

CHAPTER 5: SUNSET AT NOON

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*
Y B Yeats

Jai Ram Reddy was sitting third on Prime Minister Bavadra's right when soon after 10 O'clock on 14 May 1987, ten hooded soldiers entered the Fiji Parliament. 'Sit down everybody, sit down,' shouted one of them to everyone's consternation. 'This is a take-over. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a military take-over. We apologise for any inconvenience caused. You are requested to stay cool, stay down and listen to what we are going to tell you.'¹ Their leader, Lt Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, in powder blue safari suit with a pistol in his hand, then marched straight towards the Speaker's Chair occupied by his uncle Militoni Leweniqila without saying a word to him.² Captain Isireli Dugu and his men stood armed and ready for action. 'Please stay calm, Ladies and Gentlemen,' Rabuka spoke in his characteristically strong baritone voice. 'Mr Prime Minister, please lead your team down to the right. Policemen, keep the passage clear. Stay down. Remain calm. Mr Prime Minister, Sir, will you lead your team now.' The parliamentarians, listening to a rambling — 'venomous' is the word Reddy used — speech by the rampaging trade unionist and Fijian nationalist firebrand Taniela Veitata about Mao Tse Tung and power coming from the barrel of the gun and much else besides, were genuinely perplexed. Some thought the military was carrying out a precautionary exercise in case things escalated with Fijian nationalists threatening to overthrow the month-old Coalition government.

‘What the fucking hell’s going on,’ Speaker Militoni Leweniqila reportedly asked, puzzled by the commotion in the aisle of the Parliamentary chamber, his profanity purged for posterity.³ ‘Is this for real?’ Dr Timoci Bavadra was heard asking a colleague sitting next to him. And when he refused to stand up and lead his team out of the House, soldiers leveled their guns at him and ordered him to comply. Education Minister Tupeni Baba protested when soldiers began ordering the members to march to the military trucks waiting outside. ‘We are not going in that truck,’ he said angrily, to which Rabuka told a policeman, *Dou raici koya na Turaga ni Ovisa sa lako oqori*. ‘Look out for that inspector. Keep him covered.’ Sensing trouble, Dr Bavadra politely asked his colleagues to obey the orders to avoid bloodshed. The soldiers clearly meant business. Reddy was taken completely by surprise like everyone else as he turned to watch the unfolding commotion. Perhaps a movie was being filmed, he thought to himself. That same thought had also occurred to the Commerce and Trade Minister, Navin Maharaj. But soon the reality dawned on him. What had been threatened the previous three weeks or so had finally come to pass. As a colleague, probably Tupeni Baba, on his way out of the chamber, opened Erskine May’s *Parliamentary Practice* to see if it mentioned the word coup — it did not — Reddy simply remarked: ‘This is nothing but the conquest of one community by another.’⁴ As he was being marched out, he looked towards the Grand Pacific Hotel and the sea and the craggy Serua mountains beyond for what he thought might be the last time. Assassination was very much on his mind.

Shortly afterwards, the waiting military trucks drove away, taking the hostages to the Royal Fiji Military Barracks at Nabua, on the outskirts of Suva, where they were promptly put in the Guard House, which was filthy, full of foul smell, and surrounded by fully armed soldiers. They all sat on the floor except Dr Bavadra for whom a chair was brought. The whole atmosphere was gloomy, Reddy recalled, the sense of humiliation great. They waited in the cell, anxious, worried, cut off from the outside, unable to communicate even with their families. There were no mobile phones then, no internet, and no easy way to communicate vital information. At

around 11:15 that evening, the deposed parliamentarians were driven to the Prime Minister's residence at Vieuto after Adi Kuini Bavadra had 'accepted' Rabuka's polite request 'to the lady of the house' for possible accommodation for the detainees. 'For your information, I can accommodate the Prime Minister and all the rest of them,' Adi Kuini said.⁵ Such politeness and observance of cultural protocol, such respectful deference, even at a time like this. The Coalition parliamentarians remained at Vieuto for two nights as people in their hundreds gathered around Battery Hill keeping a vigil behind rolled barbed wires guarded by balaclava-wearing soldiers.

Inside, the parliamentarians talked anxiously among themselves, pondered their fate and took turns praying. How the *Koran*, the *Bhagvada Gita* and the *Ramayana* were smuggled into the Prime Minister's residence surrounded by so much tight security remained a mystery to Reddy. At first, all the parliamentarians were kept together. On the second night, soldiers arrived with orders to take the deposed Deputy Prime Minister Harish Sharma and Foreign Minister Krishna Datt away 'to a better place than this, which sent speculations wild' invoking the last rites and prayers, Reddy recalled later to some guilty laughter from those who had supported the coup. Bavadra told the two to do what the soldiers ordered. When Harish Sharma asked Reddy for his view, Reddy overruled Bavadra, saying with 'some heat and conviction,' as Harish recalled, that he would not countenance the parliamentary team being forcibly separated. Either they would all go together or they would all stay where they were.

Reddy's famous short fuse erupted when the soldiers came again later, Sharma recalls. 'You want my blood, isn't it,' he said. 'You take me. Leave these people alone.' 'No, sir, we can't do that, sir,' the soldier replied. Noor Dean offered himself to go in place of the two, to sacrifice his life if that was what was needed, later loudly shouting 'Allahu Akbar,' 'God is Great,' as he was thrown roughly into the back of the military truck. Reddy admired Dean's courage; many of his other colleagues were made of softer stuff. Bavadra came around to accepting Reddy's view. 'We all go or we don't go at all,' he said. At Reddy's suggestion and led by Navin Patel,⁶ the politi-

cians then went into prolonged hymn singing (Mahatma Gandhi's favorite *Raghu Pati Raghav Raja Ram, Pati Tapaavan Sita Ram*) and prayer session, some praying furiously for the first time in their lives, hoping to put off the soldiers for a while longer. 'We kept this going till very late at night, almost till midnight,' recalled Reddy, while the soldiers waited outside.⁷ 'My officer is very impressed with your singing,' a soldier said respectfully.⁸ It was probably Reddy's tenor voice, Kelemedi Bulewa, the SVT Attorney General, would remark jocularly later.

The vigil ended early the next morning when a truck load of soldiers arrived to take the Indian members to Borron House in Samabula, a rambling mansion of a crusty former European plantation owner where, legend has it, it was decreed that no Indians were ever to be welcomed, except as servants. That was the way things were in the days of colonial rule and planter power. The Borrons had been the employers of Indian indentured labour on freehold island of Mago. Now the descendants of indentured labourers were going to occupy the mansion, albeit as captives. There was resistance as the parliamentarians lay on the floor holding hands, fighting back the enforced separation of the two ethnic groups. 'It was a very touching moment in our lives,' an emotional Reddy recalled, 'Fijians holding Indians, Indians holding Fijians and there were two or three General Electors.' The separation, for Reddy, symbolized the 'tearing apart of Fiji.' Reddy snapped at the soldiers. 'Why are you doing this? You are brave men, you have rifles, why don't you shoot us?' Again, the soldiers were polite and deferential. 'No, sir, we cannot do that, sir.' They were behaving as if they knew that what they were doing was dishonourable, but the deed had to be done on orders from the top. The detained Indo-Fijian members remained at Borron House until they were released after a further two days of captivity. They did not know it then, but the rupture that had taken place at Vieuvo would take its toll in the decades ahead. The lights were going out all over Fiji, and they would not be lit again for a long time.

The symbolism of separation would remain with Jai Ram Reddy for a very long time, a rare, cherished moment of ethnic unity being torn

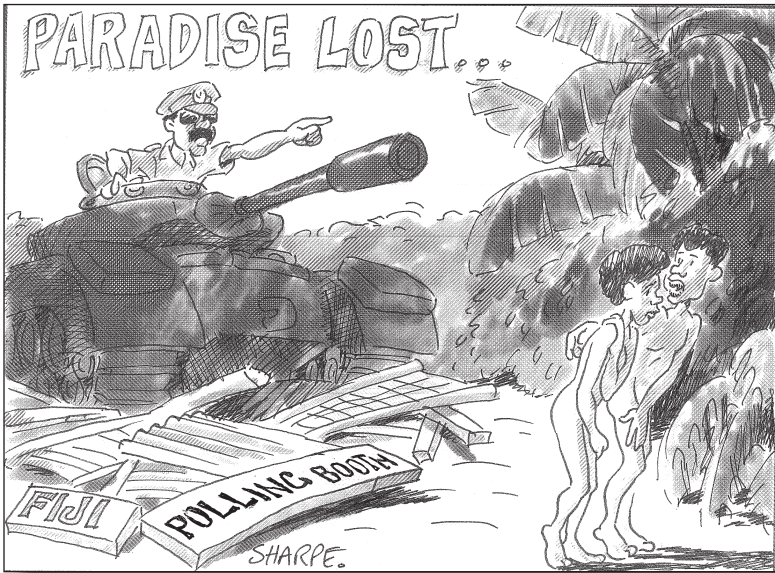
asunder by the power of guns at the behest of people pursuing their own private agendas. Reddy remembers vividly the heart-rending scene of Adi Kuini Bavadra weeping inconsolably as the Indo-Fijian members were being driven away from Vieuvo. He recalls a heated argument with one of the parliamentarians — probably Krishna Datt — about mounting a hunger strike; the Reserve Bank Governor Savenaca Siwatibau visiting Reddy's residence to console Chandra and to generally offer assistance, if it was needed; and, movingly, his Fijian secretary in the Attorney General's chambers quietly packing his private papers in his briefcase and sending them to his home. Such loyalty at such a time touched Reddy deeply. He had always had excellent relations with his staff. In the Attorney General's office, the staff appreciated the 'courtesy and respect with which they were treated,' Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi recalled. Reddy never spoke in Hindi to third parties in the presence of Fijian staff. 'A minor detail perhaps,' noted Ratu Joni, 'but one which struck those concerned quite profoundly.' And there were some devoted friends and supporters from the west planning the safest way to get Reddy back to his home in Lautoka: by crane, one of them suggested in all seriousness! Most of all, he recalls pondering the 'humiliation' and 'debilitation' that incarceration can cause. As prosecutor, he had sent hundreds of people to jail over many years, but this was the first time he realized what the loss of freedom and dignity actually meant for human beings languishing behind bars: the utter powerlessness, the helplessness, and the impotent rage.

The news of the 'coup,' as coup was invariably pronounced in the early days, spread like wild sugar cane fire. Wooden shutters went up in the city, the supermarkets were clogged with people hurriedly buying emergency supplies, and overflowing buses screeched out of town. Government offices emptied, and parents rushed to schools to take their children home. Commandeered government four wheel drives appeared on the streets with rifle-carrying soldiers in them and balaclava-clad sharp shooters atop strategic buildings and at key installations. Among those I saw in military uniform was Ratu Finau Mara, the Alliance Prime Minister's son. He was

in the lobby of the parliamentary chamber when the soldiers arrived. He was later joined outside parliament by Captain Isikeli Mataitoga. Anxious crowds chanting pro-democracy slogans and carrying anti-coup placards gathered behind rolls of barbed wire at Vieuto and Borron House to catch a glimpse of their leaders incarcerated inside and to comfort each other amidst the swirling confusion. In the west, shops and schools closed, and supermarkets and hotels ran out of smaller currency for changing bigger denominations. Capital was fleeing the country.⁹

At around 11 am, Radio Fiji finally announced the news of the military takeover. Colonel Rabuka, it said, had gone to Government House to see the Governor General and to seek recognition of the military action and the overthrow of the Bavadra government. A caretaker government was to be named shortly, and the public was urged to 'remain calm and continue with their daily work.' The Fijian people especially were asked not take advantage of the volatile situation in the country. As dusk settled over a cowering, shaken city, the reality finally hit most people that something untoward, something huge, had taken place. Adi Kuini Bavadra spoke for many when she said, 'This is just not Fiji. It is another banana republic. Democracy is dead, and it is very unfortunate.' Jeff Penneberthy, of *Time* magazine, wrote: 'Another colonel, another coup, another small country with its constitution and the rule of law usurped at the point of a gun. The difference is that no one had imagined it happening in this arcadian region and in a place that had become a model of democracy for its emerging region.'¹⁰

Perhaps more than anything else, the coup destroyed the sense of innocence with which the people of Fiji had approached public affairs until then. Despite all the tensions and aggravations that came with the characteristically red-hot election campaigns, a military takeover of government was not on the mental radar of most people. Coups always happened elsewhere, in Africa and Latin America and other such ill-fated places. From 1987, they would occupy a permanent place at the back of the minds of most Fiji citizens. A coup culture was born.



*Two views of the coup reproduced by permission. Courtesy of
Mr Ian Sharpe and Mr Geoff Pryor.*



THE ROAD TO MAY 14

As soon as the results of the elections became known, Dr Bavadra proclaimed himself ready and able to form the new government. Coalition parliamentarian Navin Maharaj's factory at Vatuwaqa, an industrial suburb of Suva, became the impromptu Coalition headquarters where elected members gathered for briefings and to elect the new ministers. Dr Bavadra rang Reddy and pleaded with him to join the new government as its Attorney General. Reddy hesitated. Having made the break in 1984, he thought he had left national politics for good. He was not interested in pursuing a parliamentary career again although his critics alleged, as they still do, that he had actually engineered the invitation and accepted it with alacrity when it came. That was someone's figment of imagination, but the pressure on him was enormous, and it could not be ignored. 'You helped put the Coalition together, and now you must go in and make it work,' was how one supporter put it to Reddy.¹¹ It was then that Reddy realized that he had no choice but to join the new administration. The news of Reddy's acceptance was received with much relief by the Indo-Fijian community, for he was one truly recognized and experienced political leader in the new government they knew and could trust. Harish Sharma was another. Reddy's induction into the new Cabinet angered the Alliance. 'What made the Alliance camp irate,' wrote Nemani Delaibatiki, 'was that Mr Reddy apparently had gone into political inactivity [but] like a master tactician he worked his way back and became one of the powerful key people behind Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra.'¹² For that reason, Reddy would become the chief target of Fijian protest movements, the principal focus of their wrath and retribution. Reddy was the man the Fijian nationalists loved to hate more than any other leader.

Thoughtful people from across the political divide were happy that Reddy was in the government to contribute a calming presence in it. In the folder he was carrying on the day of the coup were many letters of congratulations he had received from a wide cross-section of the community. Haji Mohammed Hanif wrote: 'I am sure that with your appointment, the

people of our nation can be assured of justice during your term.’ Sir Robert Munro, a leading Suva lawyer and sometime President of the Senate, wrote: ‘The profession and the public will expect much of you after so many disastrous years and I, and my partners, are confident that you will clean the Augean stable.’ Former Alliance Finance Minister Wesley Barrett said ‘in all sincerity’ that the ‘Nation was fortunate that you have accepted this post of grave responsibility at considerable financial sacrifice.’ Fiji High Commissioner to New Zealand, Satyanand, said ‘they could not have found a better person for the position.’ Justice Sir Graham Speight, later President of the Fiji Court of Appeal, wrote to ‘express my delight in hearing of your acceptance of the offices of Attorney General and Minister of Justice. The country is indeed fortunate in having a man of your calibre available in such a crucial role at such an important time in its history.’ ‘Our prayers will always be with you,’ wrote the former Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, CP Ravindranathan. ‘The tasks ahead are immense and liable to continue to test your political skills, but we know that you will face them with serenity — and succeed.’ Moving words, but fate willed otherwise.

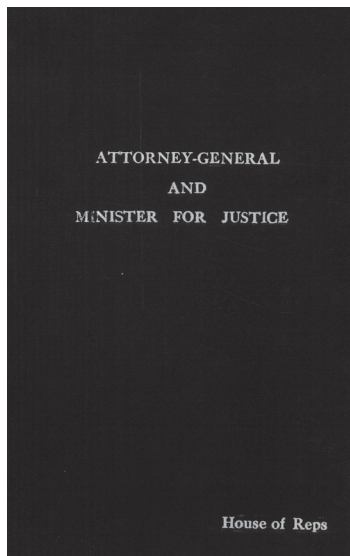
In the negotiations over the allocation of portfolios, NFP was led by Reddy, his law partner Bhupendra Patel, and campaign manager Dijendra Singh. But there was not much consultation within the party about power sharing arrangements in the new government being formed. The party hierarchs were on the outer. Harish Sharma, who was still officially the parliamentary leader of the NFP, recalls being ‘told’ by ‘two outsiders’ (Patel and Singh: outsiders in the sense that neither of them was in Parliament, or had even contested the election) that he would be ‘offered’ the position of Deputy Prime Minister. Even as a senior member of the NFP, he had been left out of the negotiations. He felt especially dismayed because the initial coalition talks between NFP and Labour had begun with him, he recalled, but his injured pride mattered little, he said without bitterness. His party and his community were beginning a new and historic journey, and he was happy to be a part of a historic moment.¹³ When the final list of cabinet members was announced, Labour emerged the clear winner by a country mile.

NFP-FLP COALITION CABINET

Portfolio	Name	Party
Prime Minister	T Bavadra	FLP
Home Affairs	T. Bavadra	FLP
Fijian Affairs	T. Bavadra	FLP
Education	T. Baba	FLP
Primary Industries	J Nacola	FLP
Labour	J Kalou	FLP
Land & Mineral Resources	M. Volavola	FLP
Foreign Affairs	K. Datt	FLP
Finance & Planning	M. Chaudhry	FLP
Trade & Industry	N. Maharaj	FLP
Health & Social Welfare	S. Nandan	FLP
Deputy PM & Information	H. Sharma	NFP
Transport & Communication	A. Bhamji	NFP
Attorney General & Justice	JR Reddy	NFP
Ministers of State		
Fijian Affairs	F. Ralogaivou	FLP
Works	C. Work	FLP
Rural Dev & Housing	T. Sukunaivalu	NFP



Being sworn in as Attorney General.



