

# CHAPTER 7: BACK FROM THE BRINK

*After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now  
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors  
And issues, deceives with whispering ambition, Guides us by vanities*  
TS Eliot

‘We see a new order of hope, of peace, reconciliation, and progress in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens are guaranteed,’ President Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau said, promulgating the 1990 Constitution. ‘We seek understanding, trust and tolerance.’ The new constitution was not based on ‘some revolutionary and radical proposition,’ he continued; it simply provided ‘for a continuation, and an enlargement, of an idea which has become an established part of our power-sharing arrangements.’ By this, Ratu Penaia meant the entrenchment of the principle of Fijian political paramountcy. This was necessary, he continued, to protect the Fijian identity, culture and way of life which were under severe threat. Justifying the enhanced role of the chiefs in the new constitution, he said: ‘The chiefs are a force for moderation, balance and fair play [who have] done much to bring Fiji into the modern world and to spur on our economic progress.’ Ratu Penaia assured the Indo-Fijians that it was never the intention of the Fijian leaders to disenfranchise anyone, for ‘to have taken such a course would not only have been an affront to accepted principles of human conduct, it would also have been contrary to the cultural values of respect, tolerance, mutual caring and Christian love that the Fijians hold dear.’ ‘The time has now come,’ he continued ‘to lay to rest the ghosts of the girmit experience, to put aside the sense of grievance of the past. Be positive about Fiji. Have faith in it as a nation with a bright and shining future.’<sup>1</sup>

A bright and shining future was the last thing the Indo-Fijian community saw for itself in Fiji. For Jai Ram Reddy and other leaders, the new constitution would not lay to rest but instead resurrect the ghost of the gimit experience. Reddy was emphatic about the deep flaws of the constitution:

The constitution is an imposed document. We had no hand in its making. It is an unjust document. It seeks to and discriminates against citizens of Indian origin in this country. It monopolizes political power in the hands of one community to the total exclusion of another. It is a backward looking document which negates the multi-racial character of Fiji. It rides roughshod over fundamental constitutional values, and violates many international instruments of human rights.<sup>2</sup>

And it was to the rejection of the constitution and its replacement by a fairer one that Reddy would devote a large part of his energies during his last decade in politics. Indeed, it would be his principal political obsession in the 1990s. Without political rights, a people were nothing more than slaves, he would say over and over again to those who wanted the constitution to be left alone to concentrate on improving their economic position. The cause of human dignity and freedom demanded an unqualified repudiation of a document which had effectively rendered his people second class citizens. The task would not be easy, for emotions were inflamed, attitudes entrenched, and lines firmly drawn in the sand. But Reddy was not deterred. Bit by small bit, he chipped away at the walls of prejudice and suspicion between the two main communities to create an atmosphere for rational dialogue and discussion. Success, however, came at a huge price. His preferred path for dialogue differed from that proposed by his party's Coalition partner, the Fiji Labour Party. Unable to reconcile their differences, the two parted company for good. This meant that throughout the 1990s, Reddy would be battling both his Fijian opponents as well as his former coalition partners over issues which now seem so inconsequential.

## TOWARDS THE 1990 CONSTITUTION

Two problems faced the military-backed interim administration when it assumed power in December 1987. One was the formulation of a constitution which would address the concerns and aspirations of the indigenous Fijians, and the other was resuscitating an economy teetering on the brink of collapse from shattered investor confidence, the haemorrhaging of skilled personnel from the public sector, the flight of capital, the interruptions in cane harvest and a severe downturn in the tourism industry.<sup>3</sup> To address these problems, the interim administration initiated policies which promised a new direction for Fiji. It explored commercial and trading links with ASEAN countries as part of its 'Look North' policy in part to lessen dependence on Fiji's traditional trading partners which had strongly condemned the coups. It also began de-regulating the economy and eliminating import-substitution policies. A tax free zone was started which gave companies exporting more than 90 per cent of their products thirteen year tax holidays and exemption from customs duties on imported equipments and production materials.

The chief beneficiary of this initiative was the garment industry.<sup>4</sup> For these and other industries to flourish, stringent regulations were needed. In 1991, the interim administration enacted a series of repressive labour laws intended to emasculate the trade unions, the backbone of the Fiji Labour Party, but publicly justified in the name of improving the country's international competitiveness and internal economic flexibility. The new decrees enabled the prosecution of trade unions for damages arising from 'unlawful' trade disputes; introduced company-based unions, amended the Trade Disputes Act to include other forms of industrial actions, such as go-slow, work-to-rule, and the withdrawal of goodwill; and provided for the use of postal or workplace ballots for the election of union officials.<sup>5</sup> Tensions continued to simmer in the cane belt over the uncertainty of obtaining the full forecast price of cane, but there was mercifully no full-scale confrontation between the growers, the Fiji Sugar Corporation and the government. A tenuous truce characterized industrial relations throughout the 1990s.

It was the government's proposals for the formulation of the new constitution that the nation and the international community watched carefully. In October 1988, nearly a year after assuming office, the interim administration appointed an 18-person Fiji Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee (FCIAC), chaired by retired Colonel Paul Manuelli, Fiji's first local commander of the military forces. There was no representation of the Coalition on the Committee, nor were any other parties represented. The Committee was thus theoretically neutral, but it lacked credibility. Its Indo-Fijian members included RH Bechan, Tamessar Bhim, Hafiz Khan, Shardha Nand, GP Shankar and Uday Singh, all non-Coalition people, some of whom (Nand and Singh) had contested elections against the Coalition in the past.<sup>6</sup> Though successful in their various chosen professions – agriculture, law, commerce and public service – they lacked a credible political profile among their own people. Nothing much though was expected from them. If they were able to orchestrate a progressive outcome, they would be praised, and if they failed, they would be condemned and ostracized.

The Committee was not starting from scratch. The Cabinet had prepared a draft constitution which it wanted subjected to further public scrutiny and tested for its broad acceptability, 'having regard in particular to the failure of the 1970 Constitution to provide adequate and full protection of the rights, interests and concerns of the indigenous Fijian people, and having regard to all the circumstances prevailing in Fiji.'<sup>7</sup> These patently loaded Terms of Reference for the Committee are clear. It was accepted, for instance, that the 1970 Constitution had failed to meet Fijian aspirations, begging the question how that determination was arrived at and by whom. Further, the Committee had to bear in mind the 'prevailing circumstances' as it conducted its enquiry. The coup leaders were described as 'members of the security forces who had assisted in the change of government in 1987'. How were concepts such as 'rights,' 'interests,' and 'concerns' to be understood? Did the indigenous people have a 'right' to political dominance solely on the grounds of ethnicity? And would increased

numbers by themselves guarantee Fijian political dominance? How would power be distributed within Fijian society? Questions such as these would be asked by many in the years ahead, exposing the fallacy that underpinned the thinking of those who prepared the draft constitution and the Terms of Reference for the Manueli Committee.

Fundamentally, the Cabinet Draft differed little in spirit and content from the Great Council of Chiefs' submission to the Falvey Committee in 1987. The draft proposed, among other things, to create a Fijian-dominated parliament of seventy one seats with twenty eight elected Fijians, twenty two Indians, eight General Electors and one Rotuman, with a further eight Fijians to be nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and four by the Prime Minister, all of whom would have the same privileges as the elected members of the House; to give power to an executive committee of the Great Council of Chiefs to nominate the President, who, in turn, would appoint the Prime Minister; to place all the most important ministries as well as the chairs of the powerful statutory bodies (police, public service, and legal commissions) in indigenous Fijian hands; to install the commander of the Fiji Military Forces as a permanent member of the cabinet; to conduct all parliamentary elections on strictly communal franchise; and not least, to 'promote and safeguard the interests and aspirations of the Fijian and Rotuman people and in particular to promote and maintain their cultures and traditions and their social, educational and economic well-being' through special government-directed programs of positive discrimination.

The Manueli Committee received many oral and written submissions and characterized Fijian and Indo-Fijian submissions this way. By and large, it concluded, 'the majority of submissions from the Fijian community were conclusive in their view that they were the indigenous people of the country, and as such, their aspirations and special position should be formally recognized in the country's political and administrative structures.' To this end, they 'should be given political control through a parliamentary majority in the new Fiji Constitution.'<sup>8</sup> In addition, Fijians 'contended that special arrangements should be made in the public service to ensure the fair

distribution of civil service positions in their favour and to give them control over a substantial degree of decision-making.' Christianity, which held a special place in the life of the Fijian community for more than a century, should be recognized as the state religion and the Sabbath observed strictly by everyone, including non-Christians. Many were relieved that the coup had 'nipped in the bud' the threat to Fijian culture and identity, for which they were grateful. As Fijians saw it, their demand for political control was sensible and 'in the interest of political stability and peace.' Fijians differed to some extent on the degree of political control that should be given to the indigenous community, but there was no disagreement on the principle.

The Indo-Fijian community, on the other hand, the Manuelli Committee report concluded, 'was generally united in their view that the fear expressed by the Fijians that they would be dominated by them was groundless,' and that the coup was nothing more than an attempt by the Alliance party to regain power it had lost at the elections.<sup>9</sup> They acknowledged the Fijian predicament in the modern economic sector, but this, the Indo-Fijian leaders argued, was not the result of flaws in the constitution but the direct outcome of 'development policies implemented by the predominantly Fijian-dominated Government that held political power continuously during the first seventeen years of independence.' The problems of the Fijian people would be resolved not through contrived political control but 'in raising their level of motivation, individual attitudes and dedication to improvement in their education, commercial entrepreneurship and in engaging themselves in productive activities. Political representation should be based not on principles of apartheid but on 'democratic principles of liberty, personal freedom and equality. There should be a strict separation of religion and state, and the Sunday Observance Decree, which was an imposition on their personal freedom and liberty should be scrapped. Muslims predictably pleaded for separate representation,<sup>10</sup> while the various minority communities generally supported Fijian aspirations and demands for reasons of 'blood ties,' but asked for varying degrees of separate representation for themselves as well.

The NFP–FLP Coalition presented its submission to the Manuelli Committee on 6 January 1989.<sup>11</sup> It was a long and thoughtful document. The Coalition was helped by the eminent constitutional lawyer, the Kenyan-born, Harvard and Oxford-educated Professor Yash Ghai, then at the University of Hong Kong. Ghai had been a constitutional advisor to several Pacific islands (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) during their transition to independence and had been taking a keen interest in Fiji's recent constitutional history. The NFP raised funds to engage him, and he would remain their principal constitutional advisor for the next decade. Ghai consulted widely and especially with Jai Ram Reddy as the Coalition's principal point man on the constitution and, through him, the main political and business leaders in the Indo-Fijian community such as Hari Punja, YP Reddy, Vinod Patel and others, as well as leaders of the Labour Party. In the final stages of writing the submission, Reddy flew to Sydney for a long weekend for the preparation of the final draft.

The Coalition submission stressed the 'restoration of national unity and racial harmony' as the most urgent priority for the nation. 'Without that, our social and economic goals cannot be met. Neither national unity nor economic and social development can be achieved by a government which does not enjoy the confidence and the respect of the people. The legitimacy of a government can, in turn, only be secured through democracy.' The Draft Constitution was, in its view, 'authoritarian, undemocratic, militaristic, racist and feudalistic,' and it provided a detailed and devastating critique of the document. Why should Indo-Fijians comprising nearly 50 per cent of the population have only twenty two of the proposed seventy one seats in the House of Representatives? What purpose would be served by entrenching a purely communal system of voting in a multi-ethnic society like Fiji? Why should key positions of the state be reserved for one ethnic group only? What was the point of depriving the Council of Chiefs of commoner (administrative and parliamentary) members? Why the disproportionate allocation of Fijian seats to rural constituencies when more than a third of the indigenous community was living in urban and peri-

urban areas? How could 'economic development take place in conditions of discrimination and insecurity' and 'lasting progress or peace come from the subordination of one race to another?' As an exercise in cogent and accessible exposition of complex constitutional issues, the submission is a masterpiece and well worth reading even now.

Following this detailed critique of the Draft Constitution, the NFP–FLP Coalition made its own proposals for a new constitution for Fiji. The constitution, it said, 'should be based on principles and practices of parliamentary democracy. It should be as participatory as possible.' And second, it should embrace the principle of multi-racialism, 'a partnership of communities.' Just and fair power sharing between the main communities should lie at the very heart of the new constitution. The President should be elected by members of the House of Representatives using the Alternative Vote, but executive power should be vested not in the President, who should continue to perform a largely ceremonial role, but in the Cabinet unless in exceptional circumstances of emergency. The House of Representatives itself should consist of sixty two members, all of whom would be elected, and none nominated. These seats would be allocated as follows: twelve communal seats each for Fijians and Indo-Fijians and three for General Electors, and fifteen national seats each for the two major communities and five for the General Electors. The increase in the national seats would 'remove a weakness in the [1970] Constitution shifting the communal bias of the system towards multi-racial cooperation.' There were many other similar proposals designed to create the framework of a transparent and fair system of government and to remove, as far as possible, all vestiges of racial discrimination in the public sector.

It would be too much to suppose that the NFP–FLP Coalition had high hopes that its proposals would receive a fair hearing in the Manuelli Committee. But perhaps they realized the impediments and hoped to articulate an alternative vision for the people to ponder. In the end, the submission fell on deaf ears. Nothing it proposed was taken on board. Instead, there was a complete endorsement of the Fijian view. Because the



constitution which developed from the Manueli Committee report would become such a controversial document, it is helpful to outline briefly its main features. The constitution provided that the President would be appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs for five years, would serve at the chiefs' pleasure and would be accountable for his actions to them and to no one else. He would be more than simply a figurehead. He was empowered to suspend the Constitution and the civil liberties of individuals to deal with any act that excited 'disaffection against the President or the Government' or others he deemed 'prejudicial to the security of Fiji.' It was assumed that the Presidency would be rotated among the three confederacies of Tovata, Kubuna and Burebasaga and that the President would always be a person of chiefly background.

The Senate was not abolished, as recommended by both the Great Council of Chiefs and Coalition itself in favour of a unicameral legislature. It would comprise thirty four members of whom twenty four would be Fijians appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs, one Rotuman appointed by the Council of Rotuma and nine 'Others' appointed by the President. The prerogative of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to nominate members to the upper house, present in the 1970 Constitution, was abolished. In appointing the nine members, the President would be required to 'take into consideration the special interests of the minority communities.' These would include Europeans, Part-Europeans, Chinese and Pacific Islanders besides Indo-Fijians who would, by virtue of their reduced numbers, be rendered voiceless in the proceedings of the Senate. Their complete subordination was a cruel example of blatant racial discrimination against the combined majority community of Fiji. The Great Council of Chiefs would retain the power of veto over all legislation that affected Fijian interests and institutions including the Fijian Affairs Act, the Fijian Development Fund Act, the Native Land Act, the Native Land Trust Act, the Rotuma Act, the Rotuman Land Act, the Banaban Land Act and the Banaban Settlement Act. Fijian dominance in the upper house was complete.

In the composition of the House of Representatives, there was an even more marked departure from the 1970 Constitution. The new House would comprise 70 members (instead of the previous fifty two) of whom thirty seven (48 per cent of the population) would be reserved for Fijians, twenty seven (46 per cent of the population) for Indo-Fijians, five for General Electors and one for Rotuma (which now had a member each in both the houses of parliament). The principle of parity between the two major communities was discarded. All cross-voting was abolished, thereby eliminating an even limited incentive to work towards cross-ethnic politics which the 1970 Constitution had provided for in a restricted kind of way through the national seats. The constitution entrenched complete electoral apartheid. 'Separate and Unequal' was the doctrine that underpinned the foundations of the new political order. But there was discrimination in the distribution of seats among the Fijian provinces themselves. Of the thirty seven members of the House of Representatives, thirty two would be elected from the fourteen Fijian provinces and the remaining five from urban constituencies. Ba, the largest Fijian province with a population (1986 census) of 55,000 had only three seats, the same as Lau, with a population of 14,000; and Rewa, with 48,000 would have two seats, the same as Kadavu with a population of 9,600. According to the 1986 census, 107,780 or nearly a third of the indigenous Fijian population lived in urban areas, but they had only five of the thirty seven seats. The constitution had many other discriminatory features as well, symbolized powerfully in the provision that only an indigenous Fijian could become Prime Minister of Fiji.

