.' NFP needed a 'stronger leader' and he, of course, was the man for the job. The move failed because everyone saw through Nand's transparent ruse.

Siddiq Koya, too, felt that the NFP negotiating team had conceded too much ground. Perhaps his trained and finely tuned political antennae told him not to trust the leaders of another political party seeking coalition too much, certainly not one led by such ambitious ‘Young Turks’ in the Labour Party. In hindsight, his suspicion seems well founded, but the reality on the ground constrained the choices available to the party leaders at the time. Why couldn’t the leadership of the Coalition be rotated every two and half years in the five year life of the parliament, he asked?⁸³ The Fiji Labour Party, he said, was a collection of defectors and disgruntled ‘good boys’ of the Alliance.⁸⁴ He had in mind people like the FTUC general secretary James Raman. Alluding to Reddy and the events of April 1977, Koya said, ‘The Indians had a great chance then because they were given the mandate by the country to have an Indian as Prime Minister, but these same people stabbed me in the back then.’⁸⁵ It was a true and tried Koya line of attack when cornered, but by now the accusation carried no conviction. He had contested the 1982 election under the same man he was now accusing of stabbing him in the back and whom he would nominate for parliamentary elections later.

Reddy would not budge. He told the NFP Working Committee meeting that if they wanted him ‘to support the party then I would do so only if there was a coalition of NFP and Labour’ because as he saw it, ‘a three way fight would be disastrous for NFP.’⁸⁶ Everyone agreed, and everyone also knew that the party could not do without Reddy. Speaking at the launch of the NFP–FLP Coalition at the Girmit Centre in Lautoka in February 1987, Reddy turned on the rebels, saying that they were nothing but ‘Alliance puppets,’ ‘men without cause.’ They were only about themselves. ‘The “I” is the dominant consideration. “I did not get a ticket” is the cause, and in that cause of the “I” they are bent upon causing harm to the people of this nation,’ he said. ‘What is more unfortunate,’ he continued, ‘is that there is an element of vindictiveness in their approach.’⁸⁷ ‘Political parties must cater for the legitimate political aspirations of the people,’ Reddy agreed, ‘but they cannot cater for the blind ambitions of selfish individuals.’ ‘Our people

may be simple, but they can see and think clearly. They see them clearly for what they are: selfish, self-seeking men bent upon causing harm to the very people they profess to serve.' He continued:

Compromise and accommodation in politics is good. But there is a limit. We cannot run a party without discipline. We must insist upon discipline. Those who do not accept that have no place with us. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. There is definitely no room in this Coalition for people who have no political conscience. We certainly have no place for political double-dealers, for men who get elected on our strength and serve the cause of our opponents. It is time to say good-bye to them.

Why do you have to be in parliament to serve the people, Reddy often asked. Why couldn't they for once support the candidates chosen by the party? It was a fair question, but for many, parliament was, and still remains, the cherished ticket to perks and privileges and a brief moment in the public limelight which they would not otherwise ever have. *Pet Puja*, self interest, above everything else, is, alas, an all too common a human failing, and not only among aspiring NFP politicians. It is beyond doubt that given a party ticket to contest the elections, those critical of Reddy would have happily abandoned whatever cause they were championing and joined the Coalition. That is the way of politics in Fiji.

THE 1987 CAMPAIGN


The campaign for the general election began early in the year, partly in anticipation of a February poll. It was long and unremarkable lacking, for instance, the dramatic tension of the last stages of the 1982 campaign when the contents of the Carroll Report were revealed by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, or the intense and ultimately self destructive struggle between the competing factions of the NFP in the September 1977 elections. But the campaign had its own unique features that helped to define its distinctive character. Learning from past experience, both the Alliance and the Coalition dispensed with the laborious public spectacle of

BEFORE THE STORM



*With Balwant Singh Rakḡha, NFP President (above),
Feb 1987, and with Doctor Bavadra (below), July,
addressing a post-coup rally. Photo courtesy of Fiji Times.*







**NFP / LABOUR
COALITION**

SUVA RALLY

DATE: WEDNESDAY 25th MARCH,
1986
TIME: 5.30pm
PLACE: SUVA CIVIC CENTRE
CHAIRMAN: MR MAHENDRA
P. CHAUDHRY

SPEAKERS:

- DR TIMOCI BAVADRA
- MR R.D. PATEL
- MR OSCAR RAYMOND
- MRS EMA DRUAVESI
- MR JAI RAM REDDY
- MR JAMES RAMAN
- MR BHUPENDRA PATEL

 **VOTE – COALITION** 
FOR CLEAN AND CARING GOVERNMENT

*A typical NFP–FLP
campaign advertisement.
Note the absence of the NFP
symbol, the Mango Tree.
Courtesy of Fiji Times.*

touring the country to select candidates from a list prepared by constituency committees. Now, candidates were selected from a list of applications. This more centralized approach gave the parties more time to focus on each other rather than deal with internal squabbles. It also produced an avalanche of defections as frustrated would-be candidates switched parties, though all suffered ignominious defeat at the polls.