*Folder containing
congratulatory messages
on Reddy's appointment
as Attorney General.*

The NFP's under-representation in the cabinet is evident, but there were other considerations which carried more weight. Racial balance was one of them. For the government to be acceptable to Fijians, everyone including Reddy realized, the cabinet had to be racially balanced, with Fijian members occupying a suitable number of senior positions. And the best Fijians were in Labour. The most experienced Fijian parliamentarian of them all, though, and one of the most loyal and longest serving of the NFP members, indeed its vice president, Temo Sukunaivalu, was given only a junior portfolio. Labour would not concede the Fijian constituency to the NFP at any cost, and NFP did not insist. It will be recalled, for instance, that the NFP Vice President Koresi Matatolu had to be sacrificed to accommodate Dr Bavadra. For Reddy, whether the Indo-Fijian members of government were Labour or NFP did not really matter much. On questions of fundamental importance to the Indo-Fijian community, their interests were identical. It was crucial to make the Coalition work, and if the interests of the party had to be subordinated to the larger interests of the community and the nation, that sacrifice had to be made for the greater good; and he would do so gladly. But his vision was not always shared by the Labour members for many of whom the interests of their party were paramount. Mahendra Chaudhry's game plan, as he said over and over again, was to 'finish NFP off.' Some in the NFP quietly questioned the lop-sided nature of the Coalition government. Former Alliance minister James Shankar Singh was an eminently suitable cabinet material, it was said, and there were others equally qualified who were overlooked. But none dared to raise their dissent in public. What Reddy said, went.

'How is the government doing, Mr Reddy,' Jag Nadan, a party supporter, asked the NFP leader at a private gathering in Suva soon after it was sworn in. 'If we last a month, we will survive,' Reddy replied. He probably had in mind both the internal cohesion of the government as well as threats from outside. From the balcony of the Attorney General's chambers, he saw the ominous storm clouds gathering on the horizon as protest marches were orchestrated around the country. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, then a young law-

yer in the Attorney General's office, detected in Reddy's mood at the time not a spirit of quiet achievement, but a deep sense of foreboding. In cabinet, Reddy urged caution and prudence, to make haste slowly. But Labour members, who were now clearly calling the shots, had other ideas. They had the 'mandate' of the people to govern with policies they had promised, and the sooner this was done the better. There was an air of 'raring to go' in the Labour camp. An early impression of purposefulness and direction had to be made quickly. This was not the last time that Labour would vigorously invoke the mantra of mandate, ultimately to its detriment. The mandate of Parliament was one among many mandates in the country: the Native Land Trust Board had its mandate, as had the Great Council of Chiefs, and the military. Negotiating one mandate among many required true statesmanship.

The government announced a number of small measures immediately, such as the removal of hospital charges, free bus service to pensioners and ex-servicemen, and cancellation of customs duty from all staple food items. Tupeni Baba, among others, talked about the need quickly to investigate past 'corrupt' practices of the Alliance government and to expose them to get the people behind the new government. The use and alleged abuse of the Prime Minister's Hurricane Relief Fund came in for special mention, as well as the controversy surrounding the leasing out to the Education Department of Mara family's property, the Marella House, causing great irritation, and concern, among Alliance members. 'They should have been preparing to govern, not digging up dirt on others,' was how one Alliance party member put it to me. Every issue of public policy was elevated to the level of principle, to be defended with blood, at all cost and against all odds. Power can have that effect on some people, especially those who acquire it for the first time after generations in the wilderness.

The new government's enthusiasm was understandable. This was the first time ever in Fijian history that there had been a change of government. It was the first time, too, that a genuinely multiracial government was in place in which Indo-Fijians had a fair share of power. And the Coalition

proved adept at playing the game Alliance had played all those years it was in power: the game of patronage. When it came to selecting the Speaker of the House, it chose Ratu William Toganivalu, a senior member of the Alliance Party perennially in financial need and *matanivanua*, traditional herald, to Roko Tui Bau. Toganivalu's acceptance stunned the Alliance. Only at the last minute was Ratu Willie (as he was affectionately known) 'persuaded' by his financier, Jim Ah Koy, not to accept the nomination, or he would have to face the consequences of his action. Ratu Willie, indebted to Ah Koy, had no option but to decline.¹⁴ Ah Koy was the financial advisor to many Alliance leaders, including Ratu Mara. But not Militoni Leweniqila, the big, life-loving former Alliance minister from Macuata, and a regular habitué of the Union Club in Suva, who accepted the offer after being persuaded by his close friend Maan Singh, former Suva Mayor and a fellow poker player. Militoni then proceeded promptly to accuse his party of petulant behaviour since their loss, for 'displaying the law of the jungle.'¹⁵ Fijians gravitate to power very quickly, an astute observer of the Fijian scene once told me. Abstract principles matter little to them, and loyalty is always contingent, not absolute or permanent. Pragmatism is what they are all about. That, after all, was how things were done in pre-colonial times. It was feared other notable Alliance establishmentarians might similarly be enticed to lend their support to the new government in return for perks and privileges of office or overseas diplomatic appointments. The urgency to stop the potential slippage only intensified with time.

Opposition to the Coalition government had begun almost as soon as its victory was announced. The first signs emerged from among the ranks of the defeated Alliance politicians. A meeting called ostensibly to analyze the reasons for the Alliance's failure in the elections was held in Raiwaqa, one of the poorer, predominantly Fijian suburbs of Suva. It was attended by Filipe Bole, a former senior civil servant and minister, Qoriniasi Bale, former Attorney General, Ratu Finau Mara, the former Prime Minister's eldest son, Taniela Veitata, Alliance parliamentarian and rampaging trade unionist, and many other lesser figures of nationalist bent. Even before the

full Coalition government had been sworn in, the eight hundred-strong meeting resolved to petition the Governor General to change the constitution in favor of a permanent Fijian-dominated one. To these Fijians, even very highly educated ones, the idea of a government not headed by an 'acceptable' Fijian from the ranks of the Fijian establishment, and one committed to genuine multiracialism and power sharing, was an anathema. Feeding upon, and fostering, latent ethnic prejudices and fears of the Fijian people caught up in a changing environment they did not understand, the meeting sent out a powerful signal of developing opposition which was picked up by others around the country hostile to the Coalition government. Bole and Bale, two highly educated professionals, couldn't possibly be wrong. Ordinary Fijian people looked up to them for leadership and guidance, especially in moments of crisis such as the one now unfolding.

In Tavua, on the other side of Viti Levu, the Tui Tavua, Ratu Ovini Bokini, a relative of Bole's and a staunch supporter of the Fijian Association (as he had to be by virtue of his traditional position), instructed his people to erect a road block on the King's Highway in protest against the new government. To emphasize his point, he asked them to place forty-four gallon drums, wooden planks and shrubbery on the road right in front of the local police station. Placards displayed the message: 'Labour Government is Lowest in the World,' 'Change the Government,' 'We Hate Coalition, We Don't Need it,' 'Change It, Change It.'¹⁶ The local police chief, in an act which smacked of collusion with the protesters, refused to apprehend the offenders and, instead led a team of officers to the chiefly bure to offer a *sevusevu*, traditional offering, to Ratu Ovini to persuade his supporters to disband. The police chief was later reprimanded for dereliction of duty, but by then Bokini had made his point: it was he, and not the new government in Suva, who wielded real power where and when it mattered. The *Fiji Times* wrote: 'We find it disturbing that such illegal activity can take place under the noses of police officers, The so-called demonstrators' lack of respect for the guardians of the law is disconcerting.'¹⁷ It was, in truth, more than disconcerting; it was frightening.

All this was just the beginning. The news from Tavua and of similar incidents elsewhere emboldened others contemplating similar acts of protest. On 21 April, at Viseisei, Dr Bavadra's own village, two thousand Fijians gathered to share views and consider further plans for action against the Coalition government.¹⁸ Among those present at the meeting were many prominent Fijians and Alliance members, including Tui Vuda, Ratu Josaia Tavaiaqia, David Pickering, Aporosa Rakoto, Jona Qio, Jone Veisamasama, Inoke Tabua and Jone Koroitamana. The chief organizer of the meeting was Apisai Tora, a former NFP member of Parliament, and a longtime champion of the interests and aspirations of western Fijians, of whom, ironically, Dr Bavadra was one himself. Tora was also a Fijian nationalist who had petitioned the Colonial Office in the 1960s to recognize the principle of Fijian paramountcy. He had cabled Ratu Mara to walk out of the constitutional conference in 1965 if the 'Colonial Office wallahs' insisted on the introduction of common roll. Then in 1969, he joined the National Federation Party and later the Alliance. Before his political career was over, he would form several parties (Party of National Unity, All National Congress, Bai Kai Viti, among others) to advance this cause or that, but with himself squarely at the centre of things. He was willing to serve under Koya, wrote four residents of Nailuva, Suva, but was 'now agitating against a Fijian Prime Minister who is supported by a larger percentage of Fijian votes than NFP ever had.' 'Where were his concerns then,' they asked. 'Why did he not join Mr Butadroka and ask that the constitution be changed?'¹⁹ Tora was as complex and contradictory a character as there ever was in Fijian politics. His only consistency, as he would say of his opponents, was his inconsistency. At the Viseisei meeting, he provided the ideological and political justification for ousting the Coalition government.

Tora claimed the Coalition victory had breached a sacred principle of Fijian politics. That is, while Fiji was to be home to various communities, there was a 'clear understanding that the interests of the indigenous Fijians would be paramount in Fiji.' That, he claimed, was enshrined in the Deed

of Cession. Tora then cited the 1933 Great Council of Chiefs resolution that the 'immigrant Indian population should neither directly or indirectly have any part in the control of the direction of matters affecting the interests of the Fijian race.' Tora said that Siddiq Koya, on behalf of the Indo-Fijian community, had accepted a political settlement at Independence which recognized the earlier understandings of how things were to be done in Fiji. That is, he had tacitly accepted the principle of Fijian paramountcy. Jai Ram Reddy, Tora continued, had disregarded 'the constitutional understanding' by seeking to defeat the Alliance Party in 1982. The 'constitutional understanding' was a figment of Tora's imagination. Dr Bavadra was merely the 'figurehead' of 'Jai Ram Reddy's party.' For Tora, Reddy 'was the real Prime Minister and Bavadra [was] his shield.' 'See how quickly Reddy was put in the Bavadra's cabinet.' To many nationalist Fijians, Reddy's name was like a red rag to an enraged bull. 'Our independence is shattered,' Tora lamented. 'Upon us is imposed a new colonialism, not from outside but from within our own country by those who arrived here with no rights and were given full rights by us, the *taukei*.'

A petition was signed by fourteen leading chiefs from western Viti Levu expressing no confidence in the Coalition government and calling for change so that Fijians 'must always control the government to safeguard their special status and rights.' Democracy should be abolished 'if it is to become the vehicle for eroding the *taukei*'s entrenched position in Fiji's political structure.'²⁰ 'I cannot imagine us listening to government leaders who are not chiefs,' said Bulou Eta Vosailagi from the chiefly village of Nakuruvakarua in Sigatoka. 'I ask the chiefs here, and all of us, to support, to bring back the control of our government to the Fijian chiefs.' They would march and let their views be known whether they were given the permit to protest or not. With the protest movement gaining momentum rapidly, the disparate groups with divergent agendas but a common goal came under the overarching umbrella organization called the 'Taukei Movement.' The name was simple but catchy. The goal was to derail the 'Indian-dominated' Coalition government.

Encouraged by their efforts in the west, the Taukei Movement staged a massive and menacing three-thousand strong march through Suva on 24 April, beginning at Suva Market and ending at Government House. Standing outside the old Suva Town Hall, I felt a strange sensation of fear of a kind I had never felt before. I had never imagined that Fiji could become like this. I had never seen anything like it before, people bussed in their hundreds from the heartland of southeastern Viti Levu, pure Butadroka country, outwardly cheerful and restrained but boiling inside. A slight provocation, and the place could have exploded, with what consequences it was simply too painful to contemplate. To see some people I knew among the protesters, educated middle class, outwardly multiracial in outlook, compounded my distress. The placards said it all: 'Fiji for Fijians,' 'Ka Idia Go Back,' 'It is Time to Fight for Our Rights,' 'River of No Return for Fijians,' 'Noqu Kalou, Noqu Vanua,' (Our God, Our Land),' 'Bavadra the Boat, Reddy the Captain,' 'Reddy the Gun, Bavadra the Bullet,' 'Jai Ram Reddy, You Don't Belong Here.'²¹ . The last time Fiji had witnessed such a scene was in the aftermath of the 1968 by-elections when the Federation Party had returned to the Legislative Council with an increased majority.

While the Coalition government watched the worrying unfolding events with outward calm, the nationalist protestors were busy drawing up plans to reduce the country to chaos.²² These included burning cane fields in the west at the rate of six per week, blowing up bridges and burning down shops in Suva, torching Nausori and killing enough Indians to precipitate a state of emergency. What if their acts led to violence, Australian journalist Marian Wilkinson asked Tora. 'If that is God's will, so be it,' he replied chillingly.²³ Reddy's law firm was firebombed as part of the destabilizing plan, which led a visibly distressed Tui Vuda, Ratu Josaia Tavaiaqia, who knew and liked and admired Reddy, to completely distance himself from the Taukei Movement. Senator Jona Qio was charged with arson and Apisai Tora was charged for breaching the Public Order Act for inciting racial ill hatred. Butadroka had been sent to jail under the Act a few years earlier. But no protest marches were banned because of the fear that a ban

would play straight into the hands of the nationalists: Fijians being silenced in their own country. There was also confidence, misplaced as it turned out to be, among some in the government that the protests would eventually run out of steam.

To the claims of the nationalists that the Fijian people had lost everything, that their cherished rights were now in danger, Dr Bavadra pleaded for calm and introspection and a chance for the Coalition to prove its mettle. 'It is unthinkable that we would sacrifice the welfare of our own people, so I am truly saddened by the fact that some of our own people are suggesting that I would allow my government to put the welfare of Fijians at risk.' He continued: 'Let us not yield to the designs of a disgruntled few. Let us not sacrifice the future of our beloved children to the greed of a small minority. Let us not tarnish the image of tolerance and goodwill for which Fiji is renowned. Instead, let us stand firm in the face of adversity.' 'Where,' Dr Bavadra asked, was 'justice and reason in trying to destabilize and remove a government as soon as it has been elected? Is the government to be denied the opportunity to prove itself? Is the government to be stopped from proving its commitment to the people? Will you judge the government before we have even had the chance to perform?'²⁴

The Governor General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, also issued a similar message to the 'chiefs and people of Fiji' to uphold the rule of law. 'Nothing good,' he said, could 'come out of unlawful acts or actions that are designed to destabilize the Coalition government.' The unlawful marches would only prevent the government to 'show their leadership potential,' 'disrupt the progress and achievement of the Alliance government of the last sixteen years,' and 'forever change Fiji's image and relationships at regional and international levels.'²⁵ Former Governor General and Vunivalu of Bau, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, similarly urged everyone to respect the 'peoples' choice of a new government.' The only other person of consequence on the Fijian scene, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, maintained what the *Fiji Times* called a 'conspicuous silence.'²⁶ And the Alliance party, too: 'Apart from the briefest of statements declaring that it had nothing to do with the anti-

Government foment, the Alliance has remained extremely quiet.' Maan Singh, President of the Suva branch of the Indian Alliance, expressed the frustration of many of his community in his party. 'All along the Alliance has propagated tolerance, harmony, peace, stability and security. 'It's good for all. Now what has happened to all that?' Ratu Mara, he said, should have shown some respect to Indian members of the Alliance party, which of late he hadn't, understandably dismayed about their poor pulling power in the Indo-Fijian community.²⁷

Ratu Mara's silence was predictable. He had maintained reticence on similar occasions in the past. In 1968, for instance, when the country teetered on the brink of racial riots, he had retreated to Lau where he remained incommunicado for a while. In 1982, he had abstained on the racially inflammatory resolutions passed by the Great Council of Chiefs at Bau. Mara had conceded defeat in a properly constitutional manner, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind that his rejection at the polls had injured his pride and hurt him deeply. The sense of invincibility and indispensability to the nation he had led for so long was shattered. Those who had rejected him should now pay the price for their 'foolhardiness,' he probably felt. That certainly was the Indian High Commissioner TP Sreenivasan's impression who thought Mara was the 'bitterest enemy of the Bavadra government' because 'he saw himself as the rightful owner of the Fijian throne.'²⁸ Beyond that, Mara was probably just as much in the dark as the rest of the country about what all the protests might lead to. In those circumstances, he probably thought it wise to keep his counsel to himself, keep his powder dry, and his options open. A chief must be where his or her people are, he often said. He had already asked his people to support the new government. 'I couldn't see what else I could say further than that. Do I have to repeat it ad nauseum?'²⁹

Away from the public eye, at Savura Creek, Wailoku, Lt Col. Sitiveni Rabuka began training a handful of trusted soldiers for a military coup without actually divulging his true intentions to them until the last minute. Among those who knew of the plans was Isireli Dugu, who led the masked

commandos into Parliament on 14 May. Another member of the close knit circle was Captain Matai Kabara who had returned from training in the United States with a plan, it was speculated, on how to stage a coup. Rabuka portrayed himself as a lone wolf, but he was in fact part of a larger network, according to Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, secretary of the South Pacific Bible Society and an ardent nationalist, who said that 'we asked Rabuka to prepare that [military] side and when the time [comes], when we reach a stage when he must step in, he must be ready to step in.' The decision to execute the coup was 'taken in my office at the Bible Society with Rabuka.'³⁰ The original plan, according to Kubuabola, had been to use a roll-on, roll-off ship at Suva Harbour to transport the detained government members to the remote island of Makogai in the Lomaiviti Sea which had once housed Fiji's only leprosy hospital. The plan had to be revised and the coup executed a day earlier because parliament was not sitting on the designated day. So the detained parliamentarians were taken first to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, then Vieuto and finally Borron House. Apparently a few other people were in the know, including Militoni Leweniqila, the new Speaker of the House, who recalled telling Rabuka that 'if you are going to successfully execute a coup, you may have to take some lives because no one believes a coup is possible in Fiji.'³¹ No one on the government side seemed to have any inkling of what was afoot although it was rumoured at the time that Police Commissioner PU Raman had conveyed an intelligence report on the impending trouble to some in the government.