The 1990 Constitution was a 'perverse' document, Jai Ram Reddy said often, pernicious in its various racially discriminatory provisions that even its architects acknowledged at the time. But this is what most Fijians wanted. Fijian leaders who knew very well that the assumptions which underpinned the constitution would not and could not work, remained silent. The Manuelli Committee and the Cabinet's Draft Constitution had misdiagnosed the problem and prescribed the wrong medication that instead of curing the sickness only served to aggravate it. The deep contradictions

which lay at the heart of the new constitution would become clear soon after its promulgation. But while it gave the Fijian people the illusion of power and control and comparative advantage over other communities, it also underlined and entrenched a subordinate role in Fiji for the Indo-Fijian community. Like children, the Indo-Fijians would be seen but not heard, at least not heard in the important councils of state. As Reddy put it, 'The only role of the Indian and other communities under the constitution is to work and pay taxes to the government to fill its coffers without having any say in the distribution of the government revenue. We have been strangled with the aid of those six stooges (Indo-Fijians on the Manuelli Committee) who signed the document before it was promulgated and now the community is barely conscious.'<sup>12</sup> Rejection of the 1990 Constitution became Jai Ram Reddy's principal political concern in the decade following. But amidst all the gloom, there was one glimmer of hope. There was a provision in the constitution itself for a review within seven years of promulgation and the new parliament and the elected representatives of all the communities would play a key role in that process.

#### DEATH OF A LEADER AND A DREAM

On 3 November 1989, Dr Timoci Bavadra died from spinal cancer. He was only fifty five. Bavadra's death grieved the nation, including his political opponents, as the passing away of some other national leaders did not. He was essentially an unassuming man, gentle and humane, who had been swept by the tide of history to lead the Fiji Labour Party of which he was the founding president. He was that rare Fijian leader, possibly the only one ever, to whom most Indo-Fijians were genuinely drawn by a bond of affection. Ratu Mara, they felt, wanted their support to remain in power, but Bavadra gave the impression of being caring and compassionate, of not being personally ambitious for office. To many, he was simply 'Doc.' Everyone accepted him as the undisputed leader of the Coalition, even those who doubted his political savvy. He was the glue, the moral force, which kept the Coalition together, an indispensable condition for its success. As Reddy re-

marked, Dr Bavadra 'was his own man; he was intelligent, compassionate; he meant well and he always acted in the interest of all the people of Fiji,' and who was followed 'because we trusted him, we liked him and because he was a good leader.'<sup>13</sup>

With Dr Bavadra's death ended the dream of a united NFP-FLP Coalition. Bavadra's wife, Adi Kuini, succeeded him, and led the coalition until 1991 when she resigned from the Fiji Labour Party to form her own Fijian Association Party (after a brief period with the All National Congress). She lacked her husband's stature and affection among the people, although those who knew her, as I did, never doubted her moral courage and her commitment to the cause of multiracialism. She was a brave and principled leader in her own right. Bavadra's death brought to the fore of the Labour Party Assistant General Secretary, Mahendra Pal Chaudhry who, until then, had none of Jai Ram Reddy's national profile or standing. Born in the western sugar district of Tavua, he attended the Sri Vivekananda High in Nadi. Upon completing high school, Chaudhry joined the Audit department and rose through the ranks to become Senior Auditor before leaving the public service to lead the Fiji Public Service Association. There he acquired a well-deserved reputation as a tough negotiator and uncompromising advocate of his members' rights.

Chaudhry's ascendancy changed the dynamics of politics within the Labour Party. Whereas Bavadra had been gentle and accommodating and not personally ambitious for rule or control, Chaudhry was the complete opposite. He knew power and understood the exercise of it. With unerring instinct and considerable skill, he began to assert his authority over the party machinery. Dissent was suppressed in the name of party discipline, and even the most senior members of the party risked sacking for questioning the judgment of the party leader. Many genuinely idealistic members who believed in the cause of the labour movement in the broader ideological sense and had joined the party for that reason, found Chaudhry's increasing authoritarianism troubling. Over time, for one reason or another, nearly all of them left the party, carrying varying degrees of disillusionment with the

way things were run in the party and Chaudhry's leadership of it.

Some left politics altogether, while others joined the National Federation Party, saying they were attracted to it by Reddy's moderate approach and inclusive vision, even while muttering privately about NFP's 'communal' base and orientation. The vacuum left by their departure would be filled by non-threatening members loyal to, and dependent on, Chaudhry for their own position and political survival. Their loyalty to the leader was complete and unwavering. The contrast with Reddy could not be greater for, as the 1990s proceeded, he gathered around him arguably the best talent the NFP had ever had, people of genuine ability and skill who were among the best in the country: economists, trade union leaders, businessmen, and professionals in various fields. Conversely, the Labour leader surrounded himself with a generally undistinguished group who were no match for their NFP counterparts. Chaudhry was not content only to be the leader of the Fiji Labour Party. He was determined to become the undisputed leader of the Indo-Fijian community as well. He had accepted Bavadra as his superior in a way he never accepted Jai Ram Reddy. He was committed to NFP's destruction, using whatever means he had at his disposal. In this mission, Chaudhry was single-minded and relentless. Reddy's mistake was not to grasp the true nature and purpose of Chaudhry's mission early enough, preoccupied throughout the 1990s, as he was, with the larger changes and challenges facing his community and the nation. For that, he and his party would pay a terrible price. It took Chaudhry a full decade to realize his goal of toppling Reddy and assuming the mantle of Indo-Fijian leadership, but his great tragedy was that he was not fated to enjoy his spot in the sun for too long. Livy's words are apt: 'You know how to conquer Hannibal, but you know not how to utilize victory.'

The first fracture in the NFP–FLP Coalition occurred over the 1990 constitution, but not before some preliminary explorations about a merger had taken place. The proposal came from the Labour Party.<sup>14</sup> Labour reminded the NFP of its apparent commitment to a merger in the late 1980s, which the party completely disavowed. No approaches were made to Reddy

who was the de facto leader of the National Federation Party. The NFP rejected the merger option in the interests of political survival too. The Coalition arrangement had worked well, said Reddy, and should continue. 'We can speak without treading on each other's toes. In a merged party, I would be very unhappy if the party agreed to nationalization. Then we would project an image of division.' The NFP, he said, represented a broad cross-section of the Indo-Fijian community, and it had served the people well over a very long period of time. He then asked the obvious question. 'I am more and more intrigued, as time progresses, about the real motives behind this move. Is it unity or is it because the NFP has become too much of a nuisance for the Labour Party?'<sup>15</sup>

But some within the Labour party itself were opposed to the idea of a merger. Among them was the party Vice President Simone Durutalo who argued that any closer association with the NFP would play straight into the hands of the Fijian nationalists. A merger would 'lock everybody back into pre-1987 voting patterns with people voting on racial lines rather than for parties' by raising the spectre of Indian domination. He went on to argue that it would be far better for Labour to prepare its groundwork and position itself for victory in the 1996 general elections than attempt to win through a merger in 1992. 'Then, if the military comes in, we will have the people's support.' The only way forward in Fiji politics, argued Durutalo, was to 'democratize Fijian society.'<sup>16</sup> Durutalo's was a voice in the wilderness, although the merger option died a quiet death when the NFP rejected it out of hand. It was a non-starter from the beginning anyway.

#### TO PARTICIPATE OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE

Both Labour and the NFP condemned the lopsided 1990 Constitution and demanded its rejection. But they differed on whether they should participate in the general elections to be held under it. Opinion was widely canvassed. Jai Ram Reddy, Mahendra Chaudhry and Navin Maharaj visited India and raised the issue with Atal Behari Vajpayee, who later became Prime Minister of India. His advice was to contest the elections and try to change

the constitution from within, which is what the Congress Party had done once in the 1930s, rejecting the 1935 Constitution but participating in the provincial elections to keep a foot in the door. 'Staying out will not help your cause,' both Vajpayee and Bhartiye Janata Party President LK Advani told the Indo-Fijian leaders. 'You don't have to convince me,' Reddy replied. 'You have to convince him [Chaudhry].' Ramsay Clarke, Attorney General in Lyndon B Johnson's administration, whom Reddy met privately in New York, offered similar advice. He told Reddy how in Guyana Cheddi Jagan had initially boycotted parliament but, realizing his error of judgment, had returned to participate in its proceedings. Reddy told a meeting in Moto, Ba, that every minister or senior official he had met from Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States had 'advised us that while they would provide moral support, they could not directly intervene as it was Fiji's own internal problem to be solved by the people.'<sup>17</sup> The advice of the Coalition's legal advisor, Professor Yash Ghai, was the same: one could participate in the elections under the flawed constitution and use the opportunity to protest against it, expose its flaws and educate the public about it. He advised:

It is possible to attack a constitution and yet take part in the elections. But it is absolutely essential that the terms on which a party takes part is made clear so that it [not taking part] are not interpreted as an endorsement of the constitution. A party may wish to take part in the elections with a view to changing the constitution, or making the political system under it difficult to operate, or not letting its rivals dominate parliament and government. So while there may be a strong moral case for a boycott, it may occasionally make sense to take part in elections while simultaneously attacking the constitution. The important question was not boycott, but whether to endorse the constitution.<sup>18</sup>

Reddy was reassured by such advice, but he instinctively knew from the very outset that boycotting was no option. 'Boycott is a negative sentiment,' he said, 'and little good comes out of negative reactions.'<sup>19</sup> The Labour lead-

ers were 'by nature negative and their language is boycott, strike, disrupt, destroy and wreck. They want to destroy everything in sight.'<sup>20</sup> 'If you get elected and do nothing,' he said, 'then you are accepting it [the constitution]. If at every opportunity, you raise your voice, and if need be walk out of the House, that is not accepting the constitution.'<sup>21</sup> He had his party's history on his side. The NFP rejected the 1965 Constitution completely yet agreed under protest to take part in the 1966 elections under it. When it was unsuccessful in having it amended to make it more democratic, it boycotted the Legislative Council, but not before demonstrating the constitution's obvious biases and flaws. And Reddy knew his community well enough to know that there would always be opportunists who would participate in the name of the Indo-Fijian community, even if they represented no one but themselves, all the while parading themselves to the world as democratically elected representatives of their people in parliament. Even Fijian leaders such as Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu William Toganivalu urged dialogue, as did the business community, which wanted stability. 'Many times I told Mr Chaudhry,' Reddy said, 'that if he wanted to be a leader, he should not indulge in class wars, which separated growers, workers and businessmen. But he was always bent on orchestrating strikes and boycotts, and always criticized the business community.'<sup>22</sup>

The Fiji Labour Party disagreed. Going on the offensive, and referring to Reddy's anti-boycott stance, Chaudhry attacked the NFP leader for not 'respecting the rights of workers, the farmer, and the poor.' 'In fact,' he said, Reddy showed 'contempt for them. It is about time that he understood that boycotts and strikes are legitimate and lawful actions used by the working class to protect themselves against exploitation and oppression.'<sup>23</sup> How could they participate in an election under a constitution they had all roundly condemned as racist, authoritarian, undemocratic and feudalistic? To do so would accord legitimacy to that flawed document and undermine the party's credibility internationally. The FLP told the visiting Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in February 1992 that 'we do not wish to be a party to an election that will not return



Fiji to genuine democracy but instead entrench an authoritarian racist government similar to that in South Africa.'

International pressure, Labour believed, and nothing else, would force the government to the negotiating table. Said Navin Maharaj, its Secretary General: 'Nothing can be done by going into parliament and success can only come through international pressure, and that is what we intend to do.'<sup>24</sup> In any case, he added, 'People are not really interested in elections. There is quite a lot of apathy among the general public. The public wouldn't give a damn whether there is an election or not.'<sup>25</sup> 'Rabuka has explicitly told us that the constitution cannot be changed and likewise the Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei has not given any assurance of any change,' said Mahendra Chaudhry. 'Do you think the coup-plotters carried out so many atrocities for the last five years just to change the constitution?'<sup>26</sup> At a meeting in Tavua in May 1992, Chaudhry accused Reddy of falling into an elaborate trap laid by the Fijian leaders to remain in power. The final stage of their master plan, he said, 'is the 1992 general elections.' 'If we sit in parliament,' he continued, 'they will sing to the world that everything is normal in Fiji and that the government would solve the grievances of the Indian community through the parliamentary process.'<sup>27</sup>

Reddy rejected the charge, accusing Chaudhry of being a 'power hungry politician playing a game with an unsuspecting Indian community. He always wants to be the man at the top and that is the game he is playing.'<sup>28</sup> 'By boycotting elections and staying out of parliament, the Indian community will aggravate its grievances...Labour is harping about international focus and pressure. Where will they get pressure from? From the International Confederation of Trade Unions? It is absolute facts not fantasies that the international community recognizes the government of the day.'<sup>29</sup> He said repeatedly that the 1990 Constitution was 'abhorrent and something no political party with a sense of propriety can accept.' Still, 'as a matter of practical politics, the chances of getting it improved are better by participation rather than by staying out.'<sup>30</sup> In this stance, Reddy received the full support of Siddiq Koya, whom Labour had opportunistically lauded

over the NFP leader. 'My views are completely against the Labour Party,' he said.<sup>31</sup> 'Their decision [not to participate in the elections] is not in the best interests of this country.' 'Negotiation with those in power is the only way change could be brought about to the constitution,' Koya said, 'bearing in mind that talks should be done on the home front.'

In another meeting, Reddy warned about the strategy of wrecking the economy to put pressure on the government to address the grievances of the Indo-Fijian community. He concluded it would be counterproductive. It would only 'lead to a point of no return where there would be no atmosphere for dialogue.'<sup>32</sup> The 'debate on whether the constitution can be changed from within or outside of parliament is an academic one,' Reddy argued. 'The truth is that the only worthwhile constitution will be agreed upon by all the communities and that will not be possible unless we talk. That is vital and there is no other way to proceed.'<sup>33</sup> But Labour was undeterred. In pocket meetings in Penang, Vaileka, Ellington, Barotu, Madhuvani and Vunikavikaloa, Navin Maharaj, Tupeni Baba, Mahendra Chaudhry, Samresan Pillay, and RS Goundar, formerly a president of the NFP, told their supporters not to vote in the elections.<sup>34</sup> 'Any Indian leader, who is seeking a permanent solution to the problems they face in Fiji will never in his right mind advise Indians to participate in the forthcoming elections under the 1990 Constitution,'<sup>35</sup> they said. But as we shall see, not only would Chaudhry contest the elections under that 1990 Constitution, he would support the government formed under it! The whole boycott strategy was both short-sighted and short-lived and in the end jettisoned without regret.

The boycott option was not widely shared within the Labour party. As mentioned, among its more vocal critics were intellectuals like Simone Durutalo, of the University of the South Pacific. It would make more sense for leaders to be inside parliament than outside, he said. 'Even an authoritarian parliament is better than no parliament.'<sup>36</sup> The boycott strategy would, furthermore, deprive Fijians who wanted to vote for Labour and were opposed to other parties. He questioned Labour's strategy to constantly 'harp' on the racist nature of the constitution. That it was racist was undeniable,

but most ordinary Fijians did not have a sufficient appreciation of this fact. It was important to try and educate the Fijians about the constitution. 'An indigenous Fijian-oriented strategy for Labour is the best way to defend Indo-Fijian interests and aspirations in Fiji.' And this strategy, he argued, 'points towards electoral participation rather than boycott strategy.' The boycott decision 'shows how insensitive the party is when it comes to the interests of the Fijian people. They have failed to notice that while the boycott stand would be ideal for the party's Fiji Indian electorate, it is not so for their Fijian counterparts.'<sup>37</sup> Durutalo questioned the way decisions were made in the party. The fatal weakness of the Fiji Labour Party, he said, 'has been the installation of puppet leaders who are used as mere mouthpieces by powerful political personalities pulling strings behind the scenes.' The 'three musketeers' he had in his sight were Mahendra Chaudhry, Navin Maharaj and Tupeni Baba. The token leader Durutalo had in mind was Jokapeci Koroi.<sup>38</sup> Chaudhry accused Durutalo of opportunism, of having suddenly changed his mind when he had in fact supported the boycott option until August 1991.<sup>39</sup>

The truth was that Durutalo's position was widely shared by many other members. Durutalo resigned from the party along with another prominent founding member, Michael Columbus, president of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, who called the boycott position a 'sham' and pointed out the ironic situation of him asking for dialogue with the government under the existing constitution and then boycotting elections held under it.<sup>40</sup> In March 1992, Adi Kuini Bavadra said that 'there are really no grounds left for a boycott and the only realistic and practical option is for participation.'<sup>41</sup> A month earlier, Jone Dakuvula had resigned from Labour over 'fundamental disagreement' with the boycott decision of the party. Durutalo's parting shot at his former party was that its coalition with the National Federation Party had been an 'unmitigated disaster.' It was, he said, 'a classic case of political expediency by those in a hurry to get to power at any cost. The political product was a top heavy Coalition government with solid Fiji Indian backing but a very fragile Fijian base.'<sup>42</sup>

The departure from the Labour ranks of some of its well known members was depressing. The exodus of the founding members, Reddy said, was due to the 'stubbornness of one man, who thinks he knows everything, does not need to consult anybody and tells people that all Indian leaders till now have not done anything for the community. One man's ego is destroying the community.'<sup>43</sup>

By late April, FLP's boycott strategy was in complete disarray, criticized both from within and from without. On 30 April, FLP wrote to the NFP proposing that it would not contest the elections if the NFP undertook to abide by certain 'conditions.' In hindsight, the conditions are so unbelievable, so brazenly outrageous, as to lead to the thought that perhaps they were intentionally designed for rejection so that Labour could then find an excuse to contest the elections.<sup>44</sup> Labour wanted NFP, upon election, to seek an assurance from the government to immediately address all issues of concern to the Coalition, the foremost of which would be the review of the constitution. This assurance, FLP demanded, should be sought outside parliament and steps to be taken to redress the grievances established. If the government refused, the NFP would not enter parliament, but if the government agreed, then the NFP would enter parliament and participate in deliberations 'only to the extent at first of giving effect to redressing those grievances.' Further, the NFP would have to undertake to 'consult with and obtain agreement of the Fiji Labour Party at all stages of the negotiations.' How Labour expected an independent, self-respecting party to give in to such a set of demands only its leaders knew. The NFP expectedly replied that it saw no merit at all in Labour's views and could not possibly accept the terms and conditions 'without sacrificing for all time the NFP's reputation and integrity.' 'The real effect of presenting demands of the kind that Mr Chaudhry is suggesting,' Reddy said, 'will simply put other peoples' back up against the Indians and will not lead to any sensible solution to the present crisis.'<sup>45</sup> RD Patel, one of the founding members of the NFP, likened Labour's behaviour to that of a seven year cheeky child making demands on a thirty year old adult.