Another significant difference between the 1987 election and previous ones was that, for the first time since the advent of elections in Fiji, the leaders of both the ruling as well as the opposition parties were ethnic Fijians. This fact diluted, though never completely eliminated, the exploitation of racial anxieties during the campaign, as we shall see. The Alliance

sought to portray Bavadra as a Fijian in name only. In truth, Mrs Irene Jai Narayan said, taking the Fijian nationalist line, that he was a puppet of the Indo-Fijian political leaders, including Jai Ram Reddy, who were using him to realize their ultimate goal of political dominance.⁸⁸ The divisive issue of race was supplanted by other emotionally charged distinctions, such as regionalism and class. Many Fijians saw in the election a contest between commoner Fijians from western Viti Levu led by Dr Bavadra and the traditional chiefly elite led by Ratu Mara. The Coalition Fijians talked freely about circumscribing the role that traditional chiefs should play in the modern, multiracial political arena, and this appeared to threaten the chiefs' own aspirations for an increased role for themselves.

Fijian institutions, which were once taboo topics for public discussion and comment because of their deep sensitivities, became the subject of open campaign talk in a way they had never been. Among them was the Native Land Trust Board, created in 1940 and responsible for the leasing and administration of all Fijian native land. The NLTB was a powerful indigenous institution. The Governor General was its president, the Minister for Fijian Affairs its chairman, with five members appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs and three appointed by the Fijian Affairs Board, and not more than two non-Fijians. The composition and function of the Board could not be changed except with the consent of six of the eight Great Council of Chiefs' nominees in the Senate. Despite its august status, the NLTB was becoming increasingly unpopular. The Carroll Report had found that only 44 per cent of the Fijians and 30 per cent of Indo-Fijians thought that the organization was doing a 'good job,' while 39 per cent of both communities thought the NLTB was doing a 'bad job.' In his inaugural speech launching the Fiji Labour Party, Dr Bavadra had said:

The NLTB must be democratized so that it comes to serve the interests of all Fijians and not just the privileged few and their business associates. In addition, more effort must be made to see to it that those whose land is being used get more for their money out of the NLTB. It is impossible at present to see how the level of

administrative charges that are levied are justified on the basis of services performed. If the NLTB is to take the money that it does, then it must do more for those who it is supposed to be serving. It is also important that steps be taken to rationalize the benefits derived from land use in Fiji. The system must be rationalized so that all Fijians, not just a few, benefit more. In addition, a great deal more must be done to enable the people of Fiji to increase the productivity of their land. More services and better infrastructure must be provided. This may difficult, but ways must be found.⁸⁹

As part of its reform plans, the Coalition — it was originally Labour's idea — promised to establish a National Land Commission, comprising representatives of the government, the landowners and the tenants to keep a watchful eye on NLTB, adjudicate land disputes, and facilitate communication between the owners of the land and its users. The Coalition proposed to modernize and rationalize land usage to provide maximum benefit to its owners and a greater sense of security to its tenants. Opening up new areas and utilizing existing Crown land to meet the genuine needs of both Fijians and Indo-Fijians was a part of the Coalition's strategy. 'If the people are willing to work the land, be they Fijians or Indians or any other, we want to give them the opportunity to produce from land so far unutilized in order to feed their families and earn for themselves a living and in the process benefit the country.' The audacity of the idea is not as astonishing as simply the fact that it was raised at all as an issue in the campaign, without racial overtones even though the Alliance could not resist making it a racial issue. In the past, any Indo-Fijian who dared to talk about land, in whatever context, would have been hounded mercilessly. Mahendra Chaudhry realized this to his great political cost during his brief tenure as prime minister in 2000.

The talk of a Land Commission gave Mara the opening he needed to raise deep-seated Fijian fears about being dispossessed. Setting up of a Land Commission was 'very dangerous thinking,' Ratu Mara told a Fijian Association rally at Lautoka, 'and Fijians should be very wary of it because it could lead to the slipping away of native land.' Who would be on the

Commission, he asked. Was Bavadra 'not aware that a common identity would also mean that non-indigenous people would claim native land?'⁹⁰ Dr Bavadra responded with devastating logic. 'As one of the architects of Fiji's constitution, he [Mara] should be fully aware that ownership of all classes of land is protected under the constitution.' 'All those who know the constitution,' he continued, 'know fully well that no changes to the Native Land Act are possible unless both House of Parliament sanction it by a majority of no less than three quarters., and four of the six Senators nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs concur.'

That being so, Dr Bavadra questioned Ratu Mara's motive in raising the land issue in such a provocative way, and wondered whether the Alliance leader had opted 'to abandon national leadership in favour of narrow political interests.'⁹¹ The Coalition's rhetoric also sent waves of fear and concern among the hereditary chiefly classes. For the first time, a credible opposition was being led by an ethnic Fijian, a middle ranking chief from the traditionally neglected western parts of Fiji against sections represented by high chiefs from the maritime provinces. In a society where ascribed status, hierarchy and protocol are accorded the greatest weight and where traditional political ideology holds that the business of political leadership should ideally be the business of chiefs, Bavadra's ascension posed problems. Bavadra and his Fijian colleagues in the Coalition represented in many ways the coming of age of a new generation of Fijians while Mara and the other paramounts stressed their links with the past. They were, in truth, creatures and creations of the past.

The 'new' Fijians were urban-based professionals who had achieved success by the dint of their individual effort and sacrifices. They were men and women of achieved status and essentially middle class values. They still paid their dues to their villages and continued, as best as they could, to nurture the old links, but the process of distancing from their traditional roots was becoming increasingly clear and irreversible. For their livelihood as teachers, doctors, public servants, skilled workers, they depended on the infrastructure of the modern, multiracial community. Their social and

material world had widened considerably as a result of their exposure to influences that could not even be imagined by their kinsfolk still in the villages. In 1976, 79, 314 (36.3 per cent of the total Fijian population) lived in urban areas; in 1986, the number had risen to 107,780 (38.9 per cent). And the numbers were increasing.