Rabuka justified his military coup on a number of grounds, none of which now hold water; they did not do so even then. He cited law and order as an important reason.³² He had acted in the national interest to prevent madness and mayhem planned by the Taukei Movement. But duty, surely, demanded that he assist the security forces in apprehending the would-be arsonists instead of joining their ranks and becoming their leader. The key coup supporters, including Inoke Kubuabola, Tomasi Raikivi, Viliame Gonelevu, Apisai Tora, Taniela Veitata, and Filipe Bole, became his closest advisers and members of his Council of State. This was a carefully planned,

well orchestrated coup. Neither was Rabuka's assertion that Fijian interests and institutions were imperiled by the election of the Coalition government. No government, not even a Fijian-dominated one, could touch any legislation affecting Fijian interests without the consent of the nominees in the Senate of the Great Council of Chiefs. His excuses were just that: excuses, and they kept changing as the context and his mood changed.

At the time of the coup, Rabuka portrayed himself as simply a selfless soldier acting alone to save his people from the evil designs of the Coalition government. He even claimed divine inspiration for his plans, as illegal usurpers of power usually do. The tee-shirts proclaimed: 'Steve: The Hand of God,' 'Fiji: God is With Us.' Rabuka was a handsome young man with a massive handlebar moustache and a strong voice, confident in his bearing, convinced of his mission as the messiah of his people and determined to succeed. He reveled in the glory and attention that came his way, untroubled by doubts about the genie his coup had unleashed. In the mid-1990s, as things began to unravel and his leadership was challenged, he invoked the Nuremberg principle of defense: that he had obeyed orders to do what he did. He once told me that he would one day like to write a book with such a title as 'The Kleenax Man,' or 'The Fall Guy' for the manner in which he was used and discarded by some Fijian chiefs who had their own private political ambitions.³³ Specifically, he implicated Ratu Mara in the coup machinations.

Ratu Mara always maintained his innocence, saying that he joined the coup administration purely out of the noblest of motives. His house was on fire, and he could not stand idly by and see it burnt down, which led some to quip — perhaps it was Judge Kishore Govind — that in that event, he should have joined the firefighters, not the arsonists. Jai Ram Reddy and, indeed, most people in Fiji are convinced that a person of Ratu Mara's stature, experience and connections could not but have known what was afoot. Many people would probably see a grain of truth in Indian High Commissioner Sreenivasan's assertion that Mara had to be in the loop 'because I knew that nothing important could happen in Fiji without his blessings.'³⁴ I have

seen sworn statements from Fijians close to the action expressly stating that people were sent to inform Ratu Mara about what was coming.³⁵ However, it was not so much about what he knew or did not know beforehand that is important in the end. It was what he actually did at the time that matters. And the simple truth is that he did very little in defense of democracy at the moment of its greatest danger. It is in that regard that he failed as a national leader. Dr Martin Luther King's words are apposite: 'The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.' Whatever his motivations, Mara's joining the coup cabinet, *Time Magazine* said, 'lent the new regime weight and substance, if not legitimacy, giving the 'new civilian regime its best chance of gaining international recognition.'³⁶

The other chief upon whom suspicion focused was the Governor General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Rabuka's own paramount chief and patron.³⁷ Again, there is no direct evidence linking him to the coup plotters, and some have even defended his innocence,³⁸ but proclamations of his innocence must be treated with skepticism. Daryl Tarte makes the persuasive observation that Ratu Penaia was torn. 'Throughout his career he had expressed concern about the diminishing influence of Fijians in their own land, while at the same time upholding the principles of equal opportunity for all. His instinct for the survival and domination of Fijians was a powerful force that could not be ignored.'³⁹ Whether that emotion was strong enough for him to lean in Rabuka's direction remains the unanswered question. It probably was. They were all implicated by degrees. It was guilt by association, Reddy believes. None of them wanted power to be exercised by anyone else except by the Fijians, preferably high chiefs.

D-DAY AND WEEK AFTER

At Borron House, the Coalition members were cut off from the world. There was both frustration and fear.⁴⁰ A hunger strike was begun but soon aborted. Fiji was not India under the British rule, someone said, where civilized protocols were observed even in the gravest of circumstances. Here, no

one would care if they died. It was not for no reason that the islands were once known as the 'Cannibal Isles.' Speaker Militoni Leweniqila tried to lighten the mood of the captives with a couple of bottles of whisky and tall tales, but despair and desperation filled the general atmosphere. On 19 May, all the detained Indo-Fijian Parliamentarians wrote a signed handwritten letter to the Governor General:

The Indian members of the Coalition have been incarcerated at Borron House since the early hours of Sunday, 17th May, 1987. We were removed here forcibly and against the wishes of both ourselves and our non-Indian colleagues by the military. As of 18th of May, visits by our wives have been discontinued. We have no way of communicating with the outside world and do not know of our present position and future.

It has come to our attention through news broadcast that you have sworn in the military commander who assumed power by the use of force and in flagrant violation of the country's constitution. We have learnt with shock that you have sworn in the Military Commander as the chairman of the Council of Ministers, the remaining members of which we understand will be sworn in later today. We have also learnt with alarm that it is proposed to put in place a new constitution which will deprive the Indian community of their rights enshrined in the present constitution which was negotiated and agreed upon in good faith at the London conference.

The constitution is a grant from Her Majesty to all the people of Fiji. It is unprecedented that those rights are now being taken away as a result of unilateral decision of those who assumed power illegally. Your Excellency is aware that not a single bona fide Indian leader is free to advise or lead his people. This whole exercise borders on deceit and treachery. We, the Indians members, lodge the strongest protest to you against this treatment of a whole community.

Surely, we are entitled to expect a little more and we would like to know as a matter of urgency our position and the future course you propose as Her Majesty's representative in this country. Our particular concern at this point is the question of release and the timing so that we may be with our families and our people in the hour of their greatest need. It seems that the others that we trusted and relied upon have deserted them.

As we see it, we were separated from our non-Indian colleagues deliberately as part of an orchestrated anti-Indian campaign by the military ruler and those who are behind him. We are equally concerned for Dr Bavadra and our other colleagues presently held at Vieu.

In the name of humanity, can we have an answer from you please?

Whether the Governor General ever saw the letter is not known. He was himself caught in a swirling pool of confusion. Soon after taking over Parliament, Rabuka went up to Government House to personally inform Ratu Penaia of the momentous event which had just taken place. He pleaded with him to 'please distance yourself to see what it is we as your subjects can do to take over leadership of this land and the Fijian people until such time as we think that you should be invited to resume your leadership to a position which is rightfully yours and which was bestowed upon you by our Father and God Almighty.'⁴¹ Rabuka spoke feelingly and respectfully as Ganilau was his traditional chief and the two had been 'very, very close together' for some time. Ratu Penaia responded only with mild rebuke rather than consternation, as the occasion demanded. 'What have you done?' he asked. 'You mean I have no job?' He added, 'Couldn't you have given them [the Coalition] time to carry out their policies? Perhaps they would have shown us in a few months time they were incapable of running the country anyway?' And 'Have you thought of what you are going to do next?' 'Good luck,' the Governor General is reported to have said to Rabuka. 'I hope you know what you are doing.'⁴²

Rabuka then returned to Government Buildings to meet with the members of the diplomatic corps at 2 in the afternoon.⁴³ Flanked by former Alliance ministers Ahmed Ali and Peter Stinson, he announced that the 1970 constitution had been abrogated, the three most senior police officers sacked (Police Commissioner PU Raman, his deputy, Moses Tuisawau, and Assistant Commissioner Chandra Deo Sharma), and Fiji Military Forces Commander Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, who was away in Australia on an official visit, and Lt Col. Jim Sanday, the Chief of Staff, suspended. Sanday left Fiji for good soon afterwards and refused many offers over the years to rejoin the military. Indeed, he flatly contradicted the reasons Rabuka publicly gave for the coup.⁴⁴ Ratu Epeli, ever adaptable and with a well known taste for the good life, managed to keep himself gainfully employed as a diplomat and a politician (and as a minister in the military interim administration after the 2006 coup). In May 2009, he accepted an invitation from the military to become the Vice President of Fiji, and in October, was appointed President. Such are the politics of survival in Fiji.

The news of the composition of the new interim administration came early on the morning of 15 May. Rabuka was the only military representative on the Council of Ministers. The rest were members of the Taukei Movement and the former Alliance government. They included Ratu William Toganivalu, Ratu Josaia Tavaiaqia, Peter Stinson, Dr Ahmed Ali, Dr Apenisa Kurusiqila, Narsi Raniga, Filipe Bole, Viliame Gonelevu, Timoci Vesikula, Kelemedi Bulewa, Rev. Tomasi Raikivi, Adi Litia Cakobau and Jone Veisamasama, the secretary of the Alliance Party. The most surprising inclusion was Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. 'I accept,' is what Mara told Rabuka when offered a position. 'I nearly hit the roof as I jumped and cheered,' Rabuka recalled. Well he might: with Mara on board, Rabuka had won the first round. For his part, Ratu Mara said, 'I have no authority to talk to him. I was called to come and help. He was the man in-charge. I came in and took my place among others.'⁴⁵ Perhaps. The presence of such a strong Alliance contingent in the Council reinforced the rapidly deepening suspicion of the party's collusion with the coup makers. The broad smiles, victory

signs and clenched fists punching the air showed the enthusiasm of those who had joined in. An Australian television program reported that Ahmed Ali had ‘made it clear that the Alliance Party was unofficially backing the Taki [Taukei] Movement and that the Alliance would not be in opposition for too much longer.’⁴⁶ ‘The Crown sits uneasily on Bavadra’s head,’ is what he said to me at the time. Reddy was in no doubt that ‘the real cause of the coup lay in the ambitions of those who had lost power in 1987 and were determined to get it back. They were engineered to regain political control.’

Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau was goaded into a different direction, despite advice from Sir John Falvey and Isikeli Mataitoga, later a High Court judge and diplomat, that he was no longer the Governor General but was now acting in his capacity simply as a high chief of Cakaudrove. For these two — Mataitoga would later be sworn in as a captain in the army and appear in public in military uniform with a pistol by his side — had accepted the coup as a done deed and an accomplished fact against which it was futile to protest. Ratu Penaia may have emotionally sympathized with the aims of the coup, and probably did too, but he heeded firm advice from the Queen not to recognize the military regime, by the international opinion which overwhelmingly condemned the military take over, especially from the leaders of the Commonwealth, and locally by the high court judges, led by the Chief Justice, Sir Timoci Tuivaga. At 2 pm, Tuivaga, through magistrate Howard Morrison, a former member of the elite SAS, secretly sent the Governor General an unsolicited letter signed by himself and seven other judges which said that the ‘purported suspension of the constitution by the military was ‘illegal and invalid,’ as was the purported suspension of the judiciary, that the constitution ‘remains in force unchanged,’ that the judges assured the Governor General ‘of our undivided and complete loyalty and of our readiness to continue to exercise our duties in accordance with the law of Fiji and our oath of office, and the judges’ declaration was endorsed by other judges of the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court who were not physically present in Suva to sign the letter.’⁴⁷ It was a declaration of great courage and integrity at a moment of grave crisis.

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Official Residence of the Chief Justice,
228 Ratu Sukuna Road,
Suva.

17th May, 1987.

His Excellency Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, GCMG, KCV0, DSO, ED,
Governor-General,
Government House,
SUVA.

Your Excellency,

We, Her Majesty's Judges of Fiji whose names
appear below declare to Your Excellency

- (1) That the purported suspension of the
Constitution of Fiji by the military regime which
has assumed de facto power is illegal and invalid.
- (2) That the purported suspension of the Judiciary by
the said regime is also illegal and invalid.
- (3) That the Constitution of Fiji established by
Her Majesty in council by the Fiji Independence
Order 1970 remains in force unchanged.
- (4) That we assure Your Excellency of our undivided
and complete loyalty and of our readiness to
continue to exercise our duties in accordance with
the law of Fiji and our oaths of office.
- (5) This declaration is supported by the Judges who
are not present at the signing hereof namely,
Sir Graham Speight, Vice President of the Court of
Appeal, Sir Clinton Roper and Sir Barry O'Regan,
Justices of the Court of Appeal and Mr. Justice
Dyke of the Supreme Court.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

Dated at Suva this 17th day of May 1987

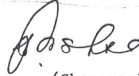
*This page and facing page: Judges rallying against the coup.
Courtesy of Sir Timoci Tuivaga.*

SUNSET AT NOON

Signed by



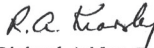
(Sir Timoci Uluiburetu Tuivaga)
Chief Justice and President of the Fiji
Court of Appeal



(Ghananand Mishra)
Senior Justice of Appeal



(Sir Moti Tikaram)
Senior Puisne Judge and Ombudsman



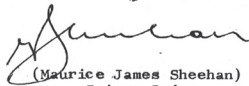
(Richard Ambler Kearsley)
Puisne Judge



(Francis Xavier Rooney)
Puisne Judge



(Kisher Nand Govind)
Puisne Judge



(Maurice James Sheehan)
Puisne Judge

The judge's intervention stiffened the Governor General's resolve to stand by the constitution. In the early hours of Friday morning, FM 96, then the country's only commercial station, played the full tape of his message, which had been broadcast in a truncated form at six the previous evening. Proclaiming himself deeply disturbed by the 'unlawful seizure of members of my government,' a situation 'which must not be allowed to continue,' Ratu Sir Penaia declared a state of emergency and assumed executive authority vested in him by the constitution. The constitution had not been abrogated, he said, 'and all officers duly appointed as such remain in office.' He urged everyone, especially the members of the Royal Fiji Military Forces, to 'return to their lawful allegiance in accordance with the oath of office and their duty of obedience without delay.' He said that 'In the temporary absence of the Ministers of the Crown I have assumed that authority.'⁴⁸ These were brave words from a besieged Head of State, but not destined to last long. Upon returning from Taveuni on Sunday evening on 17 May, where he had gone to attend the funeral of a relative, Ratu Penaia inexplicably swore in Rabuka as the head of government, just two days after he had castigated him as the unlawful usurper of his, the Governor General's, constitutional authority.

Why he changed his mind it is not known. Most probably, he had heeded the advice of his people from Cakaudrove, where he was the Tui Cakau-elect, the paramount chief of the province and of Sitiveni Rabuka himself, that Rabuka had done what most Fijians wanted done anyway, that he was not a treasonous criminal but a great Fijian hero.

Rabuka's newly legitimized role did not last long. No sooner had he left Government House than the Chief Justice, after numerous failed attempts, was able to get an audience with the Governor General at 7:45 that evening. He presented him with a four-point plan. The plan advised the Governor General to dissolve the Parliament and call for fresh elections; proclaim himself the Executive Authority under Section 72 of the constitution; appoint a bi-partisan Council of Advisors to help him run the country in the interim period, and set up a Royal Commission of Enquiry to 'inquire

into the efficacy and general acceptance of the 1970 Constitution and to suggest such modification as may meet the expectations and assuage the fears of the people of Fiji.' Meanwhile, the Governor General could exercise the prerogative of mercy to pardon all those 'implicated in the illegal seizure of power' as 'no purpose will be served by vindictiveness which might hinder the complete restoration of legitimacy.' This was sanguine advice under the most difficult of circumstances, but defective in strictly constitutional terms. The Prerogative of Mercy could only be exercised after the due process of law had been allowed to take its course.

Equally problematic was the dissolution of Parliament without the consent of the duly elected Prime Minister. Jai Ram Reddy would later help Dr Bavadra mount a Supreme Court case challenging the constitutionality of the Governor General's action.⁴⁹ Perhaps reminded of the important legal and constitutional issues at stake, late on Monday afternoon (18 May), Ratu Penaia informed the nation that it was 'impossible for him to recognize the regime.' The following day, he refused to swear in Rabuka's ministers when they arrived at Government House in their Sunday best. Rabuka was dejected. 'The penalty for treason in all Commonwealth countries is death,' he said in a statement read on Radio Fiji, 'and if this is to be my destiny, then I will accept it.' At 4 O'clock, the Governor General announced the plan the judges had advised him to follow. Later that evening, all the detained Coalition parliamentarians were released. 'I think there was considerable courage displayed by the Governor General,' said New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange. 'He was simply not supported by Ratu Mara.'⁵⁰ That was a fairly widely held view internationally. For his part, Ratu Mara would never forgive Lange, or Bob Hawke, his Australian counterpart, for their openly biting, sneering criticism of the Alliance leader and his 'conspicuous silence,' not too subtly doubting his proclamations of innocence and hinting at his complicity in the whole affair.

The release of the detained parliamentarians brought huge relief to the country knowing that they were not subjected to physical assault and abuse. The following day, 20 May, as news spread of Dr Bavadra addressing

a rally at Albert Park spread, large crowds began to gather in the city. By mid-day about a thousand Indo-Fijians had assembled at the Park. Many had come in hired buses from various parts of Viti Levu, some, as I was to discover, armed with sharpened cane knives hidden in the boots of cars in case any harm came to their leaders. Their loyalty and determination was both impressive and distressing. But what was seen by one group, the Coalition supporters, as a quiet celebration of peaceful end of a crisis, was seen by another, supporters of the Taukei Movement, as a provocation. About a hundred hired Fijian youth employed at the Suva docks, Veitata's stronghold, marched through Victoria Parade, Suva's main street, determined to break up the meeting. Armed with sticks, stones, cement bricks and iron bars plucked from parked Suva City repair trucks, they went on a rampage, smashing car windows, and chasing and beating any and every Indo-Fijian they could find, the images of rampant violence caught on tape and broadcast around the world.