Unable to move the NFP, Labour rescinded its boycott decision and announced that it would fight the election, but, strangely enough, not enter parliament! How did Labour explain its position? Said Navin Maharaj: 'It was only a change in strategy: from boycott of election to boycott of parliament.' Why? 'The change came about because the NFP has no clear picture.'<sup>46</sup> The Coalition was dead. It was a sad end to an arrangement which had begun with so much promise less than a decade ago. On 4 May, Reddy was elected leader of the NFP to take the party into the general elections. In a letter to Chaudhry, he wrote: 'The NFP strongly feels that your eleventh hour decision to field candidates after maintaining for months that you had strong grassroots support for your position is untenable, just as is your decision to field candidates who have already broken written pledges given to people.' Reddy was referring to people who had pledged not to stand against the NFP if they were unsuccessful in getting a party ticket to stand, but who were now standing either for Labour or the recently launched Fiji Indian Congress, and others who had given no pledges but had unsuccessfully applied for a NFP ticket. Among those now contesting the elections, who had applied for NFP ticket, were Lekh Ram Vayeshnoi, Rameshwar Prasad, and Pradhuman Raniga (all successful as Labour candidates). In Indo-Fijian politics, loyalties are tenuous, and commitment to principles even more so. *Pet Puja*, looking after yourself first, is what the game is often all about. Reddy continued:

The NFP has not made a decision to enter Parliament unconditionally after the general elections. That issue has to be addressed once the elections are held and the identity of the Government is established. A decision would have to be taken then, after due negotiations on critical issues affecting the Indian community are held with those in power. The decision will depend on the result of those negotiations and is a matter exclusively for the National Federation Party. You seem to fail to understand that no political party wishing to retain any credibility with the public can allow itself to be placed in a position where it appears

to be under the control of another political party, and that too a rival one on critical issues. Furthermore, the NFP does not share your view that entering Parliament, even under protest, will amount to legitimizing the constitution. If that is legitimizing the constitution, then participation by the Fiji Labour Party in the electoral process must do the same. The NFP has made it repeatedly clear that it rejects the constitution. The NFP is fully committed to bring about changes to the constitution. Where we differ is on the method.<sup>47</sup>

The campaign that followed was hard and bitter. It was a head-to-head battle between Reddy and Chaudhry. The key question became: who could be trusted to be the leader of the Indo-Fijian community? Reddy's longer political record provided the necessary grist for Labour's campaign mill. ALTA was depicted as a sell-out of the Indo-Fijian farming community, in whose passage Reddy was said to have had a big hand. To Muslim audiences, Reddy was portrayed as the man who had prevented Siddiq Koya from becoming Prime Minister. His radio address after the April 1977 general elections was dredged up as an example of a leader who was afraid to lead. Reddy's call for a consociationalist government of national unity 'based on a formula of power-sharing which would ensure that every community is represented at the decision making level'<sup>48</sup> was ridiculed by Labour as an arrangement which would 'both implicitly and explicitly give credence and legitimacy to the decreed constitution' and reduce the NFP to a 'subservient position' depending on the mercy of the Fijian side in parliament.<sup>49</sup> And so it went.

Chaudhry knew, or should have known, what the truth was (as I have shown in earlier chapters), but truth is usually the first casualty in an election campaign. Chaudhry claimed in a meeting in Tavua in May that Reddy had 'left Indians in Fiji to fend for themselves during the most difficult period in this country's history.' Reddy, he said, was like leaders who 'surface during elections and desert people in crisis.'<sup>50</sup> 'Run Away Reddy' was a common phrase heard at Labour rallies. But it was also a blatant

lie, one among a long series of lies, half-lies and gross distortions. Reddy was in Fiji throughout 1987. He could not have left the country because he was blacklisted and banned from travelling until December of that year. He had, as we have already seen, been instrumental in the Deuba Accord negotiations. He had instigated a court case against the Governor General for illegal dissolution of parliament. He had been on the Falvey Committee, travelling around the country receiving submissions. He had written the minority report. He had left for New Zealand briefly during the Christmas break and before the arms seizure in June 1988, a full year after the first coup, and remained there for two and half or so months afterwards on the advice of friends 'who pleaded with me to stay out of the country fearing for my safety.' There was good cause for concern. Reddy was still the man the Fijian nationalists fingered as the chief architect of the Alliance defeat. And there was nothing much to do in Fiji anyway, with the military government firmly in place and repressive decrees banning free speech. Jagannath Sami recalls people hurriedly crossing the streets to avoid meeting Reddy, fearing that even the slightest hint of acquaintance with the NFP leader might lead to a visit by the security forces.

Knowing what the truth was but still making a patently false allegation was something Reddy could not comprehend. 'There are very serious doubts about his suitability to lead the country,' was all he managed to say about Chaudhry. Of all the false allegations made against Reddy, the one about him deserting his people in their hour of need hurt him most deeply, and of which he is to this day unforgiving. But Reddy's 'supposed absence' at the 'height of the crisis' caught on among the Indo-Fijian electorate who had no way of verifying the truth of the allegation, but were willing nonetheless to believe the worst about their opponents. Vinod Chand Maharaj of Lautoka, a Labour candidate, told pocket meetings that Reddy had left the country disguised as a woman! Chaudhry, by contrast, was the man of the moment. Wrote Arvind Pillay of Namousau Ba (if he was the real letter writer): 'It is not for Mr Reddy or anyone else today to denigrate the leadership of a man who stood by the oppressed and downtrodden, raising

his voice fearlessly for their rights, putting his family, his property and his person to considerable risk.<sup>51</sup> Of Chaudhry's courage there was no doubt. Even his strongest opponents would concede that. But how could Chaudhry and his colleagues tell tall tales about Reddy knowing the real truth remains beyond easy comprehension and explanation as well.

#### CONFUSION IN THE FIJIAN CAMP

While the Indo-Fijian community was racked with division and disunity, things were not much better on the Fijian side either. Divisions in it would have a large bearing on post-election developments. When the constitution was formally promulgated in July 1990, the Great Council of Chiefs launched a new political party, the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) that, it hoped, would unite the Fijian people under one umbrella in the manner of the old Fijian Administration system. This united Fijian party, the chiefs hoped, would lead the Fijian people to electoral victory and thus fulfil one of the aims of the coup. The reality turned out to be entirely different. Even as the party was being formed, some Fijian leaders questioned the wisdom of the Great Council of Chiefs sponsoring a single political party for all Fijians when it would have been prudent for it remain above the fray of electoral politics. What would happen to the dignity of the Council, the pinnacle of Fijian society, if its party failed to win, asked Apisai Tora, who then went on to form a separate party of his own!<sup>52</sup>

But views such as this went unheeded, planting the seeds for further problems. The first of these emerged over the election of the president of the SVT. Many Fijians wanted a non-political chief, chosen through consensus, to lead the party and thus provide it with a semblance of traditional authority. Once again, and to no one's surprise, the reality turned out to be different. There were three contenders for the position: Ratu William Toganivalu, a former Alliance minister, Ro Lady Lala Mara, Tui Dreketi, paramount chief of the Burebasaga confederacy and wife of Ratu Mara, and Sitiveni Rabuka. To the surprise of many and the consternation of some, Rabuka beat the chiefs, winning nine



of the nineteen SVT management committee's votes, to Lady Mara's six and Toganivalu's four. Rabuka's ascendancy troubled many Fijians, including some of his former (but now disenchanted) supporters who had expected him to fade away from the public scene after executing the coup. Rabuka's sharp criticisms of Ratu Mara and his administration troubled many, as did his ambition to become Prime Minister. Said Sakeasi Butadroka: 'If the SVT delegates can put a commoner before a chief, then I don't understand why the Great Council of Chiefs is backing the SVT.' He went on: 'I don't know why a chiefs-backed party can do such a thing, putting a chief — in this case the highest ranking chief, Ro Lady Lala — before a selection panel.'<sup>53</sup> It was a good question to which there were no clear cut answers.

Rabuka began making pronouncements which resembled the criticisms that Bavadra had been making in the 1980s. He wondered whether it was appropriate for chiefs to involve themselves in politics. The proper role for them was at the village level, because when it came to politics, 'the chiefs do not have the mandate of the people.'<sup>54</sup> Underscoring the point, he added that 'there are a lot of capable commoners who can play a very, very important role in Fiji of the next decade.'<sup>55</sup> Implicitly, he counted himself among them. Rabuka also noted that the 'dominance of customary chiefs in government is coming to an end,' with meritocracy replacing aristocracy. None too subtly, he was invoking the Melanesian model of 'achieved leadership' to the Polynesian model of 'ascribed leadership.' He compared his paramount chiefs — he had Mara in mind — to the towering banyan tree 'where you don't see anything growing,' and he suggested that they step aside.<sup>56</sup> No one was indispensable, he added, and 'those defeated in elections should take it in their political stride and accept defeat and move out gracefully.'<sup>57</sup>

Ratu Mara, the unmistakable target of Rabuka's barb, was among those disturbed by Rabuka's strident ascendancy. He thought Rabuka an 'angry young man,' a naïve soldier, erratic, 'speaking off the cuff in any instigation.'<sup>58</sup> The SVT under Rabuka was a 'debacle,' 'an organization in

disarray,' Mara reportedly told his political intimates.<sup>59</sup> Rabuka retaliated by calling Mara 'a ruthless politician who has been allowed to get away with a lot. Maybe it's because of the Fijian culture that he is a big chief and because he was groomed well by the colonial government.'<sup>60</sup> The bad blood between the two strong-willed men was becoming public knowledge, with accusations and counter-accusations flying freely through the media about motives and machinations. Early in 1992, Mara encouraged the formation of a 'Diner's Club' through which he proposed to share his political experience with a select number of prominent and aspiring Fijian leaders. Rabuka was not among them. Mara went further and backed Josefata Kamikamica, former long time head of the Native Land Trust Board and the interim Finance Minister, as his preferred successor. With that, the rupture between Mara and Rabuka was complete.<sup>61</sup>

Tensions within the SVT erupted when candidates were being selected for the 1992 elections. In province after province, aspirants questioned the selection procedures, threatened to stand as independents, and sometimes formed their own political parties even as they pledged undying loyalty to their chiefs. On the eve of the elections, Fijians seemed more hopelessly divided than ever before. The triumphant post-coup Fijian nationalism and the assumptions which underpinned the formation of the SVT were in imminent danger of derailment. The coup had removed the threat of Indian dominance, and thus opened up more space for democratic debate among indigenous Fijians. As a *Fiji Times* editorial put it, 'the Fijians are now facing so many issues that challenge the very fabric of traditional and customary life. Things they thought were sacred have become political topics, publicly debated, scrutinized and ridiculed.' 'Now,' the editorial continued, 'the threat is coming from their own communities where the politics of numbers are changing loyalties and alliances. For the first time in modern history, the Fijian community is in danger of fragmentation; democracy is taking its toll. The chiefs are losing their mana and politicians enjoy increasing influence.'<sup>62</sup>

## THE RACE FOR PRIME MINISTER

Polling lasted a week, from 23 May to 30 June. The SVT won thirty of the thirty seven Fijian seats, with the remaining seven going to the Fijian Nationalist Party (three), Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua (two), and independents (two). The SVT had done well, but it still did not have the numbers to form government. The election results among Indo-Fijians surprised most people. Expected to win all the twenty seven seats comfortably, the NFP won only fourteen, capturing 50 per cent of the Indo-Fijian votes cast (114, 005) while Labour won marginally fewer: thirteen seats. Reddy (2,405 votes) won over Labour's largely unknown candidate Kesho Ram Sharma (1,640 votes), but among its big losses were party president Balwant Singh Rakkha and former party leader Harish Sharma. There was an interesting irony in the Indo-Fijian voting pattern. Labour, with an essentially urban base, won easily in the sugar cane belt, failing to win only one rural seat, the one contested by Reddy, while the National Federation Party, founded in the cane belt of western Viti Levu, captured the votes of the urban Indo-Fijian electorate. NFP's urban success owed in part to the fact that it was better-funded, fielded better candidates and was able to benefit from bitter divisions within the ranks of the trade union movement. Some of Chaudhry's harshest critics, such as the former Secretary General of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, James Raman, were successful NFP candidates. And it might also have been the case that the urban voters read the newspapers and so better understood the issues the two parties presented to them.

Labour's rural success was due largely to the National Farmers Union, with some in the media proclaiming Chaudhry to be 'undisputed leader' of the cane farming community.<sup>63</sup> The idea of such a farmers' union had in fact been first mooted by Reddy in 1976. He had in mind a non-political farmers' trade union which could, like other trade unions, look after the interests of its members. NFU was launched in Labasa in the late 1970s, with NFP's support and Chaudhry quickly apprehended the political sig-

nificance of the organization for his purposes. Accordingly, he devoted his considerable energies to enlarging and strengthening its base as its General Secretary. Reddy accused Chaudhry of politicizing the NFU and of using its infrastructure and apparatus for Labour's election purposes.<sup>64</sup> Chaudhry implausibly denied the charge, but retorted that it was the human right of every farmer to participate in politics. NFU's chairman, Sharda Nand, resigned from the organization in disgust at the manner in which the NFU machinery was 'fully utilized [by Labour] during the elections.'<sup>65</sup> The NFP resolved to reclaim its presence in the farming community and delegated Ali Hussain, formerly of the Fiji Sugar Corporation Research Centre, and Lakshman Maharaj, former FSC executive, for that task. They would achieve some success, but a politicized, Labour-controlled NFU, with Chaudhry at its head, would become and remain an important feature of the Indo-Fijian political landscape for the rest of the decade and beyond. Reddy had emerged victorious, but only just. 'This is a no-win situation,' he told his party members. 'The society is fallen. Don't think you have won.'<sup>66</sup> The very thing he had worked so hard to avoid, division in the Indo-Fijian community, had returned to haunt his people once again. He had spent much of his time and energy in the 1970s dealing with the rifts and ruptures within his own party; now he was facing the same problems with Labour.

The race for Prime Minister started even before results were known, as leading candidates, Rabuka and Kamikamica, began to campaign for support among opposition parties. This was unusual. Rabuka was the elected president of the party; he had led it in the election campaign and, having the largest number of seats in parliament, should have been the automatic choice for prime minister. But SVT met on 31 May to elect a leader, who would be its candidate for prime minister. At this meeting, Rabuka reportedly won eighteen votes, Kamikamica two, Filipe Bole four and Ratu William Toganivalu three. Claiming he had the support of forty two members, Rabuka went up to Government House to be sworn in, but President Ganilau told him to produce the signatures of all those

who supported him before 10 am the next day. The president, emotionally close to Rabuka, was aware of the split in the SVT and was also mindful of Mara's preference. Equally, he was cognizant of the constitutional requirement to appoint as Prime Minister the Fijian best able to command the majority support of all members of the House of Representatives.

Obtaining the signatures was not as easy as Rabuka might have supposed, for by the time he returned from Government House new tensions had risen. Some Fijian members who had supported him initially opposed any formal association with the Fijian Nationalists who had joined hands with Rabuka, and threatened to support his opponent. The support of the Indo-Fijian parties thus became crucial. In fact, as the results were being counted, Rabuka sent Koresi Matatolu, now of the SVT but once a vice president of the NFP, to ask Jai Ram Reddy for his support. Reddy refused point blank on principle. 'How can we support such a person who snatched our rights away and subjected us to harassment,' he asked, this man who had hounded his people and brought about so much misery to the country?<sup>67</sup> He considered Kamikamica a safer bet as he had verbally assured the NFP during the campaign of his willingness to initiate an immediate dialogue on the constitution. And he was, of course, untainted by the coups. By some accounts, Kamikamica had secured the support of thirty parliamentarians (ten SVT, one Rotuman, five General Voters Party and fourteen from the NFP), while Rabuka was supported by twenty SVT, five Nationalists and one Independent. Faced with this crisis, Rabuka's emissaries contacted the Fiji Labour Party in the early hours of 2 June.