In the villages, too, important changes were taking place which had the cumulative effect of undermining the basis of Fijian social structure and its institutions of leadership. The adoption of imported tools and equipment increased individual productivity and lessened the need for communal effort. The monetization of the village economy emphasized the primacy of the nuclear family over the communal group. The growing importance of cash crops – banana, ginger, sugar cane – and the growing links to the urban centres facilitated by improved communication, emphasized the need for individual initiative and enterprise ever more which went against the grain of traditional ethos. Changes in land use patterns, the tendency to lease other *mataqalis'* land directly outside the agency of the NLTB, and thus gain for many Fijians a measure of independence for the duration of the lease, all detracted from the former cohesiveness of the village life in which the institution of chiefly leadership was of prime importance. As geographer Gerard Ward noted, 'The combined introduction of new skills, new technology and money has weakened the functional cement which binds the native Fijian village society. This does not mean that the structure has collapsed, or will do so in the near future. It does mean that the risk of disintegration exists if other factors shake the edifice.'⁹² Among those factors would be the Coalition's social and economic policies.

The Coalition Fijians also talked about circumscribing the role traditional chiefs should play in the modern multiracial arena, and this threatened the chiefs' own aspirations of increased roles for themselves beyond the confines of the village communal system. The Alliance, many of whose own leaders were high chiefs, saw no particular conflict at all. As Ratu David Toganivalu said, the ties between the *turaga* (chiefs) and the *vanua* (land, people) were indivisible; one could not exist without the other. 'They

are the protectors of the rights of Indians and General Electors in Fiji.' The Coalition Fijians saw things differently: 'The chiefly system is a time-honoured and sacred institution of the *taukei*. It is a system for which we have the deepest respect and which we will defend. But we also believe that a system of modern democracy is one which is quite separate from it. The individual's democratic right to vote in our political system does not mean that he has to vote for a chief. It is an absolutely free choice.'⁹³

The criticisms of chiefs went further. The Coalition criticized the disparity which existed between the policies the chiefs espoused and the practices which they actually followed. The chiefs were entering the world of commerce and business and doing rather well for themselves, while they were exhorting their people to follow the path of custom and tradition: 'By restricting the Fijian people to their communal life style in the face of rapidly developing cash economy, the average Fijian has become more and more backward. This is particularly invidious when the leaders themselves have amassed huge personal wealth by making use of their traditional and political powers.' Such pointed words, spoken openly in public for the first time by Fijians themselves, could not by any stretch of the imagination be dismissed as a racially motivated attack on Fijian institutions, as criticisms by non-Fijians had been in the past. They encouraged dissent and debate among the restive Fijian youth and others in urban areas for whom tradition was no longer enough to survive on.

The disparity in the growth and development of the different provinces had been the subject of internal debate among Fijians for a long time. Sakeasi Butadroka had raised it at the national level in the 1970s. Now, a decade later, the Coalition had seized upon it again. And once again, Lau was the target. Senator Inoke Tabua, from Lau, had said on the eve of the elections: 'If the Prime Minister [Mara] steps down today, there will be trouble tomorrow. You push us too much and you are on the brink.'⁹⁴ Dr Bavadra had set the tone of the debate at the first Labour convention in 1986:

It is important that we remind ourselves that the government resources poured into Lakeba are derived from wealth produced

by others in the country ... they only serve to increase regional inequality and take resources away from places where they could of more benefit to the nation. It is time that we stopped viewing the rest of Fiji as serving the interest of a few centres in the east. The people of Lakeba are entitled to a share in the national wealth, but just a share. It is time that we had a government that is more truly national in outlook.⁹⁵

Ratu Mara denied the charge, but evidence showed that aid money and development projects funded by foreign sources did flow more generously into the maritime provinces than to other areas. And there was undeniable disparity in the allocation of scholarship money among Fijians.⁹⁶ The civil service also had a higher proportion of 'islanders' over 'mainlanders.' The Coalition's balanced approach to regional development hurt more than the Lauan pride. It also threatened their continued privileges in the future. Their swift reaction was therefore not surprising. There were probably very good reasons for the glaring disparity between the provinces, going back to the beginning of colonial rule in late-19th century, when the friendly, collaborating regions were rewarded for their loyalty by the British and the resisting provinces punished. But that long and complex history mattered little in the intense heat of the election campaign.

In the 1987 campaign for the first time, Ratu Mara's personal as well as political record came under intense and unrelenting scrutiny, especially by and among Fijians. And the fact that it was a Fijian leader rather than an Indo-Fijian, and the head of an *i tokatoka* (family group) from western Viti Levu at that, who led the charge against a paramount chief, the *Sau ni Vanua ʻko Lau* no less, the overlord for the entire Lau province, made matters worse, because he could not be dismissed as his former Indo-Fijian opponents often were. Mara was accused of being arrogant and dictatorial, pursuing policies which undermined the interests of workers and others at the bottom of the economic ladder, to the benefit of his big business supporters in the garment industry, for example, who had contributed to \$52,000 to the Alliance campaign chest, to prevent the passage of minimum

wage legislation for the industry. His 1984 wage freeze policy came in for criticism as well as the bypassing of the Tripartite Forum. Then there were the unprecedented criticism of his alleged family wealth, including the leasing of the family-owned Marella House to the Ministry of Education on a rental reportedly higher than that recommended by the government assessor. Whether it was age or fatigue from the routine of intense campaigning, Ratu Mara was not the same forceful and energetic campaigner he had been in the past. His team, too, looked tired, displaying what one observer called a 'dangerous state of arrogant complacency.'⁹⁷