At the edge of Albert Park, fierce fighting broke out briefly between the two camps before a timely arrival of a truck full of soldiers stopped the violence from escalating. One soldier who formed a barrier between the rampaging mob and the Albert Park crowd was Captain Filipo Tarakinikini, who would rise to fame during George Speight's attempted coup in 2000.⁵¹ The Fijian youth then retreated towards the market, taunting and offering to fight their opponents in the virtually deserted, cowering, streets of Suva, throwing stones and other objects at offices and shops safe behind wooden hurricane shutters. The injured Indo-Fijians were treated at the Suva hospital, while frightened residents in the neighborhoods of the city formed groups to protect their family and homes. There were some isolated incidents of looting and stone-throwing in other parts of Viti Levu, especially Nausori, but the worst had passed. The coup supporters had vented their frustration and taken their revenge, and their hapless victims were left to nurse their wounds and ponder their unsettled future. All that survives of that frightening incident now are the grainy images captured on Australian television tapes of people being punched and fleeing, a permanent reminder



Released from captivity, with wife Chandra, daughter Helen, an unidentified person, and brother-in-law Dr Krishna Nair in front. Photo courtesy of Fiji Times.

of how ugly things had turned in Suva and how volatile and potentially dangerous the situation really was. Anything could have happened.

At the other end of town, at the Suva Civic Centre, a Great Council of Chiefs meeting had been convened by Ratu Sir Penaia. As a distinguished soldier of the Malaya campaign, a conservative high chief in the Sukuna tradition of 'responsible authoritarianism' with an 'unambiguous lack of compromise towards any proposals deemed likely to weaken Fijian rights and institutions,'⁵² his public opposition to the coup and the military generally went against the grain of his inner feelings. Ratu Penaia was emotionally close to Rabuka, and his own sons were officers in the Fiji military. To test his judgment and to seek advice from circles beyond the judiciary, he convened a meeting of the body he trusted most and of which he had long been the head: the Great Council of Chiefs.⁵³ The chiefs gathered at the Suva Civic Centre on Tuesday, surrounded by hundreds of specially bussed-in, hymn-singing Fijian men and women beseeching them to support Rabuka.

Tears flowed freely along with copious amounts of yaqona in what resembled a carnival atmosphere at Sukuna Park across the street, cheerful and celebratory, people sitting on the lawn, clapping and singing. Inside the Centre, the discussions were tense and emotional. Chiefs with liberal views who were considered sympathetic to the deposed government and to the cause of democracy, such as Bau chief Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, were excluded from the meeting. Speaker after speaker rose to support Colonel Rabuka and the spirit and intent of the coup, and for a greater role for themselves in any future constitutional arrangement. For most at the meeting, the issue was not that the 1970 Constitution should be overthrown; it was whether, in the event of some unforeseen legal obstacles, they should go the full distance and, if it came to it, sever Fiji's links with the Crown altogether. By the time the Great Council of Chiefs concluded its meeting on Friday (21 May), there was unanimous support for the coup and for Rabuka personally. The republic option was postponed for the moment, but the chiefs wanted a hand in deciding the composition of the Governor General's proposed Council of Advisors. The military, the chiefs resolved, should be asked to re-examine the 1970 Constitution 'with a view to changing, abolishing or abrogating it in the quickest possible time and to ensure that Fijians were guaranteed the political government at all time.'

Rabuka was elated with the solid support the chiefs had given him. A transformed man now, his spirits soaring, he smiled broadly from the balcony of the Suva Civic Centre with a watchful Mara standing behind him as the Royal Fiji Military Force Band played 'I Did It My Way,' 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' and 'Bridge Over Troubled Waters.' Both his clenched fists raised in victory, he told the applauding Fijians sitting across the lawn below, *Sa noda na qaqa*, the victory is ours, the same words Ratu Mara had used in his message to the Fijian people at the conclusion of the 1965 constitutional conference. With the chiefs firmly behind him, Rabuka vowed 'not to agree to anything that will destroy the aim of the coup.' He was the man at the helm again. Ratu Penaia, too, was overwhelmed by the support the chiefs had given to the coup, and accordingly changed his course

SUPPORT THE G-G

The Press and the Radio are no longer free. But we express our respect and appreciation for the inspiring stand of the Governor-General, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau. He has courageously stated that he is still the rightful Head of Government and he does not support the military take-over.

He is under arrest and is no longer able to speak to the Nation. This undignified detention of such a highly-placed and respected leader is an insult to the tradition of this land.

We appeal that Ratu Sir Penaia be given a full and free opportunity to address the nation.

Brothers and sisters, let us be warned, now that freedom has been curtailed, that this regime will use any tactics to instill fear amongst us.

Let us not spread rumours that incite violence or convey fear. We can decide that we will not be governed by fear. So long as we resolutely stick to NON-VIOLENCE and our actions are just, we should not hold back.

If we will not act, how can we expect others to do so? If we take one small step in courage, perhaps we will discover greater courage. Immediately you could make copies of this and begin passing them around.

Each one, tell one.

Paint signs and prepare posters saying : ' WE SUPPORT G - G ' 'LET G-G SPEAK' 'FREE OUR G-G' or 'PEOPLE OF FIJI RESIST THE MILITARY REGIME'.

MAY GOD BLESS FIJI

An anti-coup leaflet on the streets of Suva, 16 May 1987.

in their favor. Invited to address the chiefs' meeting on Thursday, he was booed by some more ardent supporters of the coup, which in itself was an unprecedented gesture of insult to a high chief, punishable by death in ancient times. Ratu Penaia tried to explain his complex constitutional role as the head of state which required him, whatever his own private feelings on any matter might be, to be faithful to his oath of office to uphold the constitution and remain above partisan politics. His stand left many chiefs at the meeting frustrated, and they later dispatched Mara and Rabuka to plead with him to be more sympathetic to their interests and concerns. The Governor General was persuaded.

He returned the next day to the Civic Centre. There had been a misunderstanding between himself and the chiefs 'in the true meaning and implications of the message contained in my address to you,' he said, adding that 'we are all aiming at the same result, generally, but that we are considering different methods of achieving this.'⁵⁴ He went on: 'Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind, therefore, that as a native Fijian and as one who is blessed with Fijian chiefly status, the interests of my people, the indigenous Fijians, are those which I hold and shall always hold dear and close to my heart.' He assured the chiefs that he would place 'great weight' on their advice and promised that the views 'expressed in this meeting on the need not to ignore or undermine the best interests of the native Fijians shall always be paramount in my mind.' This was a commitment and pledge which he would try to honor and accommodate, while simultaneously keeping his oath of office and his loyalty to the Crown.

Just how far the Governor General was prepared to go to accommodate the chiefs' demands became clear when he announced his plan to restore Fiji to normalcy, a plan which, he hastened to add, 'has been discussed with and found acceptable to the military regime and its leader, Colonel Rabuka.' The announcement of his 18-member Council of Advisors demonstrated the influence of the Great Council of Chiefs and the Alliance party. Of the three Indo-Fijians, Harish Sharma, the deposed Deputy Prime Minister, and Mustapha, former president of the influential and overwhelmingly

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S COUNCIL OF ADVISORS

Name	Affiliation	Ethnicity
Sitiveni Rabuka	Military	Fijian
Alipate Qetaki	Taukei Movement	Fijian
Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara	Alliance	Fijian
Ratu J Tavaqia	Alliance	Fijian
Livai Nasilivata	Alliance	Fijian
Jone Veisamasama	Alliance	Fijian
Apenisa Kurusiqila	Alliance	Fijian
Viliame Gonelevu	Taukei Movement	Fijian
Filipe Bole	Alliance	Fijian
Josua Toganivalu	Alliance	Fijian
Jo Cavalevu	Civil Servant	Fijian
Savenaca Siwatibau	Civil Servant	Fijian
Dr Timoci Bavadra	Coalition	Fijian
Harish Sharma	Coalition	Indo-Fijian
Daniel Mustapha	Independent	Indo-Fijian
Mumtaz Ali	Independent	Indo-Fijian
Paul Manueli	Independent	Rotuman

indigenous Fijian Methodist Church, refused to serve while Mumtaz Ali let his membership lapse quietly. Dr Bavadra refused as well, saying that 'there was virtually no consultation with me, as Prime Minister of Fiji, as to the composition or formation of the Council of Advisors.' Also, when the announcement was made, it was specified that the agreement was between the Governor General, Rabuka and Ratu Mara. 'The head, or the Prime Minister of the country, was virtually ignored. I cannot see my way through to participate in a Council of Advisors that was formed undemocratically and unconstitutionally.'⁵⁵

Dr Bavadra must by now have realized that Ratu Penaia was not the neutral and impartial leader he had imagined him at first to be. That certainly was the gradually forming opinion overseas. Bavadra started to distance himself from the Governor General's plans and began seeking alternative ways of restoring his deposed government back into power, which was by then fast becoming an evanescent dream. With the announcement of the Council of Advisors came to an end the first phase of the crisis. The brief tussle for power between Colonel Rabuka and the Taukei Movement, on the one hand, and the Governor General and the deposed Coalition government, on the other, had been resolved in favor of the former. Reddy, too, was disappointed. 'When the Governor General took over the reins after the coup, there was some hope in the little flickering light. But when he announced the advisory council after dissolving Parliament, the light was extinguished,' he said. 'How can we serve on a committee [the Falvey Committee: see below] which is bent on giving almost entire rights for the Fijians to rule this country? What happens to the political rights of the Indians and other races?'⁵⁶

On 1 June, Ratu Penaia traveled to the west to see and assess for himself the mood of the country, particularly of the Indo-Fijian community with whom, up to that point, contact had been virtually non-existent. He would have seen, as he travelled through the dispirited cane country beginning around Sigatoka, people going about their daily lives in resignation, deeply concerned about the unfolding events, disturbed about their marginalization and anxious about their future. At the Governor's Bure in Lautoka, the Governor General had a one-on-one meeting with Jai Ram Reddy. At the meeting, at which Isikeli Maitaitoga and Inoke Tabualevu, a senior civil servant, were present, Ganilau impressed on Reddy the importance of keeping the economy going. 'Give him a scotch,' he ordered, and then asked Reddy why the Indo-Fijian cane growers were boycotting the cane harvest. Could he not make them see reason? Reddy responded: 'Fijians have taken what they wanted by force. Why can't Indians peacefully protest what has happened to them?' Reddy conveyed to Ratu Penaia the deep sense of hurt

in the Indo-Fijian community, their sense of despair and disillusionment. He wanted the soldiers to stop threatening and intimidating innocent civilians. Above all, he sought an opportunity to hold public meetings, to talk to his people, to gauge their feelings, to tell them of his plans about their future. Ratu Penaia agreed to relax the Public Emergency Regulation then in force. Reddy also remembers telling Ratu Penaia 'how disappointed he was in the former Prime Minister [Mara].' Ganilau did not respond. No doubt, he had heard many others saying the same thing. By the end of the meeting, recalls Peter Thomson, the Governor General's Permanent Secretary, who was also present at the meeting, 'there was a genuine sense of desire to help each other,' with Reddy telling Ganilau: 'You and I always got along well when we were in Parliament.'⁵⁷ That was then.

With things simmering in Fiji, it was decided to send senior Coalition leaders to key countries to brief them on the events in Fiji and to seek their support for the restoration of democracy. One of the truly remarkable developments following the military takeover was the overnight sprouting of pro-democracy movements in all the major cities with sizeable Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. They held political rallies, lobbied their members of Parliament, wrote angry letters to the newspapers, appeared on radio and television, collected funds. They were also keen to hear the story from the 'horse's mouth.'

Jai Ram Reddy, Dr Timoci Bavadra and Joeli Kalou were sent to London to seek an audience with the Queen. 'She is my Queen, she is the Queen of Fiji,' Dr Bavadra said. 'She is bound at least to listen to me,' Bavadra told reporters.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Her Majesty was under no such obligation. The Governor General was still in office and he had initiated a (tortuous) process of getting the country back to constitutional normalcy. He would remain the sole channel of communication with the Palace for the time being. But the Bavadra group did manage to have four audiences with the Queen's Principal Private Secretary, Sir Michael Heseltine, at Kensington Palace. What transpired in those meetings remains confidential, but there

can be little doubt that the true motives of the coup would have been conveyed to him. Sir Michael, it was reported in the press, asked the group to return to Fiji and work with the Governor General. Joeli Kalou reportedly could not contain his frustration at the Palace's seeming vacillation. 'What's the point of talking to him? He is the one who initiated the coup.' The Governor General's alleged complicity in the crisis was a matter of wide public speculation. The group also saw Sir Sridath Ramphal, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, and briefed him on the situation in Fiji. Ramphal, for his part, though, saw Bavadra as a man who had won the last elections, but was no longer the Prime Minister of Fiji.

While in London, the group met with the members of Movement for Democracy. Kenneth Bain, once the Secretary of Social Services to AD Patel, and later a staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat, wrote about one such meeting. Reddy impressed him: 'There was Jai Ram Reddy, Attorney General and nominated by the new Prime Minister as a member of the Senate on 12 April. He was a quietly impressive, somewhat aloof, man — calm, lucid and persuasive. He spent much of the time listening and drafting; but there were moments when he would allow himself the indulgence of a barely perceptible smile.'⁵⁹ (The contrast Bain drew with Tupeni Baba was interesting: his 'engaging impetuosity' and his own estimation that he could be 'mesmerizing').

On his way to London, Reddy and his law partner Bhupendra Patel, who had accompanied him as well, met with Natwar Singh, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, who had flown to Bombay to meet with them. In Bombay, Reddy and Patel also met with former Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, AP Venkateswaran, who had taken a keen interest in recent developments in Fiji. On their way back, they briefly met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi. Reddy was defiant and determined to restore democracy. 'We will have rallies, civil disobedience — everything to oppose the army rule,' he told the Indians.⁶⁰ 'I am prepared to do anything peacefully. And we will accept nothing short of the restoration of the government that was overthrown.' He was also asked about the

outlandish (and soon discredited) view propagated by the hyperactive Fiji exile and Hawaii-based conspiracy theorist James Anthony that the coup was engineered by the Americans worried about the slippage of their power and prestige in the region. 'I am convinced it was planned from within,' Reddy said. 'There was no question of our government undermining the interests of the Americans. In fact, we had made it clear that we will have no truck with the Soviets.' Similar assurances were given and views expressed by others touring the world, although Krishna Datt's fear-inducing claims of massive rapes of women, of imminent rifts within the military and of rampant beatings and harassment by soldiers seemed, in the absence of credible, verifiable, evidence, to be stretched. Krishna, my high school history teacher, has a theatrical side to him. The overseas trips had given the Coalition the opportunity to air their views and connect with their supporters, but the leaders, certainly Reddy, also returned firmly believing that the true battle would have to be won in Fiji, not overseas. The situation was summed up best by *Melbourne Herald*: 'In the world capitals the deposed Prime Minister managed to muster some obligatory tut-tut ting, but that was about all. His disappointing reception in countries which publicly make so much of their support for democratic institutions has taught them much about realpolitik.'⁶¹

Except in Suva, by early July life was beginning to return to normal, or as normal as it could be hoped for in the circumstances. Reddy toured the country around that time and gave speeches to massive rallies of Coalition supporters. He was the one leader they all Indo-Fijians wanted to hear. At these meetings, Reddy informed the people of their overseas visits and plans they had to return Fiji to constitutional democracy. There were two themes in particular he emphasized in his rallies. One was the importance of having political rights. Rabuka said that Indo-Fijians could stay in Fiji and make all the money they wanted, own the best buildings and drive the best cars, but should accept curtailment of their political rights in favor of the indigenous community. Reddy told a thousand-strong meeting in Rakiraki that 'to remove the political rights of the Indians would mean

turning them into economic slaves,' adding: 'Once your political rights are gone, what guarantee have you that your stay here is safe. We should not live in fear. Living in fear is like suffering for death.'⁶² A message of hope, to stand up for your rights, mattered hugely at a time of almost total darkness and despair.

And the second theme he continuously emphasized was for the Indo-Fijian community not to lose hope or confidence or accept the narrative about their role in Fijian history written by the Fijian nationalists and their European sympathizers. At an equally well-attended meeting in Labasa a week earlier, Reddy had told the gathering, 'People wanting to change the constitution ought to understand the cause of the Indians and how they had worked under difficult conditions to shape Fiji to what it is today.' To those who pushed for accommodation in the name of 'facing reality,' Reddy retorted, 'If we let the present situation remain, then our children will return to *girit* life.'⁶³ *'Hum log aap ke sun ke ghar men diya ek baar phir jalaya,'* a man said to Reddy. We have lit lights again in our homes after listening to you. I have listened to some of the tapes of these and other meetings. The speeches are passionate and rousing, sometimes leading to the thought: 'We should not accept what is being done to us lying down.' The thought of turning away from the path of peace crosses your mind momentarily, of drawing a line in the sand and saying: 'This far and no further, no matter what the price.' Reddy's speeches have that kind of effect. I get the distinct sense of a volcanic rage in Reddy as I listen to his words, of a proud man from a proud warrior tradition, powerless to protect his people at a time of the gravest crisis in their lives, and unable to stem the tide of daily humiliation visited upon them for no fault of their own. I meet people even today who recall vividly the emotional power and intensity of one of Jai Ram Reddy's greatest speeches delivered, now probably lost to posterity, to a packed Govind Park Stadium at Ba on Diwali night in 1988. A tamer English translation is at the end of this chapter.



Lopsided post-coup constitutional discussions. Cartoon reproduced with the permission of Ian Sharpe.