Chaudhry reacted differently to Rabuka's overtures. With an unexpected thirteen seats in parliament, the party which had maintained its boycott stance until the last minute, now saw itself as a key player on the political scene, the tail which might finally wag the dog. Labour agreed to support Rabuka for the top position in return for an undertaking to address several of its key concerns. They wrote to Rabuka on 2 June. Their letter and Rabuka's response are reproduced below.

2 June 1992 (CONFIDENTIAL) <sup>68</sup>

MAJOR GENERAL SITIVENI RABUKA

(Hand Delivered)

*The Fiji Labour Party has agreed to lend support to you for the position of Prime Minister on the basis that our party would be given firm assurance on the following issues in writing:*

A. CONSTITUTION

*The new government would immediately initiate a process of review and change of the 1990 Constitution by a jointly appointed team that would take into regard the objections that have been expressed by the Fiji Labour Party on behalf of the Indian community, urban Fijians and Western Fijians, and take immediate measures to address such objections.*

*Such a process to be initiated as soon as parliament convenes.*

B. LABOUR REFORM DECREES

*That the new government would urgently seek to have the labour decrees revoked to take account of the objections by the trade union movement in Fiji.*

C. VAT (Value-Added Tax)

*That the new government would urgently scrap VAT as a matter of priority.*

D. LAND

*That the new government would convene a machinery to facilitate discussions on the issue of land, particularly relating to the extension of ALTA (Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act).*

*That as soon as the parliament convenes, such a machinery be deliberated upon.*

*The Fiji Labour Party is awaiting your urgent and serious consideration of our request.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Jokapeci Koroi (Mrs) (President)*

Rabuka replied instantly.

*MRS JOKAPECI KOROI PRESIDENT  
FIJI LABOUR PARTY SUVA*

*Dear Mrs Koroï*

*I acknowledge your proposals outlined in your letter and agree to take action on all the issues, namely the Constitution, VAT, labour reforms and land tenure on the basis suggested in your letter.*

*I agree to hold discussions on the above issue in order to finalize the machinery to progress the matters further.*

*Yours faithfully*

*S.L. Rabuka (Major) General, President*

Interestingly, the Fiji Labour Party also obtained an undertaking from the Fijian Nationalist Party and the Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua, which, according to some sources, had been instrumental in initiating dialogue between Rabuka and Labour. These two parties' five parliamentarians (Butadroka, Gavidī, Lepani Tonitonivanua, Ratu Mosese Varasikete Tuisawau and Mosese Tuisawau) and the nationalist-minded independent, Kolinio Qiqiwaqa, wrote to the Labour Party: 'We give you our assurance that should the President accept his nomination we will support your conditions as set out by the new Prime Minister.' This offer hardly seems genuine or trustworthy. Why would Butadroka, of all people, endorse a review of the constitution which enshrined the principle of Fijian political paramountcy he had championed all his political life? Or resolution of the land issue in favour of the Indo-Fijian tenants when he had long agitated for the non-renewal of leases to them unless they agreed with the principle of Fijian political paramountcy?

Not everyone in the Labour hierarchy supported the deal with Rabuka. Among those who voiced doubts was Tupeni Baba, who predicted turmoil

if Rabuka was elected Prime Minister. 'Rabuka's approach at the expense of others will bring instability to Fiji with his unpredictable utterances and demands,' he said.<sup>69</sup> Kamikamica, he thought, would command greater and more solid support among the parliamentarians. But it was Mahendra Chaudhry's words which carried weight and carried the day. He said that he had noticed a change in Rabuka. 'I won't say he is the same man who marched his soldiers into parliament on the 14th of May 1987. Certainly, he has been mellowing in his attitudes and we hope to see more of this in the future.' Chaudhry did not think Rabuka would renege on his word. 'I believe that Mr Rabuka is sincere. We cannot have goodwill if there is an air of distrust and suspicion.'<sup>70</sup> He believed Rabuka when he said that he had been 'used' by some chiefs to execute the coups. 'We hope the influence of these chiefs in Fiji politics won't be there for very long.'<sup>71</sup> Among those chiefs was Ratu Mara, but by 1999, the same chief would become a friend whose influence, Chaudhry hoped, would last long into the future. Kamikamica, Rabuka's rival, and one who enjoyed the support of the NFP, was for Chaudhry a rightwing leader who had imposed anti-worker decrees when he was interim Finance Minister. This it would appear was a greater evil than carrying out the coup.

Reddy decried Chaudhry's new manoeuvrings and allegiances. 'At this crucial time,' he said, 'there is a need to heal the wounds and work together to map our common strategies to oppose and seek changes to the 1990 Constitution ... If we all want to unite, then this game of one upmanship must stop.' Before making the deal with Rabuka, Reddy said, 'they could at least have consulted us on some vital issues.' Reddy did not think much of the assurances Rabuka had given to the Labour Party. 'These assurances were given for a limited purpose, that is to secure the numbers [for Rabuka] to become the Prime Minister. I think the big question now is how serious is the intention to deliver on these promises.'<sup>72</sup> The answer, which Labour discovered soon enough, was: not very serious at all. Jone Dakuvula, SVT spokesman, said in early June that 'at no stage did the Prime Minister make an agreement with the Labour parliamentarians that he would fulfil



the four conditions they had demanded. There is no such agreement. ..The response we sent them was that the Prime Minister is willing to discuss these matters they raised. That's all. While we value the support they gave us, there was no agreement that we would get their support in return for the conditions they said they wanted.'<sup>73</sup>

Seasoned observers thought Labour's demands potentially counter-productive. Simone Durutalo thought Labour's support for Rabuka was a mistake, while Ratu Mara said that an 'immediate review of the constitution is not good.' If the SVT tried 'to tackle the issues as the Labour Party demands, then it is a foregone conclusion it will fail. You want people to be even-tempered when they look at things'<sup>74</sup> But for Labour, the deal had served its purpose. It provided them the justification they needed to enter parliament just as they said they would: by seeking assurances for a review of the constitution from outside and entering it only when an undertaking was given. It is beyond belief that Labour had any realistic expectation of getting their grievances redressed anytime soon. Reddy was not at all surprised when Rabuka wavered on the deal soon after agreeing to it. At a meeting at Adam's Triangle in Ba in June, he said: 'Nobody is surprised by Rabuka's denial of an agreement. After all, who can trust him when he overthrew a lawfully elected government?'<sup>75</sup>

Soon after striking the deal with Rabuka, Chaudhry travelled to Reddy's Teidamu retreat — 'came running to my farm, this man who fought me bitterly in that election, and accused me of selling out Indians' as Reddy recalled<sup>76</sup> — where he met Reddy and his law partner, Bhupendra Patel. They talked for more than an hour during which Chaudhry gave Reddy a copy of his so-called agreement with Rabuka. He asked Reddy to accept the position of Leader of the Opposition. When Reddy asked why he should do this when he could not be the alternative Prime Minister, Chaudhry said, 'No it is very important for our international contacts that you should become the Leader of the Opposition.'<sup>77</sup> But soon after the meeting, Chaudhry sensed an opportunity for himself to ascend to that office when the Fijian Nationalists threw their support behind Labour,

giving them a total of nineteen Opposition seats in parliament. This the nationalists did after they failed to get NFP to support Ratu Osea Gavidi for the position of Opposition leader. Butadroka also backed Labour because it had supported the removal of the \$1000 nomination fee for the general elections.<sup>78</sup>

Labour then wrote to the President to appoint Chaudhry the Leader of the Opposition. Ratu Penaia rang Reddy. 'Jai Ram, I have received a letter signed by Sakeasi Butadroka and Mahendra Chaudhry mentioning there has been a mistake; they have the numbers, you should be removed, and Mahendra Chaudhry [should replace you].'<sup>79</sup> Ratu Penaia, who recalled this request with some puzzled amusement, asked Reddy: 'What's wrong with the Labour Party? How can they support Butadroka?' It was a fair question. Ganilau refused Labour's request because to accede to it would have breached the constitution which (section 97) provided that 'whenever the President has occasion to appoint a Leader of the Opposition, he shall appoint — if there is an opposition party whose numerical strength in the House of Representatives is greater than the strength of any other opposition party — the member of the House who is the leader in the House of that party.' The Nationalists and Labour did not constitute a 'single' party, which the NFP did. There was no provision in the constitution for a Leader of the Opposition from a coalition of Opposition parties, advised parliamentary counsel Alipate Qetaki.<sup>80</sup>

Reddy accepted his appointment as the Leader of the Opposition 'with a heavy heart,' noting the obvious fact that under the constitution no Indo-Fijian, or any other non-Fijian, could aspire to become prime minister. 'I find this fact deeply distressing, not for my sake but for the sake of Fiji and the entire Indian community.'<sup>81</sup> All the important consultative provisions of the 1970 Constitution were gone. Now, consultation with the Leader of the Opposition in the appointment of the Chief Justice, the chairperson of the Public Service Commission, the Police Services Commission, the Boundaries Commission and the Electoral Commission were removed. The position of the Opposition Leader had been reduced to 'bare minimum,'

Reddy noted, but he nonetheless hoped to use the House of Representative and the Opposition Leader's office to air the views and concerns of his people. This he did with great dignity and remarkable success. He met with less success in healing the wounds within in his community.

#### THE ROCKY ROAD TO RECOVERY

In late June, Reddy met Rabuka and talked to him about his serious concerns over the constitution and its unsuitability for Fiji. Rabuka conceded that the constitution had shortcomings. Reddy entered parliament on Rabuka's undertaking to engage in dialogue and discussion. Indeed, he promised to put out a paper for discussion on the constitution for the September session of parliament. Rabuka expressed his admiration for Reddy. 'I think he is taking a very mature attitude in his concerns because I had talks with him in 1988, and the views he expressed then are still the same views he is expressing now. His main concern is the welfare of the Indian community. Whatever the racial breakdown of Parliament, his main concern is the Indians, not just the number of seats.'<sup>82</sup> Reddy also extended his hand of cooperation to the Fiji Labour Party, notwithstanding their vitriolic attacks on him during the campaign. 'At this crucial time, there is need to heal the wounds and work together to map out common strategies to oppose and seek changes to the 1990 Constitution,' he said.<sup>83</sup> 'Finger pointing, hurling accusations and squabbling will not lead us anywhere but only succeed in further fragmenting the community. My advice to the people is: Let's unite, forget our differences and demonstrate the solidarity of the Indian community in these trying times.' Chaudhry himself had approached Reddy soon after the elections (before writing to the President to be appointed the Leader of the Opposition) for the two leaders to cooperate on issues affecting the Indo-Fijian community, especially on the issue of the constitution.<sup>84</sup>

Rabuka initiated the preparatory work towards setting up a Constitution Review Commission, but he was hampered by difficulties in running the government. His immediate priority was to consolidate his

support in the party and in the by now fractured Fijian community. To this end, he tried to co-opt potential opponents who had lost in the elections. Many were rewarded with seats in the Senate, diplomatic jobs or positions with statutory bodies. In cabinet and other appointments, he observed the principle of provincial balance. The logic of the electoral system demanded that each province be represented in the higher echelons of government. Indeed, when some members were dismissed or demoted for non-performance or other similar reasons, they attacked the prime minister. Viliame Saulekaleka called Rabuka anti-Lauan. Ilai Kuli, the mercurial sacked Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, treated his dismissal as a betrayal of the people of Naitasiri. Bua threatened to block the opening of the \$10 million Nabouwalu Hospital if its representative in cabinet, Koresi Matatolu, was removed. Rabuka may have had his mandate, but he had to work with a team whose loyalties were divided and contingent, and who had mandates of their own. In this scheme of things, the interests of the Indo-Fijian community featured nowhere.

In the first few months in office, Rabuka announced a number of pro-Fijian policies. His government said, for instance, that it would continue to support the special Fijian education initiatives. It proposed several measures to propel more Fijians into the commercial sector where they were conspicuous by their absence. These included a small business agency to advise and train Fijians, providing loans to provincial councils to increase their shares in Fijian Holdings Limited, giving that investment company priority in buying shares from privatized government enterprises, and proposing income-tax exemption for Fijian-owned businesses for up to twenty years. It also set aside funds worth \$2 million to provide interest-free loans payable over thirty years to certain *mataqali* to buy back freehold land on the market. Late in 1993, the government announced the transfer of the administration of all Crown Schedule A and B lands from the Department of Land to the Native Land Trust Board, with the view eventually to converting them to native title (which would take place under the Qarase government a decade later).

Many of the pro-Fijian policies were cautiously supported both by Labour and the NFP. At the same time, they also raised questions about the discrimination against Indo-Fijians in the civil service, with Chaudhry pointing out that the principle of balance had been ignored. Of the 9597 civil servants in 1992, 5,897 (61 per cent) were ethnic Fijians and 3186 (33 per cent) were Indo-Fijians. On the boards of statutory organizations, the absence of Indo-Fijians was even more glaring. For instance, there was not a single Indo-Fijian on the boards of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, the Fiji Broadcasting Commission or, most incredibly, the Fiji Sugar Commission. Reddy pleaded with the government for fairness and equity, but the government had no political incentive to address the concerns of the non-Fijians. It was in the early years of the Rabuka administration that the culture of corruption grew in the public service as people were appointed and promoted not on the basis of competence and meritocracy but on the principle of patronage and ethnicity. For that Fiji would pay a terrible price later.

With time, Indo-Fijian disenchantment grew, but Rabuka was, or appeared to be, indifferent. He had his own internal concerns to attend to. The worst fears of Indo-Fijian leaders were coming to pass. Their people were feeling alienated and discriminated against with few remedies for redress at their disposal. No one felt more betrayed than Labour, whose support had made Rabuka Prime Minister. Rabuka effectively ignored the conditions of that support. The ten per cent value-added tax on most goods and services was retained as part of the government's tax reform package. The labour reform legislation, whose ultimate effect was to cripple the trade union movement, was not enforced though it remained on the books. And though there was some talk, there was no action on the pressing expiry of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act. On the review of the constitution, Rabuka said, perhaps only half seriously, that to 'review means to look at what has been done. It does not mean that we have committed ourselves to making any changes or abolitions.'<sup>85</sup> In fact, the government had committed itself to a review within five years, but did not regard it as a matter of urgency.

Then, suddenly in December 1992, Rabuka mooted the idea of a government of national unity. The proposal caught everyone by surprise. Perhaps it was a survival strategy, with his standing in his party shaky. He told the nation:

[W]hat I and those who support my idea envisage is a style of government that brings the communities together, that enables all ethnic groups to cooperate jointly in the affairs of the government and the work of the legislature. I want leaders of Fijian, Indian and General Voters to define the middle ground, the political centre, where they can pool their wisdom and their abilities in the national interest. I want to see them united in pursuit of defined national objectives – objectives that serve the interests and welfare of us all, Fijians, Indians and General Voters. In my vision of what I consider to be the ultimate good of the country, I see very clearly that it is in all our interest to develop a social and political partnership that transcends suspicion and distrust, that elevates us as a nation and gives us a combined sense of common destiny and purpose.<sup>86</sup>

The statement was hailed as a major policy declaration by the government though, in truth, it was much the same as what Rabuka had said in 1990 about abandoning ‘extremities’ and looking for ‘points of convergence.’<sup>87</sup> Rabuka talked about inclusiveness and partnership, but his proposed national unity government would have eighteen members, twelve from the SVT, two each from NFP and Labour, and one each from the Nationalists and the General Voters Party. The proposal predictably received a mixed response. The SVT caucus complained of being kept in the dark. The Taukei Movement urged all Fijian members of parliament to ‘completely reject and throw out of the window with precipitated [sic] haste the devilish concept of government of national unity.’<sup>88</sup> They postponed threatened protest marches only after Rabuka assured them that promoting national unity should never be misinterpreted or misconstrued by anyone to mean that he and his government were giving away the special position

conferred on the Fijians and Rotumans as the 'host' communities under the 1990 Constitution.<sup>89</sup> Simione Durutalo thought the whole unity proposal was an attempt by Rabuka to 'repackage his 1987 image of an anti-Indian.' 'If the idea is accepted,' Durutalo said, 'it will be a big score for his prime ministership. If the idea is rejected, he will turn around and tell the Indian leaders he tried his best but the GCC blocked him.'<sup>90</sup> Reddy was also sceptical. There had to be some consensus on the basic principles before the proposal could be discussed further, he said. 'I am not going to nominate numbers,' he said, 'but at the end of the day in a government of national unity, Indians should be fairly represented. We should have a figure that bears some resemblance to their numbers, contribution and work, and not just a token number.'<sup>91</sup> But a government of national unity was not Reddy's main concern. He said:

Let me emphasize that our priority is not a government of national unity, our priority is the review of the constitution and I am absolutely convinced in my view that has to precede anything else. Because the potential gulf between us and Government on the future of the constitution could be so enormous that it would be utterly unrealistic for the Opposition to get locked into the government of national unity issue until such time we are able to narrow down those differences. I think my own gut feeling is that the government of national unity or any kind of unity would have to come after a constitution is in place which facilitates that kind of government. I don't think any meaningful dialogue can take place and any solution can be formed if there is an air of instability in the country.<sup>92</sup>

Rabuka then did what he should have done in the first place: he presented his proposal to the Great Council of Chiefs, adding that the proposal was not of 'paramount importance.'<sup>93</sup> In the Council, many chiefs, including Ratu Mara, questioned the prospects for a government of national unity under the provisions of the 1990 Constitution. How could you have, in the same document, the principle of Fijian political control enshrined on the

one hand, and the principle of democratic government and equitable power sharing on the other? As usually happened in these situations, the Council of Chiefs decided on more grassroots consultations, and sent the proposals to various Provincial Councils. And there they languished in the wilderness, never to be raised again. By then, Labour had had enough of Rabuka's meandering tactics. In July 1993, they walked out of parliament in protest against his procrastination and prevarication.