All this became evident during the last leg of the campaign. But things were different in the beginning. Confident of victory, the Alliance adopted a dismissive attitude towards the Coalition. Ratu Mara set the tone in November 1986 when, referring to the Labour politicians, he asked: 'What have the Johnnys-come-lately done in the promotion of national unity?'⁹⁸ He returned to this theme again and again throughout the campaign, contrasting it with his own and his government's long experience. He was determined to remain in harness. 'Time will come,' he said in a radio address, 'the time may not be long in coming when the leadership of this fair land must pass on to other hands. That is inevitable, but the hour has not yet struck! When it does, I will willingly lay down the burden and thank you for the privilege of serving you. Until then, I will answer the call. I will keep the faith. Ratu Mara will stay.'⁹⁹

Dr Bavadra became the target of a sneering newspaper campaign. In a typical advertisement, the Alliance said: 'Bavadra has never been in parliament. He has no EXPERIENCE. He has no INFLUENCE. The Council of Chiefs does NOT listen to him. The international scene where we will sell our sugar has NEVER heard of him. He cannot get renewal of leases for farmers.'¹⁰⁰ In the opening Alliance campaign address over the radio, Moses Qionibaravi, the Deputy Prime Minister, had called Bavadra an 'unqualified unknown.' The Coalition was often portrayed as weak, vacillating and untrustworthy. One typical Alliance advertisement said: 'The opposition factions are fragmented and quarrelling

among themselves. Their policies are confused and shift constantly as one group or would-be leader gains ascendancy. Principles are proclaimed as fundamental and are then dropped when pressures are applied by vested interests, or political expediency.' For its part, the Alliance was 'united in purpose, strong and fully accepted leadership, clear and consistent policies, and a political philosophy with values that have been proved by experience.' Of all the allegations against the Coalition, the one about squabbles for leadership was completely untrue. Bavadra was the Coalition leader respected by all and criticized by none. His humility and a common touch endeared him to the Coalition supporters and more than made up for his political inexperience and perhaps even a degree of naivety. The 'Doc' was their undisputed leader.

The Alliance's major concern was the slippage of Fijian votes to the Coalition, the same slippage which had caused its downfall in April 1977 and near-defeat in 1982. It appealed for Fijian unity and instilled concern, if not actual fear, about the consequences for Fijians of a Coalition victory. The unmistakable Alliance message was that only a government headed by a high chief could guarantee the security of Fijian interests. 'Fijians have the political leadership despite being outnumbered in this country,' said Mara menacingly. 'If they failed to unite that leadership would slip from them.'¹⁰¹ And Mara accused the Coalition of trying to undermine Fijian leadership by taking up mainly Fijian causes with the intention of discrediting the Alliance, such as the Nasomo land dispute in Vatukoula, the plight of the cocoa growers in Vanua Levu, and competing claims of ownership of Yanuca Island in which his own wife, Adi Lady Lala Mara, was involved. Mara's overtly racial appeal surprised many. A *Fiji Sun* editorial said: 'In past elections, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara called for political parties not to indulge in politics of fear, and not to fight the election on racial lines. But now the Prime Minister himself has begun a racially oriented campaign. His call for the Fijians to unite to retain political leadership is unwarranted. If every individual race began campaigning on these lines, the country would be in trouble.'¹⁰²

Fijians were told not only to fear the loss of their land and cultural heritage, but were also warned about the danger of embracing foreign ideologies. In this regard, the Coalition's advocacy of democratic socialism came in for a particularly savage attack. Democratic Socialism was a system, the Alliance told its supporters, 'in which LAND, FACTORIES, MINES, SHOPS, etc are ALL OWNED by the STATE and the COMMUNITY. This is opposed to the present system in Fiji where ownership of Fijian land rests exclusively with Fijian *mataqali*, and businesses belong to individuals or shareholders in a public company.' The fact some Coalition (as indeed had some government ministers as well) had visited Moscow at one time or another, usually for a conference, was presented as further indisputable proof of the Coalition's nefarious socialist designs. Exaggerations and distortions are a regular feature of Fiji elections and probably of elections everywhere. Minor disagreements are blown up into major differences of principle and policy, criticism of individuals portrayed as an insult to their ethnicity, their *vanua*. The Alliance's strident attacks showed just how keenly aware they were of the closeness of the contest.

In contrast to the Alliance, the Coalition entered the campaign as the distinct underdog, under-funded and unable initially to match the Alliance in the media wars. The Coalition was a party of and for the poor, election rallies heard, which had the interests of the underdogs truly at heart and with plans for their betterment through balanced development, poverty alleviation plans and social justice programs. It charged the Mara administration with abuse of power and reminded the electorate of the mounting economic difficulties for lower income families. In his concluding campaign speech over radio, Bavadra said: 'Wage and salary earners remember the wage and job freeze; farmers remember their extreme hardships and insecurities; rural dwellers remember the high prices; parents remember the increased bus fares; squatters remember physical removal and neglect; teachers remember Dr Ahmed Ali's reign of terror in the Ministry of Education; students remember the pain of their hunger strike; the *taukei* remember that most of Fijian development money goes to a few provinces.'