FALVEY AND HIS STILL-BORN REPORT

Two weeks after announcing his 'compromise' plan, Ratu Sir Penaia Gani-lau unveiled his detailed proposal to return Fiji to constitutional normalcy. It involved a four-stage process. The first step would be the appointment of a Constitutional Review Commission. The Commission would comprise four representatives each from the Coalition, the Alliance, the Great Council of Chiefs and the Governor General himself. The second stage would involve the Commission holding a series of public hearings throughout the country to gauge public opinion on how best to achieve that goal and then prepare a report on the 'ways and means of strengthening the political rights of the indigenous Fijians. The third stage would involve the formation of a Council of National Reconciliation which would 'arrive at a consensus to agree on the proposed changes to the constitution and to agree on a Covenant of

National Reconciliation.' If consensus was reached at that stage, as Ratu Penaia hoped, the recommendations of the Commission would be enacted in accordance with the amendment provisions of the 1970 Constitution. The last step would be an uncontested election for the House of Representatives which would approve the unanimously recommended changes in accordance with the formula for national reconciliation. The final outcome, the Governor General hoped, would be an amended constitution embodying changes which would satisfy the Fijian demand for political paramountcy. The Parliament would then be dissolved, and fresh elections called under the new constitution.

The Governor General's 'path back to normalcy' received predictable responses from various quarters. Rabuka was happy. 'I have seen the plans and I believe they can achieve the objectives I set out to achieve for the Fijians and the people of Fiji. I think the GG and my committee that had set out to review the constitution have the same objective but the method of achieving the objective are different,' echoing the Governor General's own words at the meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs. Reddy said the Coalition would refuse to participate in the Commission's proceedings.⁶⁴ 'They can have the wedding, if they want, but the bridegroom would not be there,' he said in Hindi. Dr Bavadra outlined the obvious flaws. His party which had won the elections, and thus enjoyed the mandate of the people would be in a minority on the Commission dominated by representatives of other groups, including the Alliance Party and the Great Council of Chiefs, both of which had a 'community of purpose' in supporting changes to the constitution. He noted, too, that the Governor General had assumed, without testing the public opinion through a referendum, for example, that the constitution needed to be changed. If any changes were to be contemplated, it should be done by a Royal Commission comprising eminent jurists from outside Fiji.

Bavadra and Reddy were not the only people casting doubts on the wisdom of the Governor General's proposed plan of action. *The Australian* newspaper, which had until then urged caution and support for the Governor

General, denounced the plans as a triumph of 'Melanesian chauvinism and exclusivism.' It wrote:

Implicit in Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau's announcement of a so-called 'path back to democracy' is a deplorable admission that Fiji, under its present administration, has now definitely withdrawn from the international community of democratic nations and placed itself in the same camp as those like South Africa where considerations of race and ethnicity are judged to be more important than fundamental civil and political rights. An uncontested election would simply rubber stamp constitutional changes designed to ensure native Fijian hegemony over the Indians and other non-Fijian majority. In this way, the objectives of Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and his fellow ethnic nationalists would be effectively fulfilled, with the added bonus of having been achieved through a vote in Parliament, the only institution that is empowered to change the constitution.⁶⁵

The *New Zealand Herald* called the Governor General's proposals a 'face-saving charade of consultation.'⁶⁶ Even the United States, which had maintained a noticeably low profile on Fiji, stated that the 'creation of any system in Fiji which did not respect and protect the rights of all of Fiji's people, regardless of its label, should not expect support from us.'⁶⁷

In late June, Ratu Sir Penaia appointed a Constitutional Review Committee chaired by Sir John Falvey, the former Alliance Attorney General and a close confidante of the Fijian establishment for over three decades. The Coalition would be represented by Jai Ram Reddy, Tupeni Baba, Ratu Mosese Tuisawau and Krishna Datt. The Alliance was represented by Tomasi Vakatora, Filipe Bole, Apisai Tora and David Pickering, Tora being the founder member of the Taukei Movement. Adi Litia Cakobau, Aporosa Rakoto, Sitiveni Rabuka and Ro Jone Mataitini represented the Great Council of Chiefs and Dr MS Sahu Khan, Kantilal Parshottam, Atfoa Varea and Isikeli Mataitoga, all lawyers, represented the Governor General. The Terms of Reference of the Committee required it

To review the constitution of Fiji with the view to proposing to the Governor-General amendments which will strengthen the representation of indigenous Fijians and in so doing bear in mind the best interests of other peoples in Fiji; to call upon and hear the views of the public of Fiji on this subject; to begin hearings on 6th July, 1987, and to deliver to the Governor General the findings and recommendations of the Committee by 31 July, 1987.

The urgency and the intent are evident in setting up the Committee and in the scope of its work. Reddy and his colleagues on the Committee boycotted its proceedings for the first week because they objected to the restrictive Terms of Reference which were loaded to accomplish one goal: the entrenchment of Fijian political control. The Fijian nationalists were equally adamant against any concession, with Filipe Bole, Inoke Kubuabola and Taniela Veitata telling Ratu Penaia on 3 July: *sa vakarau na dogo*, meaning that they were ready to make clubs from the mangrove trees to use violence against their opponents.⁶⁸ The Coalition was unmoved. Reddy proposed an alternative Terms of Reference. The Governor General acceded to his request, with the result that the final Terms of Reference of the Constitutional Review Committee read: 'To review the constitution of Fiji with the view to proposing to the Governor-General any amendments which will guarantee indigenous Fijian political interests with full regard to the interests of other people in Fiji.' 'The [original] terms infer, without doubt,' editorialized the *Fiji Times*, 'that whatever happens, the Fijians will be given complete political dominance over the non-Fijian majority of the population.' It quoted a letter Dr Bavadra had written to the Governor General on 29 June: 'To effectively disenfranchise people born in Fiji for no reason other than their ethnicity will not make for the long term peace and stability of Fiji. On the contrary, it will be sowing the seeds of resentment, disharmony and even confrontation. The world is full of examples of such cases. Is this not the very kind of discrimination the Commonwealth says it is fighting against the South African regime?'⁶⁹ Cogent arguments, but the minds in powerful circles had been made up already.

There were some calls for the Coalition to boycott the proceedings of the Review Committee altogether because, given its composition, the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Why taint yourself by participating in a flawed, farcical process designed to produce a predetermined outcome that would be detrimental to the cause of democracy? Reddy disagreed. Participation did not mean concurrence. He was aware that there was tremendous pressure on the Coalition from its supporters both at home and abroad to participate. A boycott would most likely bring adverse consequence which the Coalition could ill-afford. Reddy was determined to take the opportunity of the hearings to put his case before the people of Fiji and the international community. Reddy also reasoned that the expected public submissions from across the country and from people from all walks of life could become an important platform to educate the people about the protection in the 1970 Constitution of the rights of indigenous Fijians which could, conceivably, undermine the propaganda of the Taukei Movement and other nationalist Fijians. Participation would buy the Coalition valuable time to consolidate its position and put pressure on the Governor General to extract further concessions from the coup supporters. And finally, as the visits to foreign capitals had shown, sympathy did not always translate into tangible support. The battle would have to be fought in Fiji. Five years later, Reddy would face a similar dilemma and he would, once again, make a similar decision.

The Review Committee began its work in mid-July, traveling to the country's four major towns and receiving some eight hundred submissions from individuals, social and religious groups, cultural organizations and political parties. The whole atmosphere was eerie, Reddy recalled, a 'terrible experience' made even more ominous with Rabuka turning up armed with pistol visibly on display. The overwhelming majority of the Indo-Fijian community opposed any alterations to the 1970 Constitution without a full national debate. The only notable exception was the Fiji Muslim League, or rather a Suva-oriented branch influenced by Ahmed Ali, which told the Review Committee that it endorsed the changes wanted by the chiefs of Fiji because Fiji was first and foremost a Fijian country where Fijian

values should prevail, just as Jewish culture prevailed in Israel and Indian culture in India. 'We see this demand as a rightful desire to have stamped on Fiji the mark of the indigenous people.' This was pure Ali prose. The submission argued that the 1970 Constitution had 'disinherited' Muslims; that it was 'wrong and unjust' to describe Muslims as Indians, and that the deposed Coalition government would not care for their interests. 'If the Fijian community which is 46 per cent of the population is rightly concerned about its future, then a mere 9 per cent has even greater reason to desire safeguards.'⁷⁰ The League wanted a certain number of separate seats reserved for the Muslims in return for endorsing Fijian political control. The demand for separate representation was not new, but its timing and the context in which it was made seemed inappropriate. The demand was not endorsed universally across the Muslim community. Many were actually distressed by the submission, and questioned the Muslim League's right to make such a representation on their behalf without prior consultation.⁷¹

The Methodist Church, long the bastion of Fijian establishment, recommended increasing the number of Fijian seats in the House from twenty two to thirty, while retaining the existing twenty two and eight respectively for Indo-Fijians and General Electors. It similarly wanted Fijian representation strengthened in the Senate. Details and emphases varied, but on the whole most Fijian provinces wanted Fijian political control of Parliament strengthened and certain positions reserved for the indigenous community exclusively, especially that of the Prime Minister and the Governor General. The Church also wanted Fiji to be declared a Christian state. The most extreme suggestion came from the Ba Provincial Council which has the largest number of Indo-Fijians in it and where many Fijians benefited from the rents paid by Indo-Fijian tenants. It proposed that Fiji be declared a republic with a fifty-two seat Parliament of which fifty should be reserved for Fijians and the remaining two allocated to Rotumans. The Indo-Fijian community would have no representatives of its own in Parliament at all. One must assume that the Council was not really serious in making this recommendation; if it was, the suggestion was simply ludicrous.

By the time the Great Council of Chiefs met in Suva in late July, the real question was not whether the Council would endorse the general sentiment expressed in the various Fijian submissions: that was a foregone conclusion. The real question was whether it would go the full distance and recommend terminating the link with the Crown altogether. In the meeting, intense and heated debate took place between those who wanted Fiji declared a republic and those who preferred maintaining the status quo. Opening the meeting, Ratu Penaia exhorted the chiefs to come out with a 'chiefly system of government that would protect individual rights and freedoms,' warning that 'individual freedom and liberty are not [to be] used or manipulated to interfere with Fijian traditional customary rights and responsibilities.'⁷² The chiefs agreed. Dr Bavadra attended the meeting and was given a reluctant but polite hearing. His colleague, Tupeni Baba, was not so lucky. He was assaulted as he left a session.

After several days of deliberation, the Council of Chiefs' Constitutional Committee, headed by Ratu Mara and Sitiveni Rabuka, issued a lengthy document. It demanded that Fiji be founded upon Christian principles and traditional Fijian values, with particular regard to Fijian rights and aspirations. This represented a marked departure from the letter and spirit of the 1970 Constitution. The Council stated that the constitution should expressly incorporate provisions regarding preferential treatment and special affirmative action for Fijians to enhance their participation in public offices, statutory bodies and even in the private sector. This, unofficially, had been the thrust of the Alliance government policies for many years, but they were now to be enacted into law. The bi-cameral legislature, the Council recommended, should be replaced with a single chamber of seventy one seats, to be allocated as follows: forty for Fijians (twenty eight nominated by the Provincial Councils through consensus rather than direct election), eight nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs (that is, the Senate representatives transferred to the Lower House) and four nominated by the Prime Minister. The number of Indo-Fijians at 22 and General Electors at 8 would remain unchanged. Four of the twenty two Indian seats should be reserved

for Muslims. All national, non-communal seats were to be abolished and replaced by communal ones.

Certain offices, moreover, were to be reserved exclusively for Fijians. These included the office of the Prime Minister who 'can command the respect of the *Fijian* members of the House' and not *all* its members as is the case in the Westminster system. Only Fijians would occupy the ministries of Fijian Affairs, Agriculture, Home Affairs, Finance and Industry. The Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, the chairman of the Public Service Commission and the Secretary to Cabinet were always to be Fijian. The Governor General would be appointed on the advice of the Great Council of Chiefs and empowered, in addition to exercising the Prerogative of Mercy, to 'grant general immunity from criminal prosecution and related civil litigation in very special circumstances.' This was clearly intended to cover all those who had been implicated in the coup in various ways. Further, the Council wanted to curtail the Crown's privileges of *eminent domain* enshrined in the 1970 Constitution. Fijians should be given the ownership of all underground water, un-extracted minerals, including petroleum, geothermal heat and energy, foreshores, including mangrove swamps and lagoons, reefs and sandbanks, fishing rights, riverbeds, and traditional intellectual property rights, paleontological and archaeological excavations.

This is as extensive and overarching a list as it is possible to imagine. The endorsement of the proposal from Rabuka was to be expected. Ratu Mara's support, however, left many heads shaking in bewilderment: this from a leader who had championed the cause of multiracialism? But his stance was not altogether surprising. As a chief, he wanted to be where his people were. Protocol outweighed principles. 'I am in total agreement with the concept that the constitution should be changed to guarantee Fijians' continued leadership at all times,' Ratu Mara told the Lau Provincial Council. He knew in his heart that changing the constitution to allow Fijian leadership 'will not be fruitful, effective and meaningful if we Fijians cannot shoulder those responsibilities to support our leadership.'⁷³ Still, publicly, his nationalist credentials were visibly on display.

The Great Council of Chiefs proposals were similar in substance, if not in tone, to the *Taukei Movement's* submission. Both wanted Fijian paramountcy in the affairs of Fiji, and both rejected the notion of equal constitutional rights for other groups. They differed only in their methods. While the *Taukei* extremists were forthright in their true feelings, the GCC preferred to maintain the impression of Fiji as a functioning multiracial democracy and give the appearance of reasonableness, while rejecting the principle of political equality. This criticism of the GCC could perhaps be softened by the view that the chiefs were merely reflecting the views of their people, not trying to stifle them, and that without their intervention things could have taken a much worse turn, that they were exercising a calming influence, providing an alternative avenue for the Fijians to air their concerns and grievances. Perhaps.

In its submission, the Coalition refused to entertain any change to the 1970 constitution in the prevailing circumstances. Said Dr Bavadra:

The Coalition maintains that the present system of political representation is just, fair and equitable. The system has withstood the test of time and has become accepted by the majority of the citizens of this country. It protects the special interests of the indigenous Fijians through special provisions of power of veto by nominees of the Great Council of Chiefs. To devise changes to the existing constitution on the basis of the preponderance of any particular race must in the end be harmful to race relations as it would enhance polarization of our communities along racial lines. It will also disturb the balance of power in the current constitution. This could lead to loss of confidence in the long term stability of the country which would translate into serious economic results, similar to what has been evidenced since the coup.⁷⁴

Given the widely divergent submissions presented to the Constitutional Review Committee (with its slanted mandate and composition in the first place), no one expected a united report or a common understanding of the best way forward for Fiji. And a divided report was the final, predictable

result. The majority report, supported by the Great Council of Chiefs and Alliance nominees, accepted many of the most important recommendations made by the chiefs. It endorsed, for example, the concept of a single chamber Parliament, to be elected entirely from communal rolls. It agreed that the Governor General should always be a Fijian, and a high chief nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and formally appointed by the Queen. The positions of Prime Minister, and ministers of Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Fijian Affairs, Finance and Industries must be reserved for the indigenous community. Fijian customary law should be recognized in the new constitution along with Fijian ownership of the foreshores, river beds and other things demanded by the chiefs and the Taukei Movement.

The minority report, masterminded by Jai Ram Reddy, rejected the whole thrust of the majority recommendations. It found its proposals 'repugnant on the grounds that they will further segregate the various races.' Integration, not segregation, was the way forward. 'Any constitution for Fiji must recognize the existence of major races in this country and should provide for means to allow integration between the races. We are opposed to any change which discriminates on the basis of race, colour and creed.' Where, it was asked, was fairness in the majority report when Indo-Fijians at 49 per cent of the national population were allocated only twenty seats while indigenous Fijians, at 47 per cent of the population were given forty seats and General Electors at 5 per cent of the population, eight seats? Since General Electors from communal seats invariably sided with the Fijians, this would mean further entrenchment of the indigenous community.

The intent of the majority report, the Coalition correctly pointed out, was the ultimate subjugation of the Indo-Fijian community. The removal of cross-voting seats which provided some opportunity for cross-ethnic voting would entrench communalism in the political system whose pernicious effects, once entrenched, would be difficult to remove. The removal of the national seats would 'result in extreme communalism and racial prejudice,' 'reinforcing 'socio-economic and cultural disparities.' It added accurately that 'the inter-dependence and common needs and aspirations of our people

will be artificially divided by entrenched political communalism. Race will be exploited at the expense of national unity.' A democratic society worth its name should allow for the theoretical possibility of a change of government. The majority report was a recipe for Fijian ethnocracy. 'An outright majority of Parliamentary seats constitutionally guaranteed to a single race is not only discriminatory but it also means that a party, however corrupt, inefficient or oppressive, can remain perpetually in power through this built-in advantage. This is a most dangerous situation for any country and therefore the most compelling argument against granting extra seats on purely racial grounds.' On the Fijian absence in the commercial and business sector, Reddy and his team pointed out, the fault lay not with the constitution but rather with the formulation and implementation of policies by the Alliance government in power for the last 17 years.

On the question of separate Muslim representation, on which the majority report had been unable to reach a consensus, Reddy noted that many Muslims across the country had not asked for a separate seat at all, preferring to maintain the status quo. Nor, strangely enough, had the Fiji Muslim League appeared before the Constitutional Review Committee to present its case. On what basis, then, could a recommendation for separate seats be made? Reddy and his team rested their case on the arguments against separate representation advanced by the 'Street Commission' in 1975. They had argued then that separate representation 'would go further in fragmenting and confusing the electoral system than even those other proposals for giving separate representation to small racial groups which we have rejected. These proposals are based not on race, difficult as that may at times be to identify, but on the much less specific grounds of religious belief. Moreover, if accepted, they would open the door for further religious groups to claim separate representation.' The proposal by the majority of the constitutional Review Committee to give four of the 22 Indian seats to Muslims 'is viewed by us as an attempt to divide the Fiji Indians on religious lines.'