Behind the scenes, however, the government had been quietly preparing the ground work for the review of the 1990 Constitution. A month after being sworn in, the first paper on the constitution was prepared, and by September 13, the full cabinet had met eleven times to consider the review of the constitution. A cabinet subcommittee, with Deputy Prime Minister Filipe Bole as its chair, was set up to shepherd the review process through its initial stages. On 23 June, the President informed the parliament of the existence of the subcommittee to which Opposition members would be invited. On 9 June, Rabuka invited Reddy for the first informal meeting about the review process, the decision having already been made on 12 January 1993 to involve the Opposition in the discussions. Later four others were invited to join: James Raman, Maan Singh, Narayan Singh Arjun and Mosese Tuisawau.

Many more such meetings would take place where doubts and feelings would be expressed in the privacy of informal conversations as things progressed slowly. The main purpose of the Cabinet sub-committee was to develop consensus about a set of fundamental principles which should provide the underpinnings of the new constitution, prepare a draft Terms of Reference for an independent commission to review the constitution, and to look at substantive aspects of the document, and not only selected aspects of it, in line with the consensus principles.<sup>94</sup> The discussion would be informal, face-to-face and frank, without an eye to the electorate or the next day's headline. It would provide an opportunity to hear the views of the other side so that the vast gulf between the two sides could be narrowed. There would not be a formal report at the end of the proceedings. 'It is not a forum at



which decisions can or will be imposed on anyone,' Reddy said. 'It is easier,' he continued, 'to establish among sensible and responsible leaders who, in confidential discussions, can express their anxieties and acknowledge those of other communities and make suitable compromises [than] through wide public debates, where the pace is set by extremists on all side of the argument.'<sup>95</sup> That, after all, was how the 1970 Constitution was negotiated and, more recently, the Deuba Accord.

The discussions, though amicable, were not easy. There was, Reddy recalled, 'great intensity of feelings on both sides.' Questions of right and wrong — and who was wronged — were not easy to resolve. A certain generosity of mind and heart is required to break the impasse. '[O]ften in these things, it is not a question of whether I am right or wrong or whether the other side is right. It is often a question of being able to understand and appreciate the feelings that lie behind the positions that we take up. What is my right may be my opponents' wrongs and that which I perceive is right, correct and justifiable, may not be so perceived by my opponents, who equally and fervently believe that their own position is right.'<sup>96</sup> The important thing was to 'break down the fears that are at the back of these intense feelings.' It was with that frame of mind that Reddy accepted Rabuka's invitation to join the expanded Cabinet sub-committee on the constitution. Several informal meetings took place, all with one common theme: 'to try to create an environment in the country, to try and unite the people of this country so that we can all move forward in our endeavour to resolve the many problems and grievances that we have.' Time and patience would be required in abundance. It was not what the elected members of parliament thought or did about the review that would matter in the end; 'the success of failure will depend upon how well that constitution is received by the people of Fiji.'

On 14 September 1993, Sitiveni Rabuka moved, and Jai Ram Reddy seconded, a motion to review the 1990 Constitution.<sup>97</sup> It was a milestone achievement, the first successful one of its kind since the Deuba Accord of September 1987, voluntarily arrived at by the major political leaders of

all the communities in Fiji. The motion asked for an endorsement of the appointment of a commission to review the constitution 'with a view to promoting racial harmony and national unity and the economic and social advancement of all communities, and bearing in mind internationally recognized principles and standards of individual and group rights.' To that end, the Commission would:

Take into account that the constitution shall guarantee full protection and promotion of the rights, interests and concerns of the indigenous Fijian and Rotuman people

Scrutinize and consider the extent to which the Constitution of Fiji meets the present and future constitutional needs of the people of Fiji, having full regard for the rights, interests and concerns of all ethnic groups of people in Fiji

Facilitate the widest possible debate throughout Fiji on the terms of the constitution of Fiji and to inquire into and ascertain the variety of views and opinions that may exist in Fiji as to how the provisions of the Fiji constitution can be improved upon in the context of Fiji's needs as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society

Report fully on all the above and, in particular, to recommend constitutional arrangements likely to achieve the objectives of the Constitutional Review as set out above.

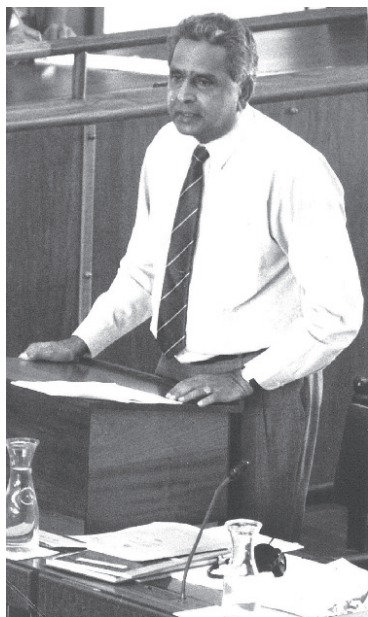
Reddy refused to take credit for this achievement, but that his sensible and moderate approach, his sensitivity to the feelings and concerns of other communities, his willingness patiently to listen to contrary views and to compromise in the greater national interest, contributed enormously to the formulation of the Terms of Reference in large measure is beyond doubt.

But the scope of the Terms of Reference was not enough to satisfy Labour leader, Mahendra Chaudhry, who ended his boycott and returned to parliament in September to participate in the debate on Rabuka's motion, saying that the Terms of Reference were inadequate and restrictive, and that Jai Ram Reddy had, yet again, sold out the interests of the Indo-Fijian

community. Chaudhry returned to parliament armed with an amendment to the motion. Most non-Labour parliamentarians were sceptical about Labour's real reasons for returning to parliament. Many thought it was really an excuse to get back on to the constitutional train now that it had started to leave, otherwise they risked being irrelevant to the process. The boycott was serving no useful purpose.<sup>98</sup> Chaudhry raised several objections. He said that the expanded Cabinet sub-committee was not the appropriate place to formulate the Terms of Reference. That should have been the responsibility of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee whose appointment had been foreshadowed in the President's address to parliament. He was particularly perturbed that the Joint Committee would begin its work *after* the Review Commission had submitted its report.

It was practical considerations rather than any devious motive which had led the sub-committee to take that path. Filipe Bole explained that there were many issues in the review exercise where there was little likelihood of meeting of minds, and if the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee were to be appointed at the beginning of the process, that would unduly delay the appointment of the Commission. Citizens would be making their submissions directly to the Commission, and the main task of the Committee would be to assist parliament in considering the report of the Review Commission. For Reddy, whether it was the expanded Cabinet sub-committee or the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee which drafted the Terms of Reference was irrelevant. The main point was reaching consensus on the scope and framework of the review exercise.

Chaudhry thought it could be counterproductive to facilitate a wide debate on the terms of the constitution because 'an overwhelming body of opinion has already been established on the matter.' Such an exercise would be time consuming and, worse, give extremist elements a platform to try and derail the process of review. And he made several other suggestions to make the Terms of Reference more specific, such as the appointment of 'independent' and 'suitably qualified' people to be on the Commission, a requirement to 'establish a democratic system of political representation,' that



the interests of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans should be protected ‘without sacrificing the rights, interests and concerns of all other people in Fiji,’ that the Commission be asked to report within twelve months, and so it went. Reddy accused Chaudhry of nit-picking by selecting for omission or deletion lines from the Terms of Reference. He asked him to read the document in its entirety before forming a judgment about it. ‘You look at that document from one corner to the other, put it aside and say, what does this document mean? That is how documents of a legal nature, or any nature, are interpreted and should be

interpreted.’ In any case, it was not for the parliament to interpret the Terms of Reference. That, in the ultimate analysis, Reddy said, would be the task of the Commission itself, which is how things in fact turned out.

Looking back at the debate from a decade later, the controversy surrounding the drafting of the Terms of Reference and the appointment of the ‘Commission to Review the Constitution,’ seems so trivial. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was manufactured for political purposes, little else, although in defense of Chaudhry, his supporters argued that in the context of uncertainty at the time, his suspicions were justified. In the event, none of the issues that Chaudhry raised ever became a hindrance to the work of the Commission. Hindsight entirely vindicates the enormous value and significance of Reddy’s consensus-building approach. What was not known to the public at the time was the amount of work and intense consultations which Reddy had undertaken, or initiated, with some of the world’s finest legal minds with constitutional expertise.<sup>99</sup> Nothing was left

*Facing page and this page:  
'Man of the House': Jai Ram  
Reddy in Parliament. He  
was its most eloquent speaker.  
Photo courtesy of Fiji Times.*



to chance. Nothing ever was. 'When you talk about political rights,' he said, 'you are talking about generations unborn and people make great sacrifices to ensure those rights are enjoyed.'<sup>100</sup>

## DÉJÀ VU

Impressive though this achievement was, any expectation of an early start on the review exercise was short-lived, being overshadowed by scandals enveloping the government and sapping its energy, and distracting it from the important tasks at hand. Reddy watched the SVT implosion with deepening dismay, the party turning in upon itself in the manner NFP had done in the 1970s. The Posts and Telecommunications Minister Ilai Kuli resigned, and Fijian Holdings faced allegations of insider trading. Similar allegations surrounded the awarding of a tender to upgrade the Nadi International Airport to a company, Minsons Limited, in which Rabuka had shares. The Ports Authority was rocked by reports of excess expenditure, irregularities in the sale of equipment, personal insurance discrepancies and

misappropriation of funds. Questions were asked about the purchase of the Prime Minister's new residence (owned by Ratu Penaia Ganilau family's Qeleni Holdings) for \$650,000 when the government valuer had estimated its value at \$465,000.<sup>101</sup>

These incidents collectively epitomized the general culture of corruption in public life which had 'reached alarming proportions,' made even worse by the 'lack of action taken by the authorities on some of the more serious misappropriation cases involving hundreds of thousands of dollars.'<sup>102</sup> But all this was not surprising. The coups of 1987 had infected public institutions with the virus of nepotism, mismanagement and corruption. Principles of accountability and transparency had disappeared. Politicians and civil servants demanded bribes openly; greasing the palm was quickly becoming an accepted way of life in Fiji. Jai Ram Reddy raised some of these issues in his budget speech in November 1993:

[W]hen a quarter of a million dollars go missing from our police force, when exhibits seized by police from suspects go missing from police stations, when stolen goods exhibited in a court of law disappear; when frauds and dubious political hangers-on can get into key positions in important public sector organizations, then it is time for the people of this country to sit up and think about the rot and it is time for this House to do something for this state of affairs.

But these allegations, serious as they were, paled into insignificance beside the so-called Stephens affair, which has already been mentioned. Sadly for Rabuka, the November 1993 budget provided his opponents an opportunity to take advantage of his miseries and topple him. The substance and direction of the budget was consistent with the government's broad philosophy of economic development, which included the deregulation of the economy and structural market and labour reforms to increase Fiji's international competitiveness, but the growing budget deficit of \$105 million or nearly five cent of the GDP posed problems for the economy, with the government itself calling it 'an unacceptable level of government

spending.' For Reddy that was the heart of the problem. 'The government has been strong on rhetoric but weak on action,' he said. 'There is a yawning gap between what this government says and what it does, raising serious questions both about its competence and ability to manage the national economy.' He and others criticized the high level of expenditure and deficit, misguided expenditure priorities, and socially regressive aspects such as higher duties on basic consumer items. The overall picture of economic management was disturbing. Government expenditure had increased from \$723 million in 1992 to nearly \$830 million in the 1993 revised estimates and was projected to increase to \$847 million in 1994; the gross deficit had increased from \$120 million in 1992 to \$184 million in the revised estimate for 1993. Government expenditure as a percentage of GDP had increased from 35 per cent in 1992 to 38 per cent in 1993 and projected to increase to 37 per cent in 1994. And so it went, from bad to worse.<sup>103</sup>

Reddy's criticism was not surprising, coming from the Leader of the Opposition, even though he had to be careful not to push the government too far. But the criticism from the government's own backbenchers was unexpected. Kamikamica led the charge. He did not question the government's economic policy. He even encouraged the government to do more for Fijians and Rotumans in the educational and economic sectors. The thrust of his criticism was that the government lacked the fiscal discipline necessary to implement correct policies. At least Kamikamica was consistent. Ratu Finau Mara acknowledged that the Finance Minister had 'very little choice in this budget,' but he was instrumental in orchestrating the Fijian vote against it, though he himself was away in Australia at the time of the voting. Cabinet minister Ratu Viliame Dreunimisimisi was 'not convinced that the budget should be abandoned,' but six hours later he voted against it. Knowing that the twenty seven Indo-Fijian members of parliament would vote against the budget, Rabuka's opponents saw their chance to defeat the government. When the budget came up for the second reading on 29 November, it was unexpectedly put to the vote, to the surprise of many on the Opposition

benches. To the government's consternation, six Fijian members and one General Voter (David Pickering) joined the Opposition parliamentarians to vote against the government. Miscalculation and misplaced trust had cost the government dearly. Rued Rabuka: 'I think my military officer mentality came into focus and led me to believe that once a directive is given, everybody would toe the line, which they did not.'<sup>104</sup> He trusted people, and thought with his heart. 'That is my nature. I feel for people and I feel for them whenever they are in need.'<sup>105</sup> That feeling was evidently not reciprocated by his own colleagues in the SVT.

The manner of the defeat was surprising. In normal parliamentary practice, the second reading is regarded as procedural. It is followed by the committee stage (in this case 30 November to 3 December), when the whole House would constitute itself as a committee and scrutinize the proposed legislation. At this time, members of parliament can propose changes and amendments or seek explanation of particular parts. The substantive vote on a bill then takes place. But in this case, the budget was defeated before it reached the committee stage. It seems certain that the Fijian dissidents had not planned in advance to bring about the downfall of the Rabuka government. Their plans materialized only as the debate proceeded and only when the position of the Indo-Fijian parliamentarians became clear.<sup>106</sup> Rabuka told the Great Council of Chiefs on 15 December that there were 'other considerations that lay behind their determination to vote against their own government.' Indeed there were. As some Fijian dissidents told Manueli, the Finance Minister himself, 'they were going to challenge the budget not because they were opposed to it, but because they wanted to change the leadership.'<sup>107</sup>

Strangely, before even informing the SVT caucus of their decision, the dissident group had informed Ratu Mara, who had succeeded Ratu Penaia into Government House, of their intention so that 'he would have more time to prepare himself for the outcome of the voting.'<sup>108</sup> One commentator thought that going to Mara was 'highly improper constitutionally, politically and morally — particularly when they did not turn up at the caucus



meeting which decided that they should all vote for the budget. They never made any representation to the Budget Review Committee.<sup>109</sup> How the dissidents expected Mara to behave is unknown, but this is what the Fiji Labour Party wrote to him:

It is quite evident to us that the defeat of the 1994 budget had other quite compelling reasons than the unacceptability of the budget itself. Over a period of the last few months, the credibility of the Rabuka Government has been brought [in]to serious question. The government has been rocked by one scandal after another. However, Prime Minister Rabuka seems to have cared very little, if at all, about these matters and has carried on in the fashion of business as usual. These incidents have seriously eroded the confidence of the opposition members and a number of government members of parliament in Prime Minister Rabuka. We feel Prime Minister Rabuka no longer enjoys the confidence of a majority of members of parliament and should therefore be asked to tender his resignation, following which Your Excellency should appoint a new Prime Minister who has majority support. The new Prime Minister should then appoint his cabinet and carry on the task of governing Fiji. We, Sir, would urge you to explore the above suggestion should it be constitutionally possible for you to do so.<sup>110</sup>

Labour's motive was understandable: Rabuka had betrayed them, and they wanted him out. But whatever their intentions, the constitution gave the Prime Minister three options. Within three days of a crisis, he could advise the President to dissolve parliament and to call for fresh general elections. Second, he could tender his resignation and that of his government and allow the President to choose another (Fijian) member of the House as Prime Minister. Only if the Prime Minister failed to act within the stipulated three days could the President then pursue his own initiative. Rabuka acted promptly. At 7:30 on the night of the budget defeat, he advised Mara to prorogue the parliament from 19 January and to issue the writ for elections within thirty days. Reddy endorsed Rabuka's decision, which led Mara to

say, probably with relief, 'Mr Reddy saved my day.' Labour used this comment to hitch Reddy to Rabuka, insinuating that Mara might have pursued other options had it not been for Reddy's contrary advice. When Labour persisted with this line of attack, Reddy wrote to Mara to correct what he called 'a gross misrepresentation' of his position. 'At no time did I say to you that I supported Mr Rabuka as the question did not arise.'<sup>111</sup> All that Mara had done was to inform Reddy of FLP's letter. 'The NFP was not involved at all.' In truth, it was not Reddy but the constitution which saved the President's day, for any other decision on his part would not only have been unconstitutional, but would also have implicated him even deeper in the machinations of the anti-Rabuka faction in the government. Independent of Mara's decision, Reddy probably welcomed an early poll to capitalize on his party's strong showing in public opinion polls.