It was 'Time for Change,' he said. The theme caught the imagination of the voters, especially of the younger generation which had come of age during the long reign of the Mara administration since 1966, and which yearned for something different, someone new.

Rhetorical excesses and allegations aside, the campaign brought into sharp relief some genuine differences between the two parties. Leadership was one such issue. The Alliance projected an image of unity, purpose and experience. The Coalition, on the other hand, was portrayed as a bunch of professional critics whose view of the world was 'so flawed that it would not pass as seconds.' Ratu Mara was, once again, the party's trump card, its principal pulling power. He vowed to fight on to the end. 'I have not yet finished the job I started and until I can ensure that unshakable foundations have been firmly laid and cornerstones are set in place, I will not yield to the vaulting ambitions of a power crazy gang of amateurs, none of whom has run anything, not even a bingo party.' The future of Fiji and that of the Alliance party were inextricably linked. Without his and his party's leadership, Mara said, Fiji would go down the path of 'rack and ruin', becoming another of those developing countries 'torn apart by racial strife and drowning in debt, where basic freedoms are curtailed, universities closed down, the media throttled and dissenters put into jail and camps.'¹⁰³ This was as stark a scenario as it was possible to paint at the time.

There was an added edge to Mara's campaign. He was especially irked that Indo-Fijians had preferred Bavadra over him as Prime Minister. Observed Indian High Commissioner TP Sreenivasan: 'He was sore that Indians wanted Bavadra rather than him as Prime Minister and he told me each time I met him that no one had done more for Fiji Indians than him. He would have understood if they had backed an Indian as Prime Minister, he said, knowing well that previous efforts to make an Indian the Prime Minister of Fiji had failed.'¹⁰⁴ Ridiculing Bavadra became an integral part of the Alliance campaign. But the more he was attacked, the more strongly his supporters rallied behind him. Ratu Mara's long incumbency presented a real challenge for Dr Timoci Bavadra. Unlike the Alliance leader, he was a

newcomer to politics and virtually unknown outside the health and the trade union circles. By profession a medical doctor, Bavadra had held a number of senior positions in the civil service. He came from a chiefly background from Viseisei village in Vuda, though he himself was not a high chief. The Alliance's attempt to box him in as a puppet of the Indian leaders, as 'nothing more than a mere pawn of the evil, scheming Reddy,' as then *Fiji Times* reporter Richard Naidu recalled, forced Dr Bavadra frequently to defend his 'Fijianness' as well as his party's platform.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the campaign, though, he had managed to turn public opinion decidedly in his favour. His unassuming character and common touch, accessibility and openness, and a certain infectious sense of humour and capacity for laughter, contrasted with Mara's characteristic aloofness, and projected an image of a compassionate man who could be trusted.

The Alliance campaigned on its record of experience and stability, while the Coalition drew support by launching a concerted attack against it. The Alliance, it said, 'had reneged on the fundamental principles of democratic responsibility and accountability. It pretends to be democratic but in fact puts all decisions in the hands of a very few. This brand of democracy aids a few at the expense of the vast majority.' The Coalition accused the Alliance of perpetuating the politics of racial separation, similar in effect if not in name, it said, to the apartheid system of South Africa. The difference between the two was 'one of degree, not one of substance,' it said to calculated exaggeration. For its part, the Alliance reaffirmed its opposition to 'any suggestion of constitutional change that would weaken or destroy the principle of guaranteed representation of Fiji's major racial groups in the House of Representatives.'

To check what it saw as the abuse of power, the Coalition proposed an anti-corruption bill, a code of conduct for parliamentarians, and the abolition of all legislation that fostered secrecy in government, including especially the Official Secrets Act. Mara was dismissive, with some justification. 'Allow me simply to say that there is no country in the world today in which similar concerns do not emblazon the headlines. The fact

is that these problems are a by-product of modernization. Fiji neither has a monopoly on these problems nor are they extensive and corrosive here.' 'I firmly believe,' Ratu Mara told his supporters, 'that these elections will be crucial to the future of our homeland. Let there be no doubt in your mind: Fiji is not so much at a turning point as it is at the crossroads. If we take the wrong direction, we will finish up in blind alleys, from which there will be no return and no way out.'¹⁰⁶ Prophetic words: perhaps the Alliance leader had the premonition of something that escaped the others.

While everyone accepted Dr Timoci Bavadra as the undisputed leader of the NFP–FLP Coalition, everyone also accepted Jai Ram Reddy as his effective deputy even though he was not a candidate. One observer called Reddy the 'star performer in the general election,' saying that he had eclipsed Harish Sharma, the Leader of the Opposition, and even Bavadra who 'stood in Mr Reddy's shadow.'¹⁰⁷ Until 1987, Reddy's political campaign forays had been confined largely to the Indo-Fijian community. In 1987, for the first time, Fijians and General Voters saw him in action on the campaign trail as he addressed campaign rallies around the country. In contrast to Bavadra, Reddy was eloquent and charismatic, holding his audiences spellbound, speaking from the heart, often without notes, inspiring trust and confidence in the Coalition. He was the featured speaker at all the major Coalition rallies, their star attraction. For the Indo-Fijians, he was the man to whom they looked up. They reposed their complete trust in him. They often turned up at rallies to listen to him more than to any other person. Mahendra Chaudhry was then an inexperienced, halting public speaker and not nearly as well known nationally as Reddy. A theme of Reddy's speeches, to which he would return again and again later in his political career, was the need for the two communities to work together. In political integration lay the salvation of both the communities.