The assumptions and understandings which underpinned the majority report's recommendations to the Governor General had not been

properly thought through. There was no way the international community would ever sanction its racially discriminatory provisions clearly in blatant breach of human and civil rights conventions to which Fiji was a signatory. If anything, they would have the ultimate effect of keeping Fiji on the pariah list for much longer. Nor, common sense should have told them, could the expectation of permanent Fijian political unity ever be realized, and that, as Oxford University's David Butler had told Ratu Mara in 1970, would be the precondition for Fijian political control. The Constitutional Review Committee, then, did not produce the miraculous compromise solution the Governor General had expected. It had, instead, produced an impossible impasse and an even more polarized atmosphere. It was clear that more sympathetic and genuine appreciation of the Coalition's position would be needed to achieve a measure of reconciliation to break the impasse. The Committee's report was a still-born child whose body had to be buried hurriedly, but the views expressed during the hearings across the country would be echoed a few years later, with the same leaders at the helm.

TO SEPTEMBER 27 AND BEYOND

The weeks and months following the May coup were a time of great confusion, anxiety, tension and violence in Fiji. As time went on, protagonists on both sides of the political divide mobilized their forces, and attitudes hardened, making dialogue between opposing camps impossible. For a month after the coup, the country was under Public Emergency Regulation. Anyone deemed by the military to be 'acting in a manner prejudicial to public safety or the preservation of the peace' could be detained for up to forty eight hours without trial, and in exceptional circumstances, for up to seven days.⁷⁵ The security forces could enter and search any property they chose to, curtail the right of assembly, impose curfew, close off roads, and control the movement of people. They could enter and search buildings where they had 'reason to believe that a meeting of three or more persons is to be held or is being held and may remain in such building for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not the provision of the law are being observed.'

A permit was required to hold meetings, whether it was funeral procession or a wedding celebration. As emergency regulations go, there was nothing exceptional about those proclaimed by the Governor General. But it was their selective application against the supporters of the Coalition, mostly Indo-Fijians and a handful of Fijians, which wreaked havoc. Daily, people were picked up from their offices or off the streets and taken for questioning at the police stations. Hundreds of houses throughout the country were searched at all hours by the security forces, acting on their own initiative or upon tips provided by others perhaps keen to settle old scores. No one was ever charged, but that may not have been the intention in the first place. The intention may simply have been to intimidate people into silence and self-censorship.⁷⁶

The size of the army was increased from 2500 to 6000. The Nasinu Approved Boys School was closed down to train the new entrants. The military was a constant presence at key installations throughout the country. Certain areas received special attention, such as the Baulevu Indian settlement fringed by Fijian koros loyal to the Taukei Movement leader Ratu Meli Vesikula, and suspected of harbouring 'seditious' elements intent upon fomenting resistance to the regime. The military confiscated all licensed guns from Indo-Fijians to eliminate even the remotest possibility of armed resistance. Disarmed and disheartened, people chose the path of passive resistance. Even the diplomatic corps became the target of the military's exuberance, as diplomats were body-searched and their cars fired upon. Shops opened for business irregularly, many schools closed, public transport was disrupted and work in government offices ground to a virtual halt as the coup supporters celebrated their success and its victims nursed their wounded pride and pondered their worsening predicament. The tourism industry slumped as hotel occupancy rates dropped to around 20 per cent and foreign tourists chose 'safer destinations.' Perhaps the excesses were best captured by the detention of some MH shop assistants who had supposedly 'insulted' the wife of the Commissioner of Police by not packing her grocery in big enough paper bags as befitting her status!

With the urban areas paralyzed, and the cane harvesting season about to start, attention shifted to the Indo-Fijian cane farmers of Fiji. With the tourist industry down, with all major hotels reporting an occupancy rate of 20 per cent or less, and foreign reserves falling to alarmingly low levels, the economy badly needed the sugar dollar to keep it afloat. The military regime therefore wanted an early harvest of cane. The cane growers, though, had other intentions. Strong supporters of the Coalition, they were understandably reluctant to bail out a regime which had ousted 'their' duly elected government. They threatened to boycott harvest if the military was not removed from the cane areas, and they did not receive immediate payment of some of the previous year's outstanding balance and a guaranteed payment in fixed installments of the year's forecast price of \$23.50 per tonne.⁷⁷ Ratu Penaia thundered that any 'unlawful activities by extremists will be dealt with by the full force of the law, great vigilance will be exercised to see that all such activities are curtailed.' Fiji, he said, 'will not allow itself to be held ransom by reckless minorities.'⁷⁸ The Governor General's choice of words was revealing. The farmers were now seen as 'extremists,' and 'reckless minorities.' The farmers, veterans of strikes against the old formidable enemy, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, knew better and held most of their ground. The Governor General soon realized the folly of flexing his muscle and pushing the farmers to the brink. In the end, he conceded most of their demands, and farmers began harvesting in late June, saving Fiji from almost certain economic ruin.

Just as the opponents of the coup were committed to turning the clock back and to restoring Fiji to parliamentary democracy, so were the members of the Taukei Movement committed to preventing this from occurring. First, there was Colonel Rabuka himself. The army, he said, would remain an integral part of the Fiji political scene, irrespective of the political system which was eventually devised. He sent a team, led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Advisor on Foreign Affairs, on a tour of ASEAN countries to buy, among other things, arms for the military. His aim was clear: 'If we can't achieve agreement through democratic means we would

have to struggle for Fiji we want. I am talking about armed struggle. We may well have to go through a period of revolution in this country.’⁷⁹ Many in the provinces agreed, and traveled to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Nabua to pay their respects and to provide food for the soldiers. The most emotional and symbolically important of these visits was by the paramount chief of Burebasaga, Tui Dreketi Adi Lady Lala Mara, the wife of the Alliance leader, who visited the Barracks in late July to present a necklace of *tabua* (whale’s tooth) to Rabuka saying, according to some reports, that the Colonel had achieved in seventeen minutes what the Alliance party had not been able to achieve in seventeen years: Fijian supremacy in the political governance of the country.

Ratu Meli Vesikula, a former Fijian soldier in the British army and now a leader of the Taukei Movement, wrote to the newspapers, telling people to ‘watch out.’ Ratu Meli would be active again, after the military coup of 2006, but this time on the side of democracy. Unless their goals were realized, he said, ‘we, the Fijian people, will have only one option left open to us and that is to pick up our clubs, old and new, and protect our interests and supremacy with all our might. This is not an idle threat: it is a promise.’⁸⁰ The *Kaitani*, or foreigners, must either learn to accept their subordinate place in Fiji or leave. There could be no accommodation and no compromise. As he put it, ‘consensus will never be reached between Indians and Fijians,’ nor, he might have added, allowed to be reached as long as people like him were around. The nationalist protests took several forms, but the one which received great notoriety was the incident in a park across the street from Government Buildings.⁸¹ Taukei Movement supporters in full traditional battle regalia (grass skirt, faces painted black) carrying spears and war clubs in front of a heated *lovo*, underground oven, threatened to kill and cook Coalition leaders if they proceeded to challenge the Governor General’s action in dissolving Parliament. Perhaps the threat was issued to coerce the Coalition’s acquiescence, but it was frightening nonetheless. ‘We are at the end of our tethers and this is not for show,’ fumed a militant Vesikula, ‘we will put people in the *lovo* if our high chief ever reaches court.’

The lighted *lovo* was a terrifying symbol of the nationalists' anger and a savage reminder of the fate of chiefs' opponents in ancient times.

The threats of violence were not empty as Richard Naidu, Dr Bavadra's media spokesman, found out. He was chased and beaten with clubs and later deported from Fiji. In mid-September, Suva became the target of a coordinated campaign of arson and violence. Shops in central parts of the city were torched with petrol bombs and looted in smash-and-grab raids, and Fiji's only medical laboratory, belonging to a known Coalition supporter (Dr Karam Singh), was razed to the ground. People on the streets were assaulted and robbed randomly. Further violence was prevented only after the army erected roadblocks and installed checkpoints at strategic points in the city. In their final gesture of protest, on 23 September, the leading Taukei Movement supporters engineered a massive release of prisoners from the Naboro prison some fifteen miles out of Suva. Over one hundred prisoners were on the loose, demanding not improvement in the prisons, but wanting to meet the Governor General to express their dissatisfaction over the political situation in the country. With the security officers as their guards, the prisoners marched through Victoria Parade, Suva's main thoroughfare, to Government House. After presenting their petition and having breakfast there, they returned to the prison. The *Fiji Sun* editorialized:

The fact that criminals were permitted to march unmolested through the streets of the capital to the home of Her Majesty the Queen's representative in Fiji, constitutes not only a grave insult to Her Majesty, the Governor General himself, and the people of this country, but also raises the question: Was the Governor General under duress to receive the criminal rabble? Figuratively speaking, was there a gun at his head? Is he now a free agent and, more importantly, who so misguidedly advised him to even listen to law breakers masquerading under the pretext of demonstrating their dubious allegiance to a High Chief?⁸²

This was an interesting question, but soon moot. On 25 September, Sitiveni Rabuka launched his second coup.

A CHARTER FOR MAYHEM⁸³

A special meeting was held on Monday evening and these were the plans drawn up (Taukei Movement). Taukei Movement leaders and prominent members took part. Release the prisoners but first of all lighting the complex, medium and minimum, on fire. Get whatever tools available from prison storeroom to fight and attack with. To be done on Tuesday night 22.9.87 after tea.

1. The earlier the better to enable one group of prisoners to escape inland and hide or try making their way to the Suva area. One group of prisoners to protest to Governor General. Wait until dawn. Show themselves to security forces. Their demand must be met or else. Prison officers supporting the Taukei Movement to release them. Let them march to Governor General and also see Rabuka.
2. Night raids and attacks to begin at night on Wednesday 23.9.87 (mass killing) target Indian community and Bavadra supporters. Prisoners to be supported by gangs at Raiwai, Delainivesi, Samabula, Kinoya and Naboro. Must be as combined effort. Names mentioned Bavadra, Kalou, Navuso, Tavai, Naidu, Siwatibau (Reserve Bank) main targets.
3. The talks held in Deuba to carry on and to approve everything about a caretaker government but when this caretaker government comes into operation sometime next week, more riots and unrest should take place to enable another coup to take place. Excuse is that this caretaker government cannot control the whole situation. Soldiers not to protect Indians and Bavadra supporters. No help to be given. Four hours only to be given for the short ruling of the caretaker government.
4. 29.9.87: Make another lovo and protest to the Governor General over court case. If Bavadra wins, club him and his supporters and put them into the lovo.

5. This weekend more trouble to take place.
6. 2000 people from Cakaudrove, Bua, Macuata (CBM) to come to Suva to be present during the court case on 29.9.87. They prepare the lovo to put the Coalition supporters in.
7. Another coup to take place—overthrow the Governor General, shoot Bavadra, Epeli Nailatikau and Coalition supporters.
9. Fiji to be under military regime until 10.10.87 when the country will be declared a republic.
10. All seats to be Fijian, other races not to be given power and decision making.
11. Indian schools next target of attacks. Observation and stories from the security forces heard soldiers helping terrorists, also have been helping throw petrol bombs at buildings although pretending to protect public (Friday incident also Saturday night 12.9.87).
12. Soldiers and Taukei Movement working hand in hand. There is evidence — overhead a police officer saying let them do it, Friday's riot.
13. Not all soldiers, Westerners and other supporters in the army are merely carrying out orders but may revolt if they are forced to shoot their own relatives and kai vata. These soldiers and policemen are just working for their bread and butter. Inside there is a bitter feeling against Rabuka.
14. Everything happening now is being backed by the Taukei Movement leaders who have encouraged youths and ex-criminals. There is evidence that some soldiers and policemen already knew before what would happen on Saturday night 12.9.87 and Friday 18.9.87. On Sunday evening 7:30 pm 20.9.87 Rabuka went to the Central Police Station cell and had a private audience with five to eight members of those who were to appear in court on Monday

morning 21.9.87 (arsonists). He took cigarettes and gave it to them. He had a secret discussion with them. Only him alone, no other member of the security forces was to be with them. He ordered that the arsonists be released for a few hours that evening. He apparently entertained them and briefed them. Please, I hope you won't reveal my identity. We pity Bavadra, Navuso, Nailatikau, etc. We are trying to help them. Please take care.

DEUBA ACCORD: 'BRITISH SOLUTION TO A FIJIAN PROBLEM'⁸⁴

The second coup came at a particularly inopportune time. With the Constitution Review Committee issuing a divided report, the Governor General realized the need for a fresh start. Learning from his errors of judgment over the past few months, he promised a new caretaker government which would be 'more representative and balanced,' and 'command the necessary public confidence.' It would consist of members of the dissolved Parliament, the senate as well as his Council of Advisors, and would run the country while a more permanent solution was being sought. To this end, he initiated a series of private meetings between the principal players. The negotiations, 'protracted and held over many days,' Reddy recalled, 'resulting in intense negotiations and discussions,'⁸⁵ took place at a Deuba resort, about forty five kilometers west of Suva, after an earlier meeting at the Hyatt near Sigatoka. The Coalition negotiating team included Jai Ram Reddy, Dr Bavadra, Mahendra Chaudhry and Krishna Datt, and the Alliance team of Tomasi Vakatoa, Ahmed Ali and Filipe Bole was led by Ratu Mara.

Reddy's leadership of the Coalition in the talks was questioned by the Alliance team. He should not be part of any future interim arrangement, the Alliance insisted, because he was not an elected member of the deposed Parliament. When Ganilau looked at him, Reddy reminded the Governor

General of his own position in 1972. Having lost that election to NFP's Atunaisa Maitoga, Ganilau had been appointed to the Senate and then inducted into the Alliance cabinet. And Reddy reminded the meeting that under the 'Doctrine of Necessity,' only those parts of the constitution which had been rendered inoperable by reason of the revolution would be set aside while the other provisions of the constitution remained intact. When the Governor General's constitutional advisor, Professor Keith Patchett, agreed with Reddy's interpretation, Ganilau overruled the Alliance, and Reddy remained in contention for a possible future role in an interim administration. Another contentious issue was the Coalition's court case against the Governor General's dissolution of Parliament. Ratu Mara was incensed. 'We are also aggrieved that we are meeting here when there is a court case hanging over your head. This case is resented by Fijians. It will be pointless to go on discussing if the court case intervenes and our talks are useless.' Reddy responded: 'It is common knowledge that any aggrieved party is entitled to go to the courts. It is a lawful action. We have not sued the person; it is the office. You [Ganilau] are not even named in the action. It is 'Bavadra vs the Attorney-General.' It is too early to ask us to withdraw the case now. We don't have the army, we only have the courts.'⁸⁶ Fortunately, emotions subsided after Tomasi Vakatora spoke some soothing words and negotiations began.

The Deuba Accord, as it came to be known, agreed that a bi-partisan caretaker government would be formed to 'guide the country to a solution of Fiji's constitutional problems, re-establish Fiji's respect for law and order, and put the economy on a firm footing.' The new Council of State, to be chaired by the Governor General himself, would consist of twenty ministers, with an equal number from each of the parties, sharing power on an equal basis. Of the twenty members, six — three each from the two main parties — would form a new Constitutional Review Committee, under the chairmanship of an eminent expert from overseas. The enquiry, it was hoped, would find a permanent constitutional solution to the problems of Fiji. Its Terms of Reference required the committee to 'recommend arrangements

for the early return to full Parliamentary democracy,' 'take full account of the aspirations of the indigenous Fijians for the betterment of their constitutional, economic and social interests,' and 'provide a framework for a multi-racial society in which the rights and interests of all the communities are safeguarded, thereby laying a foundation for just and harmonious relations between all communities.' To that end, the enquiry would 'give due regard to the aspirations and concerns expressed throughout the report of the Constitutional Review Committee, and to take proper account of all recommendations made therein,' and to examine whether any other form of constitutional arrangement is better suited to meet the present and future needs of Fiji than the Westminster model and, in particular, to consider the extent to which some form of power sharing might be given effect.'

This was an impressive breakthrough, especially the possibility of some form of power sharing, at a time when the nationalists were demanding total Fijian control of political power. To re-visit all, and not only the majority recommendations of the Falvey report with an open mind, was also a sensible concession. Unbeknownst to many at the time, the Coalition had flown in the eminent constitutional lawyer Yash Ghai to be on the standby at Deuba just in case his input was needed. Too much was at stake to take any chances. Reddy was later repeatedly attacked by his opponents for fleeing Fiji at the 'height of the coup,' but as he said in his defense, he was in Fiji throughout the most serious period of the crisis, very much at the centre of the unfolding events, as part of the Falvey enquiry and as a participant at Deuba. There was a small, formal celebration among the participants after the Accord was signed at Government House. A press photo captured Ratu Mara, Ratu Penaia and Dr Bavadra cutting a celebratory cake. Others, including Reddy, were heading back to the west for similar celebrations there.

But before the ink had dried on the document, Rabuka executed his second coup. Rabuka was not a party to the meeting that formulated the Deuba Accord. Ratu Mara suggested that he might be included in the negotiations, but reported Sir Len Usher, the idea was rejected by the Coalition

‘influenced primarily by Mr Jai Ram Reddy.’⁸⁷ This was ‘a major tragedy,’ Usher went on, ‘because such subsequent happenings as the declaration of a republic, the Governor General’s resignation, the removal of the Queen’s unifying influence and the loss of Fiji’s membership of The Commonwealth’ could possibly have been avoided. Usher also suggested in his letter that ‘when the [Deuba] meeting ended, there was considerable support within the Coalition for the principle of a Fijian majority in Parliament.’ This, he said, was ‘an important factor in the achievement of the goodwill’ to which Dr Bavadra had referred in an earlier letter. Overall, in Usher’s view, the reasons for the failure lay squarely at Reddy’s door.