#### 1994 ELECTIONS

Trust and treachery became the two key issues in the campaign. Rabuka reminded the Fijians of the many pro-Fijian initiatives. He admitted that he still had a lot to learn, and he asked for forgiveness for his unintended errors of judgment and publicly advertised lapses in his personal life. His opponents had criticized his leadership, he said, 'but no leader could really be effective if from within the ranks of his or her team there were people who were not prepared to show their loyalty to the team leader and commitment to play their role as team members. Could such people be trusted to safeguard the future of the Fijian people? He may have erred, Rabuka admitted, but 'what I have never been, and what I will never do, is to be disloyal to the Fijian and Rotuman communities, and to give away what I had personally sacrificed myself to achieve in 1987' – and that is to secure and to safeguard the interests of the Fijian and Rotuman people. He expressed astonishment at the disloyalty of his colleagues who 'almost handed over power of effective control of the national Government of Fiji to other communities.' This was not the time to change course. Unity was of paramount importance. Loyalty was one virtue which Rabuka emphasized over and



*The principal players, from left: Sitiveni Rabuka, Reddy, Josefata Kamikamica, Mahendra Chaudhry. Courtesy of The Weekender.*

over again. 'We must be unremitting in our loyalty to each other, to our chiefs, to this highest of all Fijian councils, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga.'

Rabuka's chief rival for Fijian votes was Josefata Kamikamica, and on the campaign trail, he had one and only one issue that he raised with relentless persistence: that Rabuka was a leader unworthy of the Fijian people and of the country as a whole. Kamikamica said: 'The SVT leader, over the last 18 months, has followed a path full of broken promises, contradictory statements, reversal of policy, and dishonourable behaviour. Fijian and national unity cannot be achieved through cheap political point scoring just for the sake of rallying together, or for any other selfish vested interest.'<sup>112</sup> He pointed to Rabuka's involvement in the Stephens' scandal, his close identification with Fijian nationalist aspirations, and his administrative inexperience. 'Give another five years of this style of leadership and it will be very difficult for the country because the network of interests that feed upon each other in a situation like this will be very difficult to break.'<sup>113</sup> The Fijian Association Party, Kamikamica said, was not disrespectful to chiefs, pointing to a number of high chiefs among its ranks, including Ratu Apenisa Cakobau, son of the late Vunivalu and the first local Governor General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Wili Maivalili of Cakaudrove, and Ratu

Aca Silatolu of Rewa. If elected, Kamikamica promised, he would try and restore Fiji's links with the British monarchy. Rabuka appealed to another tradition in Fijian society: cultural pride. 'The sooner we realize we are out, the better it will be for us rather than crying over spilt milk. We are a proud race. We won't go crawling back to the British and the Commonwealth.'<sup>114</sup> In this stance, he echoed the sentiments of many ordinary Fijians.

Among Indo-Fijians, the divisions were as deep, if not deeper, and the vitriol as pungent. With NFP and Labour, too, the key issue was the leadership of the community, the tussle made all the more intense given the closeness of the previous election results. Labour's last minute decision to contest the elections became an issue, dubbed by Reddy as a classic case of 'flip-flop' politics of inconsistency.<sup>115</sup> Chaudhry, Reddy charged, had advised the voters not to register for the elections because of his party's boycott stance, but got himself registered. He had promised not to enter parliament, but then did. He said that the constitution could not be changed from the inside the parliament, but that precisely was what was happening now and Chaudhry was a part of the process. Chaudhry, Reddy continued, had said that no self-respecting Indo-Fijian leader could take oath under the 1990 Constitution, yet he took the oath under it when he entered parliament. Chaudhry had promised not to make any deals, but had made an agreement with Rabuka which was 'neither politically feasible nor legally enforceable'<sup>116</sup> Chaudhry had said that the Reddy would sell the rights and interests of the Indian community by participating in the flawed review process, but he himself was now a part of it. Chaudhry had promised to start a campaign of satyagraha, but had done a 'kerekere' with Rabuka. He had thereby done the 'Third Coup' against the Indian community by lending his support to Rabuka to become the prime minister. Value Added Tax got implemented, but Chaudhry remained in parliament

Reddy patiently explained the philosophical underpinnings of his approach and where things stood. He defended his decision to join the expanded Cabinet sub-committee. His primary goal was to seek a broad consensus on the constitution because imposed constitutions never worked.

‘Consensus can only emerge where there is effective and meaningful communication.’ He had fought the 1992 elections to ‘open up dialogue with the Fijian chiefs and their people, to help improve the overall political climate in this country so that we would all collectively look at our problems in a calm and dispassionate manner.’ He did not set any preconditions about entering parliament. ‘We went into parliament with open minds with the proviso that ultimately if our wishes for dialogue drew no positive response, then we will vacate our seats in parliament.’ Reddy explained that he had supported Kamikamica over Rabuka because he, Kamikamica, had said on numerous occasions that there were legitimate grievances that the Indian community had about the 1990 Constitution.<sup>117</sup> Progress was slow, Reddy conceded, but progress there was. There was, for instance, an emerging consensus in the country that a system of government which put one community in power to the total exclusion of another was not in the long term interests of the nation. The parliament had agreed to set up an independent commission to review the constitution, and that in itself was a major achievement. He had taken part in the setting up of the review process to ‘put it to the test. It would be counterproductive to be obsessed with the result at this point in time.’

For Mahendra Chaudhry, Reddy’s approach and his leadership of the Indo-Fijian community became the principal campaign theme as he sought, with varying degrees of success, to explain to a sceptical electorate his boycott strategies and its abandonment and his support for Rabuka.<sup>118</sup> The ‘Third Coup’ claim was striking a cord with the electorate. But Reddy was his main target, not the least because his approval rating nationally was astounding: over eighty per cent. He ridiculed Reddy’s approach to dialogue. ‘The truth is that Jai Ram Reddy’s policy of peaceful dialogue translates into a policy of selling out Indian interests bit by bit. He has done this systematically under the guise of dialogue ever since he began to play a leading role in NFP politics.’<sup>119</sup> And he proceeded to catalogue a long list of Reddy’s political sins, many of which should be familiar by now. Chaudhry accused Reddy of selling out Indian land interests over the ALTA in 1976



# नेशनल फेडरेशन पार्टी



## तीसरा 'कू' किस ने किया? चौधरी से पूछो

फीजी में तीन 'कू' हुए:

पहला और दूसरा 'कू' रम्बूका ने किया

तीसरा 'कू' चौधरी और उनके लेबर पार्टी ने की, जब उन्होंने रम्बूका को पाँच साल के लिए प्रधान मंत्री बनाया।

- \* वह रम्बूका जो कौलेशन सरकार को पार्लिमेंट से बन्दूक के बल पर निकाल फेंका —
- \* वह रम्बूका जो 1970 (१९७०) विधान को जबरदस्ती रद्द कर दिया।
- \* वह रम्बूका जिसके कारण तमाम परिवार छित्तर-बित्तर हो गये। चौधरी ने रम्बूका को प्रधान मंत्री बनाकर हम हिन्दुस्तानियों पर घोर अन्याय किया।

क्या आप ऐसे नेता को चाहते हैं?

**सावधान !**

अपने भविष्य को ध्यान में रखते हुए तथा हिन्दुस्तानी कौम की भलाई के लिए अपनी हिन्दुस्तानी पार्टी 'एन. एफ. पी.' को वोट दीजिए।

**NATIONAL FEDERATION PARTY**

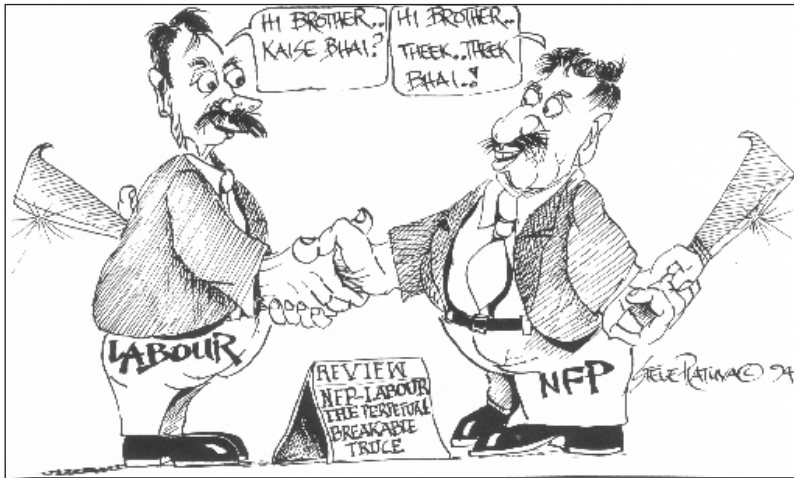


*Who did the Third Coup? Ask Chaudhry*

when he voted with the Alliance against the directives of his party leader. Reddy had sold out Indian interests in April 1977 when he informed the nation that there was no one Indian leader capable of becoming Prime Minister, effectively cheating Siddiq Koya of his right to the highest office. Reddy had 'abandoned' the Indian cause 'when he fled to safety in Auckland after the second coup.' Reddy had 'severed' Indian unity in 1991 when he 'abandoned' the coalition with Labour 'in order to serve the narrow interests of his big business supporters.' And he had sold out Indian interests in 1992 by agreeing to 'a very restricted Terms of Reference for a commission to review the 1990 Constitution.' For good measure, Chaudhry added: 'The list is hardly exhaustive.'

Claims and counter claims of treachery and betrayal, of cowardice and complicity, dominated the campaign. If he was indeed the wicked, unreliable leader that Chaudhry had portrayed him to be, Reddy asked, if all the allegations against him were true: that he had hobbled Koya's chance to become prime minister, that he had betrayed his people over the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act, then why did Chaudhry and other Labour leaders ask him in 1987 to form a coalition? How could they trust him with that responsibility? Why was he begged to join the Coalition government as its Attorney General? Why was he asked to accompany Dr Bavadra to London and to other capitals to plead the Coalition's case after the 1987 coup?<sup>120</sup> But Chaudhry's allegations and charges were pure campaign talk designed to cause disaffection against Reddy in the Indo-Fijian community. The ALTA, over which Chaudhry had severely criticized Reddy would be one piece of legislation that the Labour leader would later do everything in his power to retain. And in 1995, he would make a joint submission on the review of the constitution with the same leader he had accused of selling out the interests of the Indian community (just as in 1999 Reddy would enter into an alliance with Rabuka against Chaudhry). Such are the realities of politics in Fiji.

The 1994 election was a clear triumph for the NFP, which won twenty of the twenty seven Indian seats, capturing 56 per cent of the



*Keeping Your Knife Sharpened. Courtesy of The Review magazine*

Indian communal votes, a slight increase over the 1992 percentage while Labour won seven seats and 44 per cent of the votes. The SVT had a similar emphatic victory. NFP made a clean sweep of all the Vanua Levu seats, which had gone to Labour in 1992, and the urban seats. It would be pleasant to conclude that Reddy's sensible, pragmatic approach helped his party. Reddy clearly was his party's trump card. Many responded to his quiet tenacity. But many local issues dear to the heart of one group or another played a role as well. Indo-Fijians had not renounced Chaudhry's style of confrontational politics; they had merely suspended it temporarily in favour of Reddy's consensus approach.

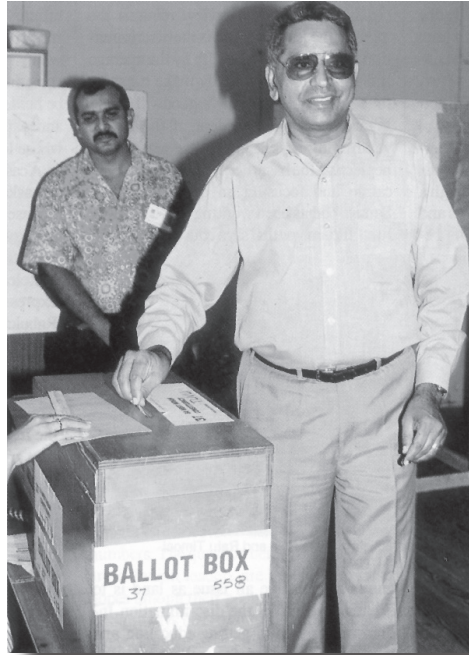
With the elections over, the parliament continued its interrupted work on the review of the constitution. On 24 June, 1994, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka announced the appointment of a multi-ethnic Joint Parliamentary Select Committee to prepare for a review of the constitution comprising 55 per cent Fijian and General Voter members and 45 per cent representing the Indo-Fijian community. The purpose of the committee would be to recommend the size of the Constitution Review Commission, to facilitate its work



*Reddy at the ballot box.  
Courtesy of The Review  
magazine*

by providing it with all the necessary documents and information relevant to the task of the review, make recommendations concerning submissions made to the Commission, encourage the development of consensus among the political parties about a future constitution, and to facilitate the passage of the new constitution through the parliament.

Reddy welcomed Rabuka's initiative as 'an important step forward for this nation as a whole, as our quest for a constitution acceptable to all the communities whose home is Fiji, continues on course.' The journey has not been easy,' he said, 'and it will not be easy but patience, goodwill and good sense should see us through.' Fiji had a great future, Reddy continued, 'if only the leaders and the ordinary people of this country understand that that future can only be heard if we learn to cooperate with each other. Cooperation begins with the capacity to listen. Let us listen to what each one is saying. No difference is so intractable as to be insoluble given patience, goodwill, tolerance and a commitment to dialogue as opposed to confrontation.' To that task he would turn his attention for the next five years.