To Indo-Fijians, he spoke almost philosophically to shed their fears about not having their leases renewed if they voted for the Coalition, for example, or upheaval if their party won and to stand up for their rights as equal citizens of Fiji. A life lived in fear, he said repeatedly, was not a

life worth living. 'Don't be like Jelly fish,' he told a four hundred-strong meeting in Malolo in March 1987. 'Be bold and cast your votes in the April elections.' 'For far too long we have been caught in the quagmire of racial and communal politics,' he told another rally. 'The common man feels alienated while government is seen to be for rich friends, relatives and hangers-on. The test for our democracy and its institutions is its ability to accept change.'¹⁰⁸ To the Alliance's promise of roads, telephones and piped water, Reddy told his rallies, 'Nothing will be a greater tragedy than people who sell their rights for a few dollars.' And so it went. All the opponents of the Coalition that Reddy had put together were silenced. Koya was nowhere to be seen. Shardha Nand was dispiritedly fighting a battle he knew he would lose. And Ratu Osea Gavidi was in the political wilderness, fading fast, his Western United Front a distant and to some a disreputable memory. Jai Ram Reddy was the man of the moment, James Raman has recalled. 'He single handedly delivered us the Coalition victory. No one worked harder in the campaign than Reddy.'

Given the racial system of voting that Fiji had, national elections became, in effect, racial census. The communal seats were a foregone conclusion. Whether a national seat was winnable or not depended on the ethnic composition of the electorate. A national seat with a preponderance of Fijian voters was a safe Alliance bet, and likewise a safe bet for the NFP if it had greater number of Indo-Fijians. With that calculation in mind, attention focused on two national constituencies in south-eastern Viti Levu. The greatest attention focused on Suva, where Irene Jai Narayan was standing for the Alliance. In November 1986, fed up with internecine battles within the NFP to which she herself had contributed wittingly or unwittingly, and endless frustration as an Opposition backbencher, Narayan had joined the Alliance because she was 'absolutely convinced' that her new party would 'remain in power for years to come.'¹⁰⁹ She joined Alliance after flirting briefly with Labour, saying she would make up her mind after seeing 'what kind of following it has and what stand it takes on some important issues.'¹¹⁰ But the call was not hers to make anyway. Labour, for

its part, feared that she might come with too much damaged political baggage and infect the new party with leadership tensions. The Alliance lost no time in parading Mrs Narayan as a prized catch, a formidable politician in touch with the grassroots who had represented Suva continuously since 1966. She had also been the president of the National Federation Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. 'I am happy to be in a happy home,' Mrs Narayan told her rallies.

Accordingly, the Alliance spent a considerable amount of resources and time in the constituency campaigning for her. Her running mate was the genial Fijian chief and Deputy Prime Minister, Ratu David Toganivalu whose wide, embracing friendship crossed cultural and ethnic lines. For his closeness to the Gujarati community, he was playfully nick named 'Gujratu David.' Their Coalition opponents were Fijian academic Tupeni Baba and Navin Maharaj, a businessman and former Alliance mayor of Suva. If anyone knew Suva inside out, it was Navin. He was the most astute and strategic-minded of campaigners, going about his business with a professionalism and commitment not often seen in Fiji election campaigns. And Baba developed as the campaign progressed into an articulate, if sometimes ponderously intellectualizing, speaker able to connect with the younger voters. The battle was truly joined. The business community's support for Toganivalu was neutralized by the Coalition's Harilal Patel, himself a Gujarati lawyer, who contested the Suva Indian communal seat.

Instead of being an asset, Mrs Narayan became a liability for her party. Her previous record of solid opposition to the Alliance was ruthlessly exploited against her. And her own unexpectedly virulent attack on her former party and her erstwhile colleagues, mounted with all the passion of the twice converted, damaged her prospects further, casting her in the role of an opportunist and a traitor. There was another unforgiving gender dimension to the campaign against Mrs Narayan. For Indian men to defect, transgress boundaries, switch sides, commit adultery, is less of a crime in the public eye than it is for women who are supposed to be the unblemished exemplars of duty and loyalty, in the manner of Lord Rama's wife Sita.

They have to be pure and pristine. For that reason alone, many Indo-Fijians refused to forgive her. How dare she do this to us? was the question many asked. As one taxi driver told me at the time, if Mrs Narayan had fallen from the highest of mountains, he would have saved her by catching her in his lap. But how could he save her when she had fallen in his esteem. *Jab nazar se gir gayi to kaise roki*. So, in the end, the Alliance was left banking on the charisma of a single candidate for a crucial seat while the Coalition remorselessly turned the tables on her by digging up her political record against the Alliance.