Reddy responded to Usher’s letter with a letter of his own.⁸⁸ He was scathing. ‘As a former editor of the *Fiji Times*,’ he wrote, ‘Sir Leonard should know that, in attempting to distil the facts of any story, one needs to talk to both sides. It is of little use to ‘question a number of people present’ at the meeting of September 23 and October 5, if they are all from the same party.’ None of the Coalition delegation was interviewed. If Ratu Mara had indeed suggested that Rabuka be a party to the talks, he had not done so in the presence of the Coalition. ‘The subject was never raised with us,’ Reddy said. Nor did it need to be. Ratu Sir Penaia had already told the assembled delegates at Deuba on 22 September that he had talked to Rabuka and had ‘his full assurance that the political consensus which is the goal of the current talks will have his full support.’⁸⁹ The substantial agreement, to which Usher had referred, only covered the formation of a joint administration and the terms of reference for a constitutional review. There was ‘no general understanding’ that there was ‘considerable support within the Coalition for the principle of Fijian paramountcy.’ That would have been inconsistent with the Coalition position. ‘We have agreed to full constitutional review,’ Reddy argued, ‘but that did not mean unfair representation for any ethnic group.’ Usher had said this ‘understanding’ was not spelt out in the statement issued at the end of the September 23 meeting. ‘It was not spelt out,’ Reddy rebutted, for a very good reason. ‘No such understanding existed.’

Four days after the second coup, Rabuka declared Fiji a *de facto* republic, but still hoping that the Coalition would accede to his demands. When that possibility faded, he finally severed Fiji's link with the British monarchy at midnight on 7 October. Rabuka told an Indian journalist that once 'the caretaker government came into being, they would have imposed watch-dogs on the military, watered down the military and restricted its capacity to stage another coup. We thought that if the caretaker government would carry on long enough, they would forget the real issue which was to change the constitution, ensuring the paramountcy of Fijian interests.'⁹⁰ That irrevocable step was taken after a meeting failed to resolve an impasse that had developed after the Deuba Accord had been signed. Rabuka had agreed to abide by the consensus of the meeting, but when he saw the terms of the agreement reached, he rejected the Accord. When Dr Bavadra came out of hiding after the second coup, he was taken straight to the Government House to meet Ganilau and Mara. At that meeting, Rabuka presented his minimum demands, which Mara agreed to and so, too, apparently did Bavadra. But before he could give that commitment, he wanted to consult his other colleagues. A meeting was arranged in Lautoka to see if a way could be found to meet Rabuka's minimum demands. Reddy erupted at Bavadra's willingness to hold the meeting in the first place. 'They don't honour their agreements,' he said, referring to the Deuba Accord. 'Why should we meet with them?' But he was persuaded to relent. Bavadra had given the commitment, and no one wanted to embarrass the leader.

At the Lautoka meeting on October 5, Rabuka presented his five minimum demands. These were: thirty seven Fijians in a sixty seven-seat House of Representatives; a Fijian Governor General and his deputy to be appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Great Council of Chiefs; a Fijian Prime Minister; mandatory review of the constitution every ten years; and the imposition of the 'Sunday Ban.' The only demand that Rabuka said was open to negotiation was the Sunday Ban; the rest were to stay untouched. After Rabuka had finished speaking, eyes focused on Bavadra. Feeling already chastised by Reddy for willing to attend the meeting in

the first place, Bavadra reiterated the Coalition's unwavering support for the Deuba Accord. 'But that is not what you said at Government House,' Ratu Mara replied angrily. Bavadra was put on the spot, embarrassed. Mara himself was willing to accept Rabuka's demands if that would return the country to the Governor General's rule. As Vakatora recalled, the Alliance thought 'there was nothing at all in the demands that could be objectionable.' Therefore, they 'decided to go along in the national interest and to assist the Governor General in his efforts to return our country to normalcy as quickly as possible.' In the Alliance view, according to Vakatora, it was the Coalition leaders who 'were so blinded by their obsession that they completely forgot the reality of the situation.'⁹¹ 'What do you say, Jai Ram,' Ganilau asked. Reddy had gone to the Lautoka meeting thinking that there might be an opportunity for an inter-party dialogue, but he was now being presented with what clearly was a done deal between the military and the Alliance. 'We are prisoners,' Reddy replied. 'We have just come out of hiding. What mandate do we have to agree to these demands?' 'Sometimes, leaders have to take the plunge,' Ganilau replied. 'This is one plunge we cannot take,' Reddy responded. 'No, it is important,' Ratu Penaia said. 'Well, if this is the way constitutions are made, under duress, then you might as well take us outside, line us up and shoot us,' Reddy said in a matter of fact way. 'What good is assent or consent in these circumstances? We haven't consulted our people.'⁹² The meeting broke up at that point.

SEPTEMBER COUP

The September coup was a much more carefully controlled and precisely executed affair than the May coup. Rabuka announced the second takeover at 4:50 in the afternoon on Friday, slapped an immediate curfew, enforced an immediate ban on foreign travel by selected Fiji citizens, and cut off all international communication. In the next two days, Coalition members and their supporters, judges, journalists and others who had for one reason or another incurred the wrath of the Fijian nationalists in the coup camp were, arrested, detained or sent to Naboro prison, and a few chosen targets

were beaten and otherwise harassed. Soldiers scoured the west for prominent Coalition leaders, especially Jai Ram Reddy, the *bete noir* of the Taukei Movement, and Mahendra Chaudhry.

Both men sought refuge for several days at the homes of close friends in Ba and Lautoka, with Reddy on one occasion hiding under a verandah for three hours to escape arrest. I have no doubt that had he been caught, Reddy would have been killed, or at the very least, severely injured, so intense was the nationalists' hatred of him, so passionate their belief that he was the one man who had been the cause of the Coalition victory and, therefore, of the present troubles in the country. Reddy recalls the humiliating episode with a palpable sense of hurt, especially the dismissive and ridiculing comments by his opponents in the Indo-Fijian community that he had done so little for them when it really mattered. 'In this country, Mr Reddy, you take what we give you. No more,' a soldier had told him menacingly in Nadi, as Reddy was on his way for a social visit with former NFP parliamentarian HM Lodhia. 'Haven't you had enough,' the soldiers said on another occasion, repeating the words Ratu Mara had spoken. It all seemed to him to be a part of an orchestrated campaign of fear and intimidation. But Reddy was determined not to give in. 'There is no way we will agree,' he said. 'Any leader who bows down to threats is not a leader. Those who want to declare Fiji a republic should go ahead. What difference will it make if they decide to go for a republic? The situation will be like a pregnant woman who has to give birth sooner or later.'⁹³

Following the September coup, Fiji was plunged into the darkest period in its modern history, remembered today as a time of wanton disregard for human rights and rampant racial extremism.⁹⁴ All Coalition members and supporters were fair target for abuse and harassment. Leading dissidents as well as professionals were barred from leaving the country. Reddy was on the banned list until December. Senior Indo-Fijian civil servants, suspected of harbouring pro-Coalition sympathy, were detained and subsequently 'retired.' In Ba, Labasa, Nausori and Lautoka, their fellow travelers suffered more humiliating treatment. The more prominent were

tortured by the military to extract information about the supposed subterranean activities of the Coalition and the whereabouts of their leaders. The torture techniques reportedly included caning, beating, the threat of rape and water and sewerage immersion. A series of decrees sought to curtail personal freedom of the people. The *Sunday Observance Decree* banned all recreational and religious activities except for those who went to church. The *Fundamental Freedoms Decree* outlawed all political activity deemed detrimental to the military and its administration. Soldiers were given order to 'shoot to kill' if necessary 'while making a lawful arrest or preventing escape, to suppress a riot, or to prevent a criminal offence.' The *Fiji Service Commission and Public Service Amendment Decree* required fifty percent of all positions at all levels of the civil service to be allocated to Fijians and to Rotumans. The Public Commission could dismiss anyone on the grounds of 'public interest.' And so it went.

Still, things did not quite go the way Rabuka and his advisors had hoped. The economy was deteriorating rapidly. The rising cost of living, the increasing inflation rate, the compulsory 25 per cent salary cuts for civil servants at a time when the Fijian dollar had already been devalued by 35 per cent, all took a heavy toll. Local and foreign investor confidence had vanished and the tourism industry was in a slump and unlikely to recover anytime soon. And the prospects on the horizon did not look any brighter. Ratu Mara correctly surmised that unless urgent corrective action was taken, Fiji was heading towards bankruptcy. The international condemnation of the September coup was strong and unrelenting. In May, there was a great deal of confusion, and in some quarters the reaction was muted because of Ratu Mara's presence in the coup cabinet. But his absence from the September cabinet caused the second coup to be perceived not as an indigenous struggle but as a play for power by a bunch of extremist men. 'This is an act of intervention against a political process that was succeeding, not one that was failing,' said Sridath Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretary General. And reports of gross abuse of human rights exposed a very ugly and disconcerting face of military rule in Fiji. The Commonwealth Heads

of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Vancouver decided, upon Sir Vijay R Singh's strong representation, to temporarily suspend Fiji's membership of the Commonwealth.

The writing was on the wall for the military administration headed by Rabuka (which contained an unlikely assortment of nationalists and opportunists such as Sakeasi Butadroka, Apisai Tora, and Inoke Kubuabola, Timoci Vesikula and Filipe Bole). Trying to distance himself from his more inexperienced, squabbling colleagues, Tora organized a petition to bring Ratu Mara back as leader, realizing that without a firm hand at the helm, the military government was heading towards certain doom. Mara's experience and international connections were sorely needed. 'There was a message coming through from many overseas governments,' Tora recalled, that 'put Ratu Mara back and recognition and aid will flow.'⁹⁵ Rabuka really had no choice but to oblige, though not before many of his preconditions were met. These included, among others, that no member of the Coalition should be part of the interim administration, that at least two senior officers other than Rabuka would be appointed to the new cabinet, and that the draft constitution prepared by the military would be accepted and any future amendments made to it be done in consultation with the military's own legal officers.

With the details out of the way, Rabuka formally approached Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau to accept the presidency of the new Republic of Fiji. At a significant ceremony on 5 December 1987, with the traditional warriors of the chiefly houses of Kaba, Rewa and Tovata in traditional battle dress standing behind him, Rabuka asked for forgiveness from his paramount chief for any unintended transgressions of cultural protocol. He disclaimed any personal political ambitions for himself; he was merely doing what his people wanted: that is, to give them the political control of the land. 'What we were doing, we are doing, is because we love the land, the chiefly way of life of the Fijian people.'⁹⁶ 'We will be prepared to support and hear your call and heed your wishes in your time of leadership. I have pledged the support of your officers and your warriors who have come to handover lead-

ership to you today,' Rabuka said. Ganilau acknowledged the significance of the occasion and said, 'Firm is our relationship, firm is the string that binds all Fijians together. Let us all shoulder one club for all time.' The next day, he told the nation that he had accepted the position of President and assured the Fijian people that the 'future protection of the indigenous Fijian interests is in safe hands.' Ratu Mara returned to his accustomed role as Prime Minister 'with honour and pride.'

On the other side of the island, Jai Ram Reddy and his colleagues had been in a limbo since the September coup, marginal to the developments taking place in Suva. It was a painful period of political impotence and great humiliation. A year after the coup, a three-member Australian Labor Party delegation, led by former Fiji-born South Australian premier Don Dunstan, visited Fiji on a fact finding tour of Fiji. Their report portrayed a stark picture of the present and future of the Indo-Fijian community. Its report noted that the response of the Indo-Fijian community was:

one of utter depression, a feeling that there was no longer any future for them in Fiji and a belief that the current administration would never afford them political rights in the future. Reference has already been to the purge of Indians in the senior ranks of the civil service. It is not surprising that private sector establishments, including foreign employers, have begun to discriminate against Indians in recruitment policy in order to make their presence acceptable to the current administration. In the last year there has been an exodus of Indian professionals from Fiji, including one hundred of the two hundred and seventy doctors working in Fiji in May 1987 and seventy of the one hundred and forty lawyers practicing in the country at that time. Over two hundred qualified teachers have resigned since May 1987 from secondary schools and five hundred teachers have resigned or retired at the primary level (in comparison with the one hundred and fifty who would leave the primary teaching service each year in normal circumstances). The most despairing reaction came from

the sugar cane farmers who generally do not have the means to leave the country. The leases under which they occupy their farms are scheduled to expire between the years 1997 and 2000 and they are concerned that the leases will either not be renewed or that rentals will be set at a level that reduces them to subsistence or that they would become mere share-croppers. Already rentals have been significantly increased from pre-14 May 1987 levels, in many cases by 500 per cent. A purge of Indians has also taken place at senior levels in the police force. It would appear inevitable in the long term that the police force will, like the army, retain very few, if any Indians. It is evident that since 14 May, 1987, the police have on many occasions been indifferent to appeals for protection from members of the Indian community that have previously been acted upon. The result of these developments is that the Indian community has lost confidence in the police force and is generally reluctant to seek their assistance.⁹⁷

The inevitable result was 'an increase in the physical and psychological pressures ... and their victimization by other sections of the community.' How to lead his people out of this dire situation would be one of the most challenging tasks to face Jai Ram Reddy and other leaders of the Indo-Fijian community. Still, they had stood their ground and refused to acquiesce against the most terrible of odds. For Rabuka and his men, this was a victory of sorts, though in the end it proved to be pyrrhic. For Reddy it meant having to start all over again.

It was not easy. The months since May had been for Jai Ram Reddy the most difficult time in his life. Things had turned especially bad since September. Chaos and confusion reigned. The economy had ground to a halt, and there was little work at office. Chandra and the children were in New Zealand and Reddy was staying at his father's place at Naviyago. People were shunning him on the streets, apparently fearful of their safety if seen publicly in his company. Reddy was depressed and very unsettled and,

partly as a result, drank excessively to kill boredom and pass time. It was then that he wrote to Isikeli Mataitoga, who was at the time in the Solicitor General's office, 'from one lawyer to another,' as he puts it, to lift the travel ban imposed on him so that he could visit his family in New Zealand. He was no threat to the state; whatever he had done he had done publicly and openly; and he wasn't fleeing the country. His request was approved immediately. Reddy flew to New Zealand for Christmas and returned four weeks later, back in the cauldron of local politics.

1987 taught an important lesson, Reddy later recalled, and he learned it well. 'There is no future if any community tries to pull its weight in an exclusive fashion to create an environment in which it sees itself as dominant in Government,' he said. 'What we need is to form a partnership. That is probably the most important thing.' This issue had not been considered seriously enough in the years before the coup 'because we all underestimated the depth of feelings that existed, particularly within the indigenous Fijian community.' Everyone got carried away with elections, democracy and a constitution which allowed for governments to be voted in and voted out. 'But we never really understood the human dimension, until raw emotions erupted post-coup.' There was a great deal of hurt and humiliation, 'but they should not be dwelt upon in a disproportionate way so that it becomes a hindrance to the future healing process.'⁹⁸

INTERLUDE

DEUBA ACCORD

I. Summary of Agreement Relating to the Formation of a Council of State of Fiji

1. AIMS

To guide the country to a solution to Fiji's constitutional problems

To re-establish Fiji's respect for law and order

To put the Fiji economy back upon a firm footing

2. LEADERSHIP

His Excellency the Governor-General, who, in law, is exercising the executive authority for Fiji will have overall direction of the Government and will be chairman of the Council of State

3. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS

a. His Excellency the Governor-General will formally appoint the members of the Council of State;

b. the choice of the 11 members to be appointed from each party will be made by that party alone;

c. the members will be chosen from the elected members of the last Parliament and in addition the Governor-General will be free to accept the nomination by either party of a Senator to be a member of the Council of State.

4. BI-PARTISANSHIP

The Council of State will be bi-partisan by virtue of having equal numbers of members from the two principal political parties and of sharing equally the portfolios (see further item 9).

5. CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Will be determined by the Governor-General but will reflect the same bi-partisanship principle set out in 4, and will follow the same processes for appointment set out in 3.

6. SIZE

The Council of State will comprise the Governor-General, who will be the Chairman, and 11 persons nominated by each of the principal political parties. (Subject to item 12 in respect of the Law Officer).

7. EXTERNAL MEMBERSHIP

There will be no members of the Council of State who are not Members of the dissolved Parliament. (see further item 12 in respect of the Law Officer).

8. ASSIGNMENT OF PORTFOLIOS

- a. His Excellency will retain the portfolio of Home Affairs;
- b. the actual allocation of portfolios will be made by His Excellency the Governor-General after due consultation with the Heads of the respective political parties.
- c. the more important portfolios will be shared equally between the parties. The subject areas of these portfolios are:
 - * Finance & Economic Planning * Fijian Affairs
 - * Foreign Affairs & Civil Aviation * Education
 - * Lands, Mineral Resources & Energy * Primary Industries
 - * Works, Communications & Transport * Health & Social Welfare
- d. There will be six Councilors of State without Portfolio who will be members of the Constitution Inquiry.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

Members of the Council of State to whom portfolios are assigned will have conferred upon them the same executive responsibilities as Ministers under the present arrangements. They will therefore be heads of the Ministries and Government Departments to which their portfolios relate.

10. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

In the event the Governor-General is absent from Fiji or is otherwise unable to perform the functions of Chairman of the Council, he will designate a person as Deputy Chairman to perform those functions after due consultation with the leaders of the two political parties.

11. PROCEDURES

The usual Cabinet procedures and practices will be followed by the Council of State.

12. LAW OFFICER

There will be a legally qualified Law Officer appointed by the Governor-General who will be principal legal advisor to the Council. The Governor-General will endeavour to find a suitably qualified and knowledgeable citizen of Fiji but, if he is unable to find such a person, he will be entitled to look for such an appointee from outside Fiji. If a Fiji citizen is appointed the Governor-General may appoint him to be a full member of the Council. Otherwise the officer would not be a member of the Council but would participate fully in the work of the Council.

13. LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Power will be conferred upon the Governor-General, acting on the advice of the Council of State, to make ordinances for limited purposes, which would include questions of supply and appro-

priation and security; namely matters meeting the requirement of necessity. When the legislative requirements of the Council are better understood, it will be open to the Council of State to look at the question of whether the dissolved Parliament should be reinstated, perhaps with circumscribed powers, to act as the legislative arm of the Council.