## INTERLUDE

---

### CONCLUDING ADDRESS TO THE YEAR OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, 1993

*I must say first of all how deeply moved I was by the invitation to be the chief guest at this occasion. This closing of the formal activities in Fiji to mark the international year of the world's indigenous people is a very real indicator that, at a time when many indigenous peoples are struggling simply to survive, Fijian culture is very much alive. Today's event is a spectacular and powerful celebration of things Fijian. It is therefore no small thing that the organizers of this grand event should see fit to invite the grandson of an Indian indentured labourer to be the chief guest. So I am personally honoured to have been invited, and I thank you not only for chance to say a few words tonight, but for the message that your invitation sends out to the people of Fiji, and to the world beyond our shores.*

*It is a simple fact that my presence here says more about the true nature of these islands than any mere words could express. History is unlikely to long recall the text of my speech tonight. But what the record will show is that, here in our country, the year of the indigenous people was closed by a non-indigenous citizen. And that is a remarkable reflection both of the tolerant and welcoming nature of taukei culture, and of the new Fiji we are building together.*

*It is yet another sign of the growing desire for national reconciliation and healing among all our peoples. Our difficulties are by no means over, and I think we are all acutely aware of the obstacles that lie in our path. Nevertheless, I believe we have made a start. We have begun dialogue and discussion among ourselves. We are talking to each other, rather than at each other. We must resolve in our hearts to keep our*

*country united and peaceful for all our peoples, irrespective of their colour, creed, race or sex.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the past few centuries of human history have, sadly, been notable for the domination and exploitation of peoples in far too many nations. They have been centuries of conquest, of imperialism and colonialism. As humankind developed the ability to travel further and further afield, and fortune and power beckoned in newly accessible continents, peoples from many corners of the globe began to explore land which had previously been only vaguely imagined. Some came as conquerors, some as traders. Some came as migrants and others as missionaries. They came for gold and precious gems, for spices and cloth. Some fled persecution and others fled the law.*

*For those who were already inhabiting the lands to which these new arrivals came, their arrival often represented the beginning of the end for ways of life that had existed for many thousands of years. Whether by gunfire or alien diseases, by fire or by sword, indigenous populations often dwindled. The local culture and beliefs were eroded by religion and politics and strange new ideas. The survival of ancient traditions hung by a thread.*

*And now comes the year of the world's indigenous people — a milestone, I believe, in global awareness and recognition of the modern world's forgotten people: those whose cultures and languages and traditions have been denigrated or, worse, simply obliterated from the face of the earth; those who have been dispossessed of their lands and their livelihoods and now live on the fringes of their own countries; and those who have been otherwise marginalized by forces of change beyond their power to control. The world, sadly, is replete with the ruins of cultures which lie buried in the graveyards of history, victims of man's insatiable greed and lust for power. If this year helps to increase our sensitivity to the plight of these less fortunate of our brothers and sisters, then humankind will have made a giant step*

*towards regaining its humanity. And all of us will be the richer for the experience.*

*Here in Fiji, different people may — and indeed probably already have — put different constructions on this year. Some will seize it to further the cause of their own racism, to attempt to demonstrate an aggressive cultural superiority, or to try to revive a paradise that never was — or that has now vanished beyond recall. They will use this event as a vehicle for their particular political interests and ideologies. For me, however, the year of the indigenous people raises a different set of issues, and evokes a different set of images. The event, for me, means not destructive divisiveness in our community, but the celebration of diversity, distinction and difference. It draws my thoughts to the mosaic of cultures which — like the colours of a Pacific rainbow — constitute this nation of ours.*

*More specifically, it invites me to reflect on the indigenous Fijian heritage of our country, which has so enriched us all. I think of the folklore, the songs and dances, the art and artefacts of our Fijian people. I think of their wonderful seafaring skills, the awe-inspiring ocean-going canoes which had few rivals in the entire Pacific. I think of the well-organised, self-contained and resilient society they built in harmony with their environment. I rejoice at their spirit of adventure, courage and bravery, and celebrate their artistic and technical achievements. I honour, too, their values of tolerance, compassion, caring and community.*

*Though this celebration is very much a Fijian occasion, I must tell you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that to me, all of these things I have spoken of are in truth as much a part of my own heritage, our own national heritage, as they are a part of the heritage of the indigenous Fijians.*

*But having said that, I fear we may have taken the accomplishments and achievements, the way of life and the traditions of the earliest Fijians, for granted. We have treated their legacy as mere curiosity pieces to be performed for tourists or, worse still, seen them as things to be stored in*

*some dusty museum or on a library shelf. That attitude, where it exists, must be changed. The past is just too important to be left alone for the edification of scholars or the entertainment of tourists. I believe it in our vital national interest to pursue an active and generously-funded national heritage policy which will identify, renovate and preserve historic sites for present and future generations. I think it would be a wonderful and fitting monument to the year of the indigenous people if we could re-ignite in our nation some of the sense of wonder, adventure, courage and bravery that moved our Fijian forebears many centuries ago. It would be a tremendous and lasting achievement if this special year helps us to light the lamp of cultural renaissance and rebirth.*

*So I pledge my support tonight for a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, our cultural heritage. But I do not advocate a blind faith in rigid and unchanging tradition. Culture, defined simply as the way of life of a people, is a constantly evolving thing, changing, adapting, rejecting, reforming — all in response to circumstances. In this sense it is a profoundly organic, living entity. In the modern world, it has to be so. The waves of change are breaking on our shores. We see this in the things we read, the images we see, the experiences of our daily lives. We are living in a global village of instant communication, and in a time in which astounding developments in technology, imagination and human ingenuity appear to know no bounds. We cannot separate ourselves from the larger world of which we are a part, and this poses a great problem for us. Culture, which makes us what we are, can sustain us. Yet, just as easily, if we are not careful, it can become a shell which smothers the life within. It would be a sad day indeed if we sacrifice, in the name of progress and modernization, all those values and traditions, diversity and differences, that give us identity, bring pleasure and meaning to our lives and enrich our existence. It would be equally sad day if we refuse to recognize the realities of the modern world and cling defiantly to a past that may no longer serve our present needs. How we reconcile these two*

*positions will test the mettle of our leaders and people, and determine our very destiny.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I would again declare to you that what we are seeing today is proof that Fijian culture is in fact very much alive, vibrant and well. We have witnessed — and are shortly to see more — demonstrations of indigenous culture, both ancient and modern. I would suggest that the original settlers of these islands, all those centuries ago, would be proud of their descendants — just as those of us who arrived further down history's path are proud of the heritage that has been left for all of us, Fijian and non-Fijian alike. I would suggest also that it is our diversity of cultures, and the nature of their arrival on these islands, that has helped keep each one of them alive. My forebears came to Fiji as migrants, almost as slaves, not as conquerors. Others have come as settlers and traders, seeking — and finding — a place to call home. We have all learned much from the culture we celebrate this evening, and, hand-in-hand with Fiji's indigenous community, we are building a new society, which draws strength and hope from the great and good things in all our traditions.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I come back to the point I made at the beginning. We have gone through turbulent times, but the progress we have made through dialogue and discussion has taught us many lessons. If there is one truth we learned anew from this experience, it is this: in human affairs, there are no eternal hostilities, just eternal interests. And no interest is more paramount for ourselves, our country and our children than survival. But we must not simply stumble and grope from day to day. We must fix our vision firmly on that bright torch of genuine multi-racialism, of deep and abiding respect for each other's cultures and traditions. We must again find pride in our nation as a beacon of hope to the rest of the world. That is our challenge and our opportunity.*

*I thank you again, from the bottom of my heart, for your invitation, and the opportunity to be a part of a very special day and a very special year.*

*I look forward to the rest of the evening's programme and to a future in which we may have many such evenings, with all the promise and celebration they represent. I congratulate those who have worked so hard to make this event a success. I can assure you that you have the gratitude and support of a watching nation — a nation in which, thank God, our cultures and traditions, indigenous and non-indigenous, stand for tolerance, understanding and, above all, peace. Long may it remain so.*

---

GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AND  
THE POLITICS OF GRIEVANCE

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAI RAM REDDY, 1993

*Q: Sitiveni Rabuka has his concept of Government of National Unity. Are there any similarities between your concept and what he has suggested?*

A: This is the difficulty. The term Government of National Unity means different things to different people. The reaction to the concept is largely an emotional one. People like the idea of unity. It sounds, feels, good. But it is when you get into the details and mechanics that you find views are so divergent.

A GNU to me means two things: shared objectives and fair representation. We begin from a position where our views on some fundamental issues are very different. The Prime Minister has very fixed views on the constitution. I want a fair constitution that does justice to the Indian community. The Prime Minister also seems to have some very fixed views on ALTA [Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act]. I would like to see Indian farmers given a fair go. They also need security so they can plan for the future.

Even before the GNU is put together, there will have to be some consensus on what we can or cannot do on these fundamental

issues. You can't have two groups of people who have totally opposite views on these essential issues coming together to work because it is just not functional.

That is why I was at pains to tell the media, the people, and government representatives, what we need to do is not public posturing but start at base one and begin to talk around these problems to see if there is some shared objectives and perceptions.

The worst scenario from the Indian community's point of view is if a token number of Indians join a GNU without any shared policy objectives. As the Prime Minister himself said, I believe, to the Macuata Provincial Council: 'They will be an insignificant minority in cabinet; they may make demands on behalf of the Indian people but they will be outvoted and then they will be silenced. They can't complain.' Now, that sounds too much like absorb and destroy.

In the meantime, there is an Opposition which theoretically may be led by Butadroka [Nationalist leader Sakeasi]. So you have a Fijian Prime Minister and a Fijian Leader of the Opposition with equally firm program for Fijian welfare and you will have an Indian community which is sandwiched between these two and which has been effectively silenced. This is why I believe people should not get carried away with the concept. The success or failure will lie in the ability of the leadership to work themselves to a position where there are some shared perceptions.

*Q: But now that Rabuka has stated his position clearly, do you still see the GNU becoming a reality?*

*A: If he has prescribed parameters within which this concept has to evolve, then I think the chances of this concept succeeding are very remote. That makes it very difficult. But if there is going*



to be an open mind and a real willingness to work out a position which is acceptable to everybody, then the concept is feasible.

*Q: It has been said that a GNU stood a better chance under the 1970 Constitution.*

A: It is probably fair comment because there was the ultimate fallback position for, say, the Indian party. If it didn't work, they could go back and still try and aspire for office by forming coalitions with Fijian parties, General Electors and so on. Under the present [1990] Constitution, if they go in and it doesn't work, I think the whole political situation will be muddled even more. But it is not impossible if the will is there to have GNU under this Constitution.

*Q: This would depend on the Fijians compromising their current hard line stand?*

A: I think so. I think there has to be flexibility. I don't think the Indian community is seeking to dominate anybody. All we are seeking is a fair chance. We're seeking fairness, equity and justice which are a recognized human right.

*Q: The flexibility does not seem to be there.*

A: I wouldn't say that. I think there is a certain amount of posturing. I wouldn't write off the concept. I wouldn't consider that the Prime Minister has taken some unalterable position. I think there will be flexibility and that will be my attitude to what he has said.

*Q: The claim by the Alliance that their offer in 1980 to you had been rejected continues to come back to haunt you.*

A: I am not sure that the Alliance is saying it. I think some of my political detractors in the Indian camp are saying it. I think the old Alliance people know the truth.

What happened in 1980 was very simple. But before I talk about 1980, let me talk about 1977. In the first general elections in April, there was a tie; the NFP won 26 seats and there were 26 against it

(24 Alliance, two independents, Butadroka and Ratu Osea Gavidi). I made a public appeal that under the circumstances we should have a GNU or a Coalition. The Alliance rejected it on the basis that they could not coalesce with an Indian-dominated party.

Let no one forget that because three years later, all that happened was that I was given a paper by the then Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, which had been written not by him but by Dr Ahmed Ali, as a matter of interest. I said I would take a copy of the letter and return the original to him which is exactly what I did, with a covering letter thanking him. But the Prime Minister himself never raised the subject with me although it was raised by them at Alliance Council meetings and other public forums. So I did the same. I responded to their public statements at a public forum — the 1981 NFP national convention in Ba.

If people still care for the truth and if they pick up the paper and read it, they will see that far from rejecting the concept, I accepted it. I made the point then that I made at the beginning of the interview that a GNU will work only if there are shared perceptions, shared policies and shared objectives.

But the premise of the paper (by Dr Ali) was that there could be no compromises on policy, i.e., we were asked to embrace Alliance Party policies and call ourselves part of a national unity government. And nothing very much has changed. Isn't that what we are asked to do today? So what happens to the concerns and worries of the Indian people? Right now every Indian farmer is worried about ALTA, and his constitutional position. What happens to that? Do we just ignore that?

*Q: Were NFP & Labour too quick to embrace the invitation from Rabuka?*

A: I don't agree. We embraced the need for dialogue — the idea that we should talk. That's all we have done and the talks are at a very exploratory stage.

*Q: Suppose you reach consensus on objectives, is the offer of just the two ministries acceptable?*

A: No! I can't see how we can. It has to be based on some principle of fairness and equity. It has to be meaningful. I am not going to nominate numbers, but it has to be something which any independent outsider can look at and say, 'Well, that looks fair.' At the end of the day in a GNU, Indians should be fairly represented. We should have a figure which bears some resemblance to their numbers, contribution and work and not just a token number.

*Q: One line of Fijian thinking seems to be that the Indians have their backs to the wall now. We're offering them two ministerial positions and a chance to be part of the government so they can take it or leave it. How do you see this view?*

A: I don't think we will have anything to gain by taking it. We will be better off in Opposition. At least we will be able to articulate our fears and doubts and hopes. I think that will probably be a much better position to be in.

*Q: What will happen if you don't join the GNU?*

A: Nothing will happen. People must understand that there are these risks. If we can explain to the people why we have not gone in, assuming we have good reasons, but you can only go in if our interests are taken care of. We represent an interest and are not going to go into it just for the sake of it. The real danger is that if you go in, it will be very difficult to come out without creating more ripples; so it has to be looked at very carefully.

*Q: If the GNU does not work, where does it leave the Constitutional review?*

A: That is the unfortunate thing. We have now successfully shifted the focus from the Constitution to something else. In a sense, it is red herring. But the Prime Minister made a very definite commitment

to the nation. Sure, he made it to the Labour Party as such but he became the Prime Minister by making those commitments; therefore, they are national commitments. His commitments were to review the Constitution to make it fairer to the Indians, to abolish VAT and to review the labour laws. He hasn't delivered on any of this, and the Labour Party seems to have forgotten conveniently these promises that they in turn made to their supporters as the excuse for going into parliament, having fought the elections on a platform that they would not go. Now there is the national unity bogey and all this I think has been unfortunate in terms of getting the Constitution right. Even the five-year framework does not worry me provided we can make a start on the Constitution. It's like him not having delivered on a half-a-dozen things but making half-a-dozen new promises.

*Q: What are the key things you would like to see looked at in a review?*

A: Representation is really the key area because on that depends the structure of government and the share of political power. The virtue of the 1970 Constitution, disregarding its many shortcomings, was that at the end of the day whichever community got into political power, could do so only if they secured enough support from the other communities. A government had to be responsive to the needs of all communities. Any future constitution which does not aim for that objective will fail. The notion that one community or the other alone should be able to be in government without the need for support from the other communities is quite abhorrent and will create serious division in society. Measures like positive discrimination should be looked at; we can achieve the same objectives but these can be so stated that it will be possible to include within the scope of those provisions the weaker people of all communities. In that area, some very positive statements have been made by the government, including the Prime Minister.

*Q: How do you see the ALTA review proceeding and what would you like to see put in place?*

A: We have all accepted historically that there is no question of ownership. The land belongs to the mataqali and we, the tenant community, want to use it because without it we can't survive here. All our other constitutional rights become quite meaningless if we have no place to live in. So it is not just an issue between landlords and tenants, it is a national problem. How do you house an entire community that doesn't own land and finds itself in the position of [perpetual] tenancy? That has to be tackled as a national issue. The landowners are perfectly entitled to expect reasonable returns because that's their asset. Indians expect a reasonable return on the investment they make. It is a matter of assessing what reasonable returns are and which must then be paid to them. We might even have a look at some form of state intervention in that sector. So many things get subsidized, why not rents, particularly given our very peculiar situation where the majority of one community is landless and tenants.

*Q: So what do you see happening?*

A: We'll wait and see. Government says it will do something. We have had very positive statements from the two DPMs and [from] some of the chiefs in areas where a large number of Indian tenants live. What can one do but hope that there will be dialogue and discussion between all the interested parties and we will find a solution which will be in the interest of the whole nation.

*Q: What about the worst case [scenario] and compensation?*

A: Compensation is no answer. If you systematically refuse to renew these leases, aren't you really saying to these people: get out of this place? It evokes images of 400 Palestinians banished to the No-Man's Land in Southern Lebanon.

*Q: Apart from the constitutional review and ALTA, what else does the NFP want for the Indians?*

A: Fair employment opportunities which I don't believe they have in the public sector. We want the problems of the very poor Indians addressed: the destitutes, squatters, the unemployed; they are the worst victims and there should be a better understanding of the suffering of these people so that they are also included in the more disadvantaged groups. Beyond that we are not against helping Fijians wherever they are: education, business.

*Q: What about the economic policies the government is looking at putting in place to help Fijians, including adopting some aspects of the Malaysian system?*

A: Indians shouldn't just react blindly. A lot of those policies will also help the Indian people and help Fiji as a whole. I would have a very open mind about these measures. It will be a long term thing. There will be failures but there will be successes and in time there will be enough Fijians who will be able to stand on their own feet. There are already signs that many do reasonably well. It's not going to happen overnight. I don't think Indians should begrudge that.

There is a gap in the visible retail sector which will have to be addressed, although the notion that Indians control the economy is a totally false one. The basic inputs are not in the hands of the Indians — land, sea resources, forests, banking/insurance sector. Where we excel is where labour and persistence are the key factors. That mostly shows up in ins small shops because that really has become the one source of survival for us. So the picture that is often painted outside and here of serious distortion is a self-serving political ploy. That becomes the justification for discrimination against the Indians.

We have to look at the whole thing. It's a fight for equity and fairness. We don't begrudge you anything. We have never been given

anything for nothing. Why treat us unfairly only because we are immigrant community?

*Q: How can the Indians help to make the situation here different?*

A: They must determine what they want. If they can put their heads together and decide that, they have to act in unison. Can you imagine any situation more depraved than the one we are in now? We have been denied everything: all our rights were taken away. What was 1987 but a virtual conquest! Our political rights were taken away, the government we helped elect was taken away, and many senior civil servants were removed at gunpoint. And what are we doing now?

We are busy undoing each other. It is an embarrassing situation to be in. I have to admit with some shame to people that this is the situation. The great battle Labour Party is waging for supremacy in the Indian community: what will it give the Indians? Will it give them back their constitutional rights, equity and fairness and respect?