Both Mrs Narayan (11 772 votes) and Ratu David Toganivalu (11 902) fell to the Coalition's Navin Maharaj (12 431) and Tupeni Baba (12 452). The margin was not much, but victory was victory. In another do-or-die seat, Joeli Kalou (13 445), a teacher and trade unionist, defeated Ratu Tu'uakitau Cokanauto (12 506), son of former Deputy Prime Minister Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, and Fida Hussein (14 138), an ex-policeman, triumphed over Veer Singh (13 341) in a constituency with a large Muslim population. The NFP-FLP Coalition won 28 of the 52 House of Representatives seats while the Alliance captured the remaining 24. The voting figures confirmed the historic trend of predominantly ethnic patterns of voting, but some new trends were also visible. The Alliance support in the Indo-Fijian community was not as broad-based as it had been in the past. The party won only 15 per cent of the Indian communal votes. While communal Fijian support for Alliance remained high at 77 per cent, it was a notable reduction on the party's 1982 figure of 84 per cent. Significantly, over 20 per cent of the Fijian voters cast their voters for parties other than the Alliance, with 10 voting for the Coalition. The shift was small, but pregnant with possibilities that the Alliance feared. None of the sense of tension and anxiety accompanied the defeat of the Alliance party this time. I had chaired the Fiji Broadcasting Commission's election panel discussions during the campaign when leading spokesmen from both sides presented their cases. Fiji had no television then. What impressed me most was the preparedness of the Coalition and its willingness, even eagerness, to assume the reins of power. The same confi-

dence was evident in their fierce newspaper advertisements and rebuttals of Alliance allegations and criticisms.

At 3:15 on 12 April 1987, Alliance leader, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, conceded defeat. 'Fellow citizens,' he said:

We have come to the end of a long, hard campaign. You have given your decision. That decision must be accepted. While I am naturally disappointed at the outcome, I am proud that we have been able to demonstrate that democracy is alive and well in Fiji. We must now ensure a smooth transition to enable the new Government to settle in and quickly get on with the important task of further development of our beloved country. There can be no room for rancour or bitterness and I would urge that you display goodwill to each other in the interest of our nation.¹¹¹

Dr Bavadra accepted the change of government graciously, thanking Ratu Mara for his longstanding contribution to the public life of Fiji. He said:

The peaceful and honourable change of government reveals yet again the deep democratic roots of our society and the profound unity of our people. I am touched by your goodness, warmth, compassion and respect. These are admirable qualities which make up the fabric of our society and which will sustain us in our future endeavours.¹¹²

He saw in his electoral triumph the dawn of a new era, full of new potential and opportunity. 'Together,' he said, 'let us write a new chapter, which, God willing, will be one which we and our children will be proud of.'

The veteran journalist and Alliance strategist, Sir Leonard Usher, wrote: 'It had been a long — too long — campaign, and at times some unpleasant elements of bitterness had crept in. These were now set aside. Democracy, clearly, was alive and well in Fiji.'¹¹³ For the moment.

NOTES

1. The exchange of letters is in the Reddy papers.
2. The Royal Commission letters were written on 2 and 29 Nov. 1982 and 7 Nov. 1983; on Government of National Unity on 20 Dec 1983, to which Mara had replied on 10 Jan. 1983, and on the boycott of parliament on 16 Dec. 1983, to which Mara had replied on 21 Dec. 1983. On all three occasions, it was Reddy who had initiated the correspondence.
3. *Fiji Times*, 2 May 1984.
4. *Fiji Times*, 7 May 1984.
5. *Fiji Times*, 15 May 1984.
6. *Fiji Sun*, 18 Jan. 1984
7. *Fiji Times*, 13 Feb. 1984.
8. *Fiji Sun*, 7 May 1984.
9. *Hansard*, 10 June 1983.
10. *Fiji Sun*, 4 Feb. 1984.
11. His autobiography, privately published, is titled *From the Mangrove Swamp* (rev. edn 1998).
12. *Fiji Times*, 10 Feb. 1984.
13. His letter as well as Lindsay Watt's are in the Reddy papers.
14. *Fiji Times*, 16 May 1984.
15. *Fiji Times*, 19 May 1984.
16. *Islands Business*, 'The return of Koya.'
17. 'What Made Reddy Run,' *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1984, 22–3.
18. Which is why Lodhia voted for Koya and not Irene Jai Narayan, he told me.
19. *Fiji Sun*, 17 May 1984.
20. *Islands Business*, June 1984.
21. *Fiji Times*, 4 Mar. 1985.

22. *Fiji Times*, 3 Dec. 1984.
23. *Fiji Times*, 18 Mar. 1985.
24. *Fiji Times*, 3 Dec. 1984.
25. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1985, 12.
26. *Fiji Times*, 20 Mar. 1985
27. *Fiji Times*, 24 Dec. 1984
28. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1985, 12.
29. *Fiji Times*, 12 Jan. 1985.
30. *Fiji Times*, 21 Mar. 1985.
31. *Fiji Times*, 25 Mar 1985.
32. Devendra Singh regarded Reddy as one of his 'gurus,' the other being RD Patel. *Fiji Sun*, 27 Jan. 1987.
33. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1985, 12: 'Political Mayhem Rules Again in Fiji's NFP' See also *Fiji Sun*, 27 Jan. 1985
34. *Fiji Times* 28 Mar. 1985.
35. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1985, 12.
36. *Fiji Times*, 22 May 1985.
37. *Fiji Times*, 24 May 1985.
38. *Fiji Times*, 21 May 1985.
39. *Fiji Times*, 6 Apr. 1985.
40. *Fiji Times*, 29 Mar 1985.
41. Pramod Rae, who worked in the Opposition office says in private conversation that Koya had in fact told Mrs Narayan that he was contemplating making changes in the party, and that her position could be affected.
42. *Fiji Times*, 16 July 1985.
43. *Fiji Times*, 15 May 1985.
44. *Fiji Times*, 29 Nov. 1985.