14. CREATION OF COUNCIL OF STATE

The Council of State of Fiji will be created by proclamation made by His Excellency the Governor-General. The members of the Council will be known as Councillor of State for the subject of their portfolio or Councillor of State without portfolio.

II. Summary of Agreement Relating to Constitutional Review

1. A primary responsibility of the Council of State will be to oversee the process of Constitutional Review.
2. For this purpose a Constitution Inquiry will be established comprising Councilors of State without Portfolio and an independent Chairman from overseas.
3. The Governor-General will decide the exact format of the Inquiry and in particular whether it should be established under the Commission of Inquiry Act.
4. The Terms of Reference of Inquiry will be:
To make proposals for a permanent constitutional solution acceptable to the people of Fiji, and in particular —
 - i. to recommend arrangements for the early return to full Parliamentary democracy;

- ii. to take full account of the aspirations of the indigenous Fijians for the betterment of their constitutional, economic and social interests;
- iii. to provide a framework for a multiracial society of all the communities in which the rights and interests of all the communities are safeguarded, thereby laying a foundation for just and harmonious relations between all communities.

To these ends,

- a. to give due regard to the aspirations and concerns expressed throughout the Report of the Constitution Review Committee and to take proper account of all the recommendations therein;
 - b. to examine whether any other form of constitutional arrangement is better suited to meet the present and future needs of Fiji than the Westminster model, and in particular to consider the extent to which some form of power sharing might be given effect.
5. The mechanism for effecting changes to the constitution will be determined by the Council of State on the recommendation of the Constitution Inquiry under item 4 of the Terms of Reference and is likely to be one of the following three alternatives:
- a. the recall of the dissolved Parliament for the purpose of enacting the changes in accordance with the special procedures laid down in Section 67 of the Constitution;
 - b. the creation by Proclamation of a Constituent Assembly, the members of which would be elected in accordance with any new electoral procedures proposed for inclusion in the new constitution;

- c. the implementation of the changes by Proclamation after those changes have been presented to the country in a referendum and have received the approval of a substantial proportion of the electorate of Fiji.

PROVISIONAL LIST OF PORTFOLIOS

- Finance and Economic Planning
 - Foreign Affairs and Civil Aviation
 - Fijian Affairs
 - Education, Youth and Sport
 - Health and Social Welfare
 - Primary Industries (Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests)
 - Public Service
 - Works and Transport
 - Communications
 - Lands, Energy and Mineral Resources
 - Housing and Urban Affairs
 - Information
 - Labour and Immigration
 - Trade, Industry and Tourism
 - Rural Development, Rehabilitation and Relief
 - Co-operatives and Consumer Affairs
- + 6 Councillors without Portfolio
- * Home Affairs (retained by Governor-General).

INTERLUDE

DIWALI ADDRESS, BA 1988

(Translated from Hindi by Radio Fiji)

Today is Diwali. Signs and celebrations of this festival are to be found in the pages of Indian history from time immemorial. In fact, how and when this festival started is not fully known. However, despite differing views of its origin, it is widely celebrated. The basic principles that this festival establishes and teaches are vital in everyone's life. This evening many of our homes will be lit with large and small lights and 'diyas.' The poor and the rich will all join in the celebration. It's a festival which signifies that wherever there is light, darkness disappears. It is symbolic of 'truth overcoming falsehood.'

Dear Brothers and Sisters, remember that it's not only the outer darkness that needs to be conquered; there are dark spots and dark areas in our own hearts and in the society that need to be dispelled for happy and peaceful living. This evening we have gathered here to reflect on some of these things. We should regard it as our duty and should firmly pledge that as the 'diyas' spread their light over darkness so we too should cleanse our hearts and eradicate the ills of the society for progress and better living. Fear, despair and despondency are the root [causes] of destruction of any society. Many of us are suffering from these at the moment. Let us pledge to conquer these as 'light conquers darkness.'

One of the fundamental lessons we learn from Diwali is that in time of difficulty and external tragedies, visible or invisible, one must not lose one's sense of balance, hope, courage and determination. As light conquers darkness, you too will find the rays of light dispelling your doubts and despairs and make you more firm and resolute to realize your aspirations.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is estimated that the first Diwali was celebrated in Fiji about 108 years ago. It is important to reflect and ask ourselves who those people were who first celebrated the Diwali, where did they come from and why did they come? Many people will give many views about the coming of the Indians to Fiji and some will give distorted views largely based on their imagination. But history is a product of research supported by documented facts.

On this auspicious Diwali I consider it appropriate to remind ourselves and the world about when, how and why the Indians came to Fiji. Indians did not come to cause trouble or confiscate anyone's land, nor did they come here as colonizers, to subjugate any group of people or to exploit or deprive anyone of their rights. The reality is, Brothers and Sisters, that the Indians did not come here by choice. They were brought here under the indenture system, which was a form of slavery. Despite the hardship they suffered, they accepted the challenge and served their cause honorably and heroically. With their hard work and labour, they survived and prospered.

Now we are told we are an immigrant race: that we have no rights. In fact in the formation of the new draft legislation [constitution] we are treated as non-entities. This new constitution which is to replace the 1970 Constitution deprives us of the fundamental right of citizenship in this country. We are asked to accept this new constitution even though we are not considered worthy of being mentioned in the preamble.

Today we are told that the new constitution is based on reality and these Indians must accept it. I wish to question as to what this reality is. Does this reality mean that we forget our 108 years of history? Or is it that we should forego all our rights and ac-

cept the denials of human dignity and sign forever to be third class citizens of this country? Remember, we are not only asked to unconditionally accept the new constitution for ourselves but also for and on behalf of our future generations. What a reality!

Brothers and Sisters, there is only one reality that I know of and it is that in the eyes of God we are all EQUAL. History tells us that from the dawn of civilization, human beings have always cherished their freedom and have fought for their rights. In the darkest of these days they did not lose their courage, hope or aspirations and persistently struggled to preserve and guard their honour, freedom and dignity.

If we look at our own 108 years of history in this country and reflect on how we came here as semi-slaves until we were emancipated, at no stage will you find that we did not have to struggle for our freedom and rightful existence. During the course of these 108 years at no stage were we ever classed as third class citizens. It is only today that we are ordered to accept this and ask no questions. The reality is this, dear Brothers and Sisters, that until our last breath we must not deviate from the truth and we must not to give up our fight for freedom and rightful existence. It is said today that Indians must unconditionally accept the new constitution. It is like being asked to dig one's own grave to bury oneself.

I will be greatly shocked and surprised if anyone accepted this new constitution as just and fair unless that person was blind or had not seen or read it, was compelled to accept under duress. Let me remind you, dear Brothers and Sisters, that your acceptance of this new constitution will be the acceptance of the denial of your fundamental rights. You will be bound by it and shall always remain as third class citizens of this country.

There is another rather strange thing about the exponents of the new constitution and it is that when they abrogated the old (1970) Constitution no one asked us whether it should be destroyed and replaced with a new one. Furthermore, when the constitutionally and democratically elected government was ruthlessly overthrown by the army at gunpoint, no one consulted us prior to the overthrow of the government. During the last 18 months, whatever they wanted to take away from us they have taken. We could not do anything and remained quiet. Then why all of a sudden is there a change of heart — why are we being asked to submit to the new constitution with our own free will and accept it in totality?

In the last 18 months the communication has been at gunpoint, and in most cases we have been subjected to threats and force. But now we are being asked to accept the new constitution voluntarily. Why? There must be a hidden motive and reason for such a move on the part of the government.

There is one obvious reason and it is that all countries of the world, where there is a democracy and people have freedom, justice and above all have equal rights in all spheres of life, have disapproved of and condemned the new constitution propounded by the present government. New Zealand, India, America and Australia, to name a few, have all voiced their disapproval of this new constitution as it stands in its present form. We are being asked to accept the constitution to demonstrate to the world that the people of Fiji are voluntarily favouring it and therefore it is in the interest of all those who are accepting it. Friends, please don't be fooled and misled by these ulterior motives.

This evening, the 'diyas' are glowing outside and the darkness is being dispelled by the light. I say to you that like the lights of the 'diya,' let the light shine in your hearts, sharpen your wis-

dom and vision and expose the deception so subtly hidden in the 'request' of the government for our voluntary acceptance of this new constitution. My request to you is that when this evening you light your 'diyas' make a pledge and with courage and conviction say 'No' to the new constitution. You know that the constitution is neither just nor fair nor would it be in your interest or in the interest of the future generations.

Brothers and Sisters, we know that our powers have been restricted and are still limited. But we know that no power can compel us to do what we do not wish to do. Remember that it is not a struggle for power; our defiance is fundamentally based on the irrational compulsion by the government and its encroachment on your freedom of choice and free will. But we are not so timid and ignorant that we cannot help ourselves. We must not forget that unless we help ourselves no one will help us.

Brothers and Sisters, I realize that tonight I have said more on the new constitution and rather less on 'Diwali.' I have done so purposely and you will agree with me that it is not the only 'Diwali' that you and I will celebrate. On this occasion we are also concerned for the future of our generations to come. What a 'Diwali' it is going to be if we pretend and fool ourselves that our future is bright. It is not a time to be complacent. We will be deceiving ourselves and living in a fool's paradise. Arise, sharpen your wits and with Diwali rekindle the flame of your wisdom. Learn from the past and strengthen your future from the experience of the present.

Brothers and Sisters, I pray that this 'Diwali' may bring you health and happiness and give you solace and peace. May you have the strength, courage, and wisdom so that you may act with responsibility and be able to discuss and distinguish reality from unreality, and truth from lies.

May God Bless You

NOTES

1. *Hansard*, 14 May 1987.
2. In Fijian custom, Leweniqila recalled, uncle and nephew seldom talk to each other. See *Islands Business*, May 1988: 16 for Leweniqila's reflections.
3. His surprise is surprising because two weeks before the coup, Leweniqila recalled having discussed the possible effects of a military coup on Fiji with Sitiveni Rabuka. See *Islands Business*, May 1988: 16.
4. See Satendra Nandan, *Requiem for a Rainbow* (Canberra: Pacific Indian Publications, 2001), 34. Strangely, Nandan does not name Reddy, though he adds: 'As usual, few minutes after the coup, the man had gone to the heart of the matter.' Reddy's recollection is also in Roger Vaughn, 'The Two Worlds of Fiji,' *National Geographic*, 188 (4), Oct. 1995, 118.
5. *Fiji Times*, 21 May, 1987.
6. Reddy had a lot of respect for Navin's courage. He was, like AD Patel, a Charotari Patel, people of steel feared and respected throughout Gujarat.
7. *Hansard*, 8 July 1993.
8. Reddy's recollection is in *Hansard*, 8 July, 1993.
9. *Fiji Times*, 21 May 1987.
10. *Time*, 1 June 1987. The magazine cover had a photograph of Sitiveni Rabuka on it.
11. See also *Daily Post*, 18 May 1999 about Reddy's critical role in the formation of the Coalition.
12. *Fiji Sun*, 10 May 1987.
13. I draw on my conversation with Mr Sharma over many years.
14. *Fiji Times*, 8 Apr. 1987.
15. *Fiji Times*, 9 May 1987.
16. *Fiji Sun*, 21 Apr. 1987.
17. *Fiji Times*, 21 Apr. 1987.

18. *Fiji Sun*, 22 Apr. has extensive coverage.
19. Letter by Ram Naidu, Sultan Ali, Eshad Ali, Sada Sivam, *Fiji Times*, 11 May 1987.
20. *Fiji Sun*, 22 April, 1987 has an extensive coverage of the event.
21. *Fiji Sun*, 24 Apr. 1987
22. See *Fiji Sun* 19 July for Veitata's plans.
23. See Karen Magnall's story in *Sunday Star*, 15 May 1988.
24. *Fiji Times*, 25 Apr. 1987.
25. *Fiji Times*, 23 Apr. 1987.
26. *Fiji Times*, 25 Apr. 1987.
27. *Fiji Sun*, 24 Apr 1987.
28. Rediff.com, 14 Feb. 2005.
29. *Fiji Sun*, 28 May 1987.
30. From an extensive interview Kubuabola gave to *Islands Business*, May 1988, 18.
31. Ibid.
32. See Eddie Dean and Stan Ritova, *No Other Way* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1988).
33. For more discussion, see John Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji: The authorised biography of Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 2000).
34. Rediff.com, 14 Feb. 2005.
35. Ratu Meli Vesikula made similar claims in his interviews with the media in Australia. I have a transcript in my possession.
36. *Time Magazine* (Australian edn), 25 May 1987. See also *Islands Business*, June 1987: 'What dismayed many of the bewildered and bemused people of Fiji was the speed with which the Prime Minister for 16 years, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, agreed to accept Rabuka's invitation to join his Council of Ministers.'
37. An account of Ganilau's life is in Daryl Tarte, *Turaga: The Life and Times and Chiefly Authority of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau* (Suva: Fiji Times, 1993).

38. Among them Lt Col. Jim Sanday who, to his great credit, resigned from the Fiji military when the coup took place and left Fiji for good.
39. *Turaga*, 174.
40. For a general account, see also Michael C Howard, 'Fiji After the First Coup,' *South Pacific Forum* 4: 2 (Apr 1988), 190–208.
41. Rabuka recalled these words when he handed power over to Ganilau on 5 Dec. 1987. Quote is from a transcript in my possession.
42. For more, see Dean and Ritova, *No Other Way*
43. *Fiji Times*, 15 May 1987
44. 'Sanday: 'Truths' Rabuka left out,' *Islands Business*, Mar 1988.
45. Ibid.
46. ABC *Four Corners* Program broadcast on 18 May 1987. Marian Wilkinson was the chief reporter for the programme.
47. A copy of the letter was given to me by Sir Timoci Tuivaga in June 1987.
48. *Fiji Times*, 15 May 1987.
49. See FM Brookfield, 'The Fiji Revolution of 1987,' *New Zealand Law Journal*, July 1988, 253.
50. *Fiji Times*, 15 May 1987.
51. *Fiji Sun*, 21 May 1987.
52. Rod Alley, 'The Development of Political Parties in Fiji,' (unpublished PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1973), 64.
53. *Fiji Times*, 22 May 1987.
54. *Fiji Sun*, 23 May 1987.
55. Quoted in *Time Australia*, 1 June 1987, 17.
56. *Fiji Sun*, 6 July 1987
57. Peter Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 127.
58. *Fiji Times*, 9 June 1987.
59. Kenneth Bain, *Treason at 10: Fiji at the Crossroads* (London: Hodder and

- Stoughton, 1989), 87.
60. *Fiji Sun*, 17 June 1987.
61. *Melbourne Herald*, 25 June 1987.
62. *Fiji Sun*, 13 July 1987.
63. *Fiji Sun*, 2 July 1987.
64. *Fiji Times*, 13 June 1987.
65. Editorial, 15 June 1987.
66. *New Zealand Herald* editorial, 25 June 1987
67. US Embassy statement is printed in *Fiji Times*, 21 June 1987.
68. According to Peter Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 129.
69. 'Terms of Contention,' *Fiji Times*, 4 July 1987.
70. Brief excerpts of the League's submission appeared in the *Fiji Times*, 6 June 1987.
71. See 'Muslim League Talks Blocked,' *Fiji Times*, 10 Aug. 1987; also 'Muslims in Crossfire,' in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Sept. 1987, 24.
72. *Fiji Times*, 21 July 1987.
73. *Fiji Times*, 18 June 1987.
74. Quote is from a transcript in my possession.
75. Public Emergency Regulation was published in *Royal Fiji Gazette*, 114: 37, 18 May 1987.
76. See *Fiji Times* editorial of 29 June titled 'Detainees Rights.'
77. The sugar cane growers proposal, drafted by Sir Vijay R Singh, chief executive of the Sugar Cane Growers Council, is in *Fiji Sun*, 1 July 1987.
78. The Governor General's speech over Radio Fiji is printed in *Fiji Times*, 19 June 1987.
79. Interview with Bruce Stannard, published in *Bulletin* magazine, 13 Oct. 1987, 20.
80. *Fiji Sun* 12 Sept. 1987.
81. Details are *Fiji Sun*, 5 Sept. 1987.

82. *Fiji Sun*, 24 Sept. 1987.
83. From a handwritten note by a senior soldier, 21 Sept. 1987. It was later published by the Fiji Independent News Service (no. 2, Oct. 1987).
84. See Tarte, *Turaga*, 183
85. *Hansard*, 22 Sept. 1993.
86. As recalled by Peter Thomson, *Kava in the Blood*, 162– 63.
87. Letter in *Fiji Times*, 17 Dec. 1987.
88. *Fiji Times*, 18 December 1987.
89. See also Daryl Tarte, *Turaga*, 182–83
90. The Indian journalist was Saed Naqvi. See his ‘Marooned at Home: A demoralised (Fiji) Indian community,’ *India Today* 30 Nov. 1987.
91. Vakatora, *From the Mangrove Swamps*, 80.
92. Reddy’s heated remarks gave Mara and Ganilau the worst dressing down he had ever seen chiefs get, according to Apisai Tora. Letter to author 17 May 2010.
93. From an undated newspaper clipping in the Reddy papers.
94. One only has to read the reports published in the Sydney-based *Fiji Independent News Service* to get a sense of what was going on in the country soon after the second coup.
95. *Islands Business*, May 1988, 15.
96. The words are from a translated script of the words spoken at the ceremony. The quotes are from my copy.
97. The report does not seem to have been formally published. I have a copy of the 19 page report. The other members of the ALP team were Ray Hogan, Victorian secretary of the Miscellaneous Workers Union, and Michael Saxton, a Sydney lawyer and chairman of the NSW ALP’s Foreign Affairs Committee. See also Satendra Prasad (ed.), *Coup and Crisis: Fiji A Year Later* (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 1988) for a similar assessment by several writers.
98. *Review Magazine*, June 1997, 16–17.