45. *Fiji Times*, 21 July 1985.
46. I am grateful for this information to Pramod Rae.
47. *Fiji Times*, 18 Dec. 1985
48. *Fiji Times*, 25 Feb. 1986.
49. *Fiji Times*, 29 Nov. 1985.
50. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Mar 1986: 2 'Realignment of Fiji party forces is on.'
51. A detailed study of the by-election is in Vijay Naidu, *The Fiji Labour Party and the By-Elections of December 1985* (Suva: School of Social and Economic Development (USP) Working Papers, 1985).
52. Writing in the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, 3 Mar 1986, 2.
53. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Oct. 1985, 52.
54. *Economist*, 27 July 1985.
55. *Fiji Times*, 1 March 1985.
56. See 'Teachers Protest: Desegregating Fiji's communal Schools,' in *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Jan. 1985), 53–55.
57. *Fiji Times*, 3 Nov. 1984.
58. Baba, 'Fijian Education in the Context of Modern, Multiracial Society,' *Fiji Teachers Journal*, May 1985, 27–31.
59. These quotes and figures come from papers presented at the forum, copies of which I have.
60. The government argued that since FTUC had become an active participant in an opposing political party which opposed government policies, it could then serve on government boards. Raman thought that the government was fearful of Labour and was therefore punishing FTUC. *Fiji Times*, 14 June 1986.
61. See 'The Wage Freeze and the Development Plan Objectives: Contradictions in Fiji Government Policy,' *Journal of Pacific Studies*, vol 11 (1985), 11–44.
62. Based on interview with James Raman, Aug. 2008.
63. *Fiji Times*, 4 May 1984.

64. Quote from his speech on 6 Dec. 1984
65. The speech was originally published in *South Pacific Forum* (1985), 2: 1, 70–81
66. *Fiji Times*, 20 July 1986.
67. According to Anirudh Kuver, who was privy to the negotiations, the idea of a National Peoples Party (or Coalition), involving Western United Front, Labour and NFP had emerged as a possibility. See *Fiji Times*, 29 Dec. 1986.
68. *Fiji Times*, 10 Oct. 1986.
69. *Fiji Times*, 18 June, 1986.
70. *Fiji Times*, 16 Dec. 1986.
71. *Fiji Times*, 9 Dec. 1986.
72. According to Robbie Robertson, Labour's abandoning of its earlier stance was 'due less to the NFP influence than to the fact that by the end of 1986 the Labour Party deemed them counterproductive to its short-term interests, at least in their early presentational form.' See his *Fiji: Shattered coups* (Sydney, 1988), 39
73. Quote from the typescript of the final address in my possession.
74. *Fiji Sun*, 2 May 1987.
75. *Fiji Times*, 27 Dec. 1986.
76. *Fiji Times*, 24 Jan. 1987.
77. *Fiji Times*, 5 Feb. 1987.
78. *Fiji Times*, 25 Feb. 1987.
79. *Fiji Sun*, 24 Jan. 1987.
80. *Fiji Times*, 26 Jan. 1987.
81. *Fiji Times*, 16 Feb. 1987.
82. *Fiji Times*, 3 Dec. 1986.
83. *Fiji Times*, 18 Dec. 1986.
84. *Fiji Times*, 25 Feb. 1987.
85. Ibid.

86. *Fiji Times*, 12 Jan. 1986.
87. *Fiji Times*, 23 Feb. 1987.
88. See Robertson, *Fiji: Shattered Coups*, 46.
89. Quote from Fiji Labour Party manifesto.
90. *Fiji Times*, 17 Aug. 1986.
91. *Fiji Times*, 19 Aug. 1987.
92. R.G. Ward, 'Native Fijian Villages: A Questionable Future,' in Michael Taylor (ed.), *Fiji: Future Imperfect* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 36.
93. *Fiji Times*, 22 March 1987.
94. *Fiji Sun*. 29 Sept. 1986.
95. Dr Bavadra's speech to the first annual convention of the Fiji Labour Party, 19 July 1986.
96. Figures are from the Fijian Affairs Board presentation to the Great Council of Chiefs in Somosomo in 1986.
97. Robert Keith-Reid, in *Fiji Times*, 6 Apr. 1985.
98. *Fiji Times*, 28 Nov. 1986.
99. From his final campaign speech on Radio Fiji.
100. *Fiji Times*, 15 Mar. 1987.
101. *Fiji Times*, 24 Sept. 1986.
102. *Fiji Sun*, 24 Sept. 1986.
103. From his final campaign speech over Radio Fiji.
104. TP Sreenivasan, 'A colossus who died lonely,' *The Rediff Special*, 14 Feb. 2005.
105. *Fiji Times*, 29 Jan. 1987.
106. Ibid.
107. *Daily Post*, 'NFP: Rocky Road to Ruin,' 18 May, 1999. Reprint of an earlier piece.

108. *Fiji Times*, 22 Feb. 1987. Also *Fiji Sun*, 2 Mar. 1987.
109. *Islands Business*, Dec. 1986.
110. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Dec. 1985.
111. *Fiji Times*, 13 Apr. 1987
112. *Fiji Times*, 14 Apr. 1987.
113. Sir Leonard Usher, *Mainly About Fiji* (Suva, 1986), 146.