---

VISION 20/20: ADDRESS TO THE  
GENERAL VOTERS PARTY, 1994

*Prime Minister, the President and members of the Executive of the General Voters Party, Ladies and Gentlemen. I want to thank you for inviting me to address this gathering. Given that this function has been organized by a partner in the governing coalition, some might find it odd that the Leader of the Opposition should be the chief guest here. So I'd better state for the record that there is no truth to the rumours that I'm planning on crossing the floor — even after this most enjoyable lunch and those kind words of welcome from Matt Wilson!*

*I do want to make the point, however, that forums such as this are a very important part of nurturing a new political climate in Fiji — a*

*climate which makes it possible for us to address our country's problems and challenges in a constructive and mutually supportive way.*

*Some of the events and pronouncements of the last few months tell us that history is beckoning — that this country stands at a historic crossroads. They tell me that now is the time for fresh and creative thinking, for innovation, for new ways of practising politics. The message I receive says we must break down the old barriers that separate this nation; we must do away with that failed style of politics which is based on destructive and confrontational urges, which seems to thrive on dispute, constant verbal warfare and on impatient and petulant insistence that only one kind of agenda is right for the country.*

*I am here because these gatherings were conceived in a spirit of goodwill and co-operation by the representatives of the minority communities who play such an important role in Fiji. I am told the G.V.P. is very much interested in contributing to the creation of a political environment which will permit us to move closer to the attainment of national unity — and, by extension, to a resolution of some of our political and constitutional problems. So the N.F.P. has a common interest with the G.V.P. in this respect, just as we have shared concerns with the S.V.T.*

*When I began to think about the topic of Fiji in 20/20, I focused very much on our current efforts to fashion a new system of politics as a foundation for the future.*

*As I look around me today, it strikes me that in many ways the people in this room are a reflection of the sort of Fiji we are trying to build. We have represented here people of many races, many religions, many cultures, and many political, economic and social points of view. Some of us (as I am sure the Prime Minister can confirm!) differ quite strongly on many issues. But we are able to gather in most cordial circumstances, to eat and drink together, to talk of matters of interest both great and small, and, finally, to sit back and listen to a guest speaker whose views*



*we may not share. It is my belief that this is a microcosm of the kind of nation the current climate of unity and healing is aimed at creating. We may not always agree, but we can nevertheless respect each others' opinions and beliefs, and find compromises and common ground to allow us to resolve our major differences.*

*It would be idle to suggest that we do not have serious divisions in our country. Nor would anyone here be fooled if I was to say that these gaps between us will be magically bridged by the passage of time, or by wishful thinking. The task of building the new Fiji is without doubt a difficult one, and no one yet has all the answers.*

*Which, of course, brings me back to my subject. How we approach that task of seeking unity now — and how successful we are — will determine the reality of Fiji in the year 20/20. To stand before you in 1993 and offer you a vision of this land more than a quarter of a century from now is at best a challenge, and at worst simply foolhardy. But I will try. I will, at least for the next few minutes, try to be a visionary, a soothsayer, and a crystal ball gazer. In setting out on this little journey, I am reminded of the words of the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who once said that a politician is a person with whose politics you don't agree — if you agree with him, he is a statesman. So whether my vision matches yours will have some bearing on where you place me on that particular score-card! But I'll take the risk.*

*First of all, let's put 20/20 into perspective. Though it once seemed like the preserve of science-fiction writers, the 21st century is, quite literally, just around the corner. In 20/20, this nation will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its independence. Children born after 1970 will already have grandchildren — giving us three post-independence generations. Like many of you here today, I would hope to be sitting in my rocking chair, enjoying my twilight years and muttering perhaps about the shortcomings of the next generation of leaders — most of whom will have no*

*memory of Fiji before independence. Of course, it is quite possible that some of us will be looking on from an altogether different dimension by then, but let's be optimistic!*

*When you consider the changes we have witnessed in the last quarter of this century, I doubt if we could even begin to predict the scientific and technological advancements that will come in the next twenty-five years. No doubt 1993 will seem as ancient and primitive then as 1893 does to us today. I could have a good deal of fun this afternoon speculating on the wonders of supersonic travel, robot labour and instant gratification. I could predict wonder computers and artificial intelligence, universal use of solar power, vacation flights to the moon and molecular transport. I could offer you a vision of a wonderful world, and of a Fiji transformed by technology into a futuristic paradise.*

*But all these things by themselves would in my view make for a hollow vision, a mere shell. For it is my assertion that, amazing as the future will be, it is not the scientists who will determine its shape. It is not what we become that is important, but who we become, collectively as the people of Fiji. It is, in a very real sense, not the body of the nation that counts, but its soul. And it is with this that I am concerned today.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I suggest to you that the vision of the soul of Fiji in 20/20 is a hazy image, not quite yet in focus — just like that so-called ghost in parliament. Compare this with our vision at independence in 1970 of Fiji in 1993. We had, or at least thought we had, a clear idea of who we were and where we were going. We were, after all, “the way the world should be.” We were a symbol of hope for the world, a model for the Third World. We were going to go forward in peace and harmony, and everything would be bright and beautiful. So our vision then was very clear, but we became so entranced with it that we forgot some of the facts of life in a young, multi-racial nation. And reality, as we all now know, has a way of providing harsh reminders to those who ignore it.*

*So we toddled through our infancy, happily burbling and laughing, quite confident that the future would be everything we imagined. As we neared our teenage years, we had a few stumbles, economic, social and political. But surely these were just bumps on the road of life, problems to be overcome and then forgotten. Then, of course, came adolescence and, like many a teenager before us, we lost our way. Uncertain of our identity, and with changes sweeping around us at dizzying speed, we crashed heavily into the stone wall of the adult world. Dazed and uncertain, we faced a future that, if we could see it at all, was an ugly and frightening thing. That, just six years after hitting that wall, we can have a vision of 20/20 at all is remarkable. That we can picture a united and prosperous nation is a tribute to the people of this country, and to their fundamental fairness, tolerance and desire for peace. The reality, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that despite the glowing picture I have just painted, Fiji in the first years of our nationhood was a tinder box. There was more than enough flammable material to build a fire that would engulf us all. And, during our darkest days, there were those of many political persuasions who had reason to pour petrol on the tinder box — and to throw lighted matches at it.*

*But it would not burn. Certainly there were sparks, and a few isolated flare-ups, but the larger fire — which could have become Fiji's funeral pyre — simply refused to stay alight. And, now that the matches have been put away, we have the opportunity to lock up the tinder box once and for all. We can never keep extremists of all persuasions from playing with fire, but we can certainly ensure that their efforts are dampened and extinguished.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the process of building the vision of 20/20, of resolving our national identity crisis and laying the foundation for a country that is truly home to us all has begun. As you know, I have spent a long time in public life, and I can tell you I have never known a period where so many people were so committed to the whole concept of*

*national unity and identity. We are no longer simply paying lip service to unity — we have started on a very real journey towards the future.*

*I ask you to consider for a moment the cabinet sub-committee on the constitution. Few would have believed that such a body would have been formed this soon. Many still believe it is simply a front, a sham. Those of us taking part in its deliberations have been accused of being puppets who are simply perpetrating an unjust system. The people who espouse that position are exercising a fundamental right. In my opinion, however, they are wrong.*

*In this committee we have yet another indicator of the willingness of our major communities to sit down and begin the task of finding common ground. That is precisely what we are doing. It is significant that these are the first real face-to-face talks, on the great issues, that the leaders of our major communities have had since the ill-fated Deuba Accord of 1987. The committee is providing a forum in which leaders can put their case forward, emotions and all. Because they are being held privately, we can get straight to the heart of the matter, without fear of premature backlash or opposition that could kill any possible agreement before it is born. I am much encouraged by the progress we are making.*

*I have become convinced that there is nothing to be achieved by endless public wrangling and name-calling. Our history shows us that when we have achieved great agreements in this country it has been through initial private dialogue between leaders of our major communities, producing substantial agreements which can then be put to the people. The 1970 Constitutional conference is a classic example, as was A.L.T.O. in 1966 and A.L.T.A. in 1976.*

*And now, in 1993, with our errors — and we have all made them — behind us, my message is that the time for anger is past. The time for bitterness is past. The time for recrimination and blame is past. At hand is the time for men and women of goodwill to frankly confront the future.*

*It is one of the great ironies of communal politics that although our supporters — and I refer to supporters of both sides of our racial and political divide — want their politicians to resolve the problems that face us, if they see leaders of our different communities drawing closer together and seeking to find solutions in a friendly and mutually trusting manner, they become very uncomfortable.*

*Racial politics bears down on us like a dead weight. In such a situation each community, preoccupied with itself and in competition with other groups, must, inevitably, be drawn beneath the surface and perish.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I am not interested in the tired old rhetoric of racial politics. I am weary of pointless bickering, ugly innuendo and the raking over of old coals. There are issues and challenges before us which are more important than who wins the next election, or whose skill as a debater or public speaker is the most persuasive. None of us — Indian, Fijian or General Voter — does his or her own community any service by perpetuating the recriminations and narrow racial perceptions of the past.*

*I said in parliament recently that there must come a time in the life of this nation when the many aspirations we talk about merge and become one: a mighty collective force that will help propel this country into the 21st century, as a great country, a shining example to the world.*

*It is my belief that the moment has arrived. It is my great hope and prayer that from this moment will come not just the vision, but the actuality of 20/20. For, as I have noted, Fiji in that year will be, in large measure, the product of our success or failure in 1993. And we must construct our future on the unique strengths that history and chance have given us.*

*I have said before that the different communities which live in this island nation of ours each have unique talents and skills. Some have the knack for individual enterprise, while others excel in situations which require*

*group endeavour. Some find satisfaction in the joys of communal life, while others are at home in a more individualistic setting. Some seek succour by invoking the past, while others seek fulfilment by looking towards the future. This diversity is not a disadvantage. Far from it. It is a great asset, a great foundation upon which we can build a truly unique and lasting structure. We need each other; as I have said before, there is no need to tear us apart.*

*To build such a structure, we need a political framework that fosters the development of common values that encourage fulfilment in a common culture rather than in separate existence. We need a system of government that is based on the consent of the governed, on principles of equality, justice and fair play, that recognizes, accepts and reflects the integrity, diversity and richness of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-racial character of our nation. Any other system, that negates the values of tolerance and mutual respect that all our traditions hold dear, is, as history has regularly reminded humankind, doomed to failure.*

*The road to 20/20 will not be easy. But then, nothing of value in life ever is. I believe that with dialogue and discussion, goodwill and a willingness to sacrifice self-interest in the national interest, we can succeed. We have to succeed, Ladies and Gentlemen. We have no other alternative. And what of the leadership required to make success possible? Earlier this year, I quoted the words of the Sudanese scholar, Dr Murtada. Noting that the world is at a critical stage of transition, he goes on to say, and I quote:*

*It needs leadership which does not expect to arrive at any final solution. It needs leadership for a new struggle to develop standards of conduct for a better person, a better life, a better country and a better world. The struggle never ends. In George Hanser's words, 'Perhaps the moment of great freedom is found as we engage in the struggle to achieve it. The process of*

transformation to a just community needs a leadership which admires virtue more than strength. The world needs a generation of concerned leaders with new ideas and experience. This period of flux will change many things, and not necessarily in a way that supports the survival of leaders.

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the leaders of 20/20 are already among us. They look for their cue from those of us who are nearer to the end of our careers than the beginning. To them, and to you, I offer a vision of 20/20 which sees this beloved country of ours united in its diversity, forged out of adversity and built on trust. I offer you a vision of Fiji of which historians will say that, in the midst of our tragedy, we found courage and wisdom, and foresight and determination, to lead the nation away from the precipice into a prosperous future.*

*I am no Martin Luther King, Ladies and Gentlemen. But, today, I, too, have a dream. I, too, have a dream that one day this great country of ours will rise up and live out its true meaning. And, yes, I have a dream that one day your grandchildren and mine will live together as one people in a country of many cultures, religions and ways of life.*

*This is my dream and my vision of Fiji in 20/20. And to those who doubt it can become reality, I would say: the only things that stand between us and that future of promise and hope are our own fears and insecurities. In the words of Franklin Roosevelt, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. If we can put fear aside, and stand together, refusing to be swayed or moved from our path towards true unity, the peace and security we all yearn for can be achieved.*

*We live in an era of momentous change. The world over, old hatreds and divisions are being healed, and events which once seemed impossible are happening with incredible regularity. Consider these words from the current issue of Time magazine:*

*The past few years have been an age of miracles. Unimaginable events, consummations devoutly wished for but never really expected, have succeeded one another as if the creator had whistled up a new world. The Berlin wall tumbles. The Soviet empire melts away. Nelson Mandela, free at last, begins to bring democracy to black South Africans. Now comes what must be considered one of the greatest miracles of all: the first acknowledgment by Israelis and Palestinians that they can share the land they both call home..*

*If all these great and seemingly intractable differences and divisions can be resolved and bridged, in the face of a history of terror, bloodshed, persecution and hatred, why should we, too, not find our peace and our prosperity? In a land where — despite our problems — tolerance and common sense have always found a way to prevail, do we not have a great advantage? If Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat can come together to shake hands at the white house, how much easier must it be for Jai Ram Reddy and Sitiveni Rabuka to find common cause?*

*So, like others before us, let us seize the day. Let us, like Brutus in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, acknowledge that there is, in his words,*

*A tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and  
miseries.*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, I can only hope that I may be allowed to see 20/20. I can only hope that my vision of this most wonderful of nations will fulfil its promise. I can only pray that we who have the moment at hand will find the courage, the strength and the determination to let the past be the past, and build a nation that will stand not just to 2020, but down through the centuries.*



EULOGY FOR  
RATU SIR PENAIA GANILAU, 1994

*I am burdened today. I carry a burden of sorrow shared by all of Fiji's Indian community. We have witnessed the quiet outpourings of grief from our Fijian brothers and sisters as they mourn the loss of a venerated high chief and national leader. We have seen the other communities expressing the depth of their sorrow.*

*The Indians of Fiji weep as well. We weep for the loss of a great and benevolent man who gave so much of himself to the country he loved. Even as death beckoned, his thoughts were of his homeland and the destiny for us all. Fiji, his dear Fiji, was with him to the last.*

*We loved and respected Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau for his goodness, his gentleness and decency. We admired his abilities as a statesman and political leader. We revered him as the embodiment of chiefly authority and wisdom. We knew we could trust him — and that he was absolutely sincere when he told us he felt we, too, were part of Fiji. There was no suggestion from him that we were foreigners, who should not be here. Although Ratu Penaia was a Fijian chief he became truly a leader for all the people. His love and concern encircled everyone in these islands and helped to draw us onwards, however hesitantly and slowly, towards that complete state of nationhood he knew we must have.*

*In my own public life I had numerous dealings with Ratu Sir Penaia. Sometimes we had to speak from opposite sides of an issue. I would argue with all my powers of persuasion. He would listen, calmly and intently. Then he would ask a question or two and make a polite observation which told you how his mind was working. You knew then that the political divide between you remained, but, from his side, there was no hint of ill-feeling or rancour. Politics, for Ratu Penaia, was never personal. It was never a reason for enmity. He could disagree with you*

*and still regard you as his friend. For me, his friendship was something I treasured. He was there, supporting me, in some of my darkest hours.*

*The Indian people remember with gratitude Ratu Penaia's courage and stoical adherence to what he saw as his duty when Fiji was in turmoil in 1987. For a long time it seemed he was the only bulwark propping up the sagging structure of the state. It appeared he was the only source of authority protecting us from evil, and dispensing reason, kindness and compassion.*

*The memories of this period are painful and I do not wish to dwell on them. But I will declare to the nation today that for me, and the entire Indian community, it was then, that we began to fully appreciate the breadth of Ratu Sir Penaia's greatness and his humanity. He was in a most difficult position himself, torn between his traditional responsibilities and loyalties and the obligations of his office. The pressures he had to bear were enormous and the problems facing him were daunting. But he applied himself to them with courage and vision. He gave us leadership which provided grounds for hope; he showed us there was a way for this nation to become reconciled and whole. He helped the Fijians and the Indians to look at each other again and see that unity was possible if we thought of ourselves as citizens of one country with common loyalties.*

*In the Hindu tradition, we are judged by our karma — or the way in which we discharge our duties in life.*

*We have first of all a duty to ourselves, to be educated, to acquire skills, to develop our abilities to the fullest, to practice self-discipline and to learn the true meaning of wisdom. Then we must do our duty to those who are near and dear, our parents and family. And finally we have a duty to serve our people and our country*

*Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau performed all these responsibilities in an exemplary way, he served his God by service to his fellow human beings.*

*All the tears that fall today for Ratu Sir Penaia tell us about his life and what he meant to this country. And so we pay homage to him and we praise him, we elevate him to the pantheon of national leaders and heroes who served and sacrificed for Fiji and left their indelible imprint on our history.*

*It is my heartfelt desire that all of us now abide by the wishes of this illustrious figure and go forward, together, as a people united. I am sure he would smile from his new home in heaven if, one day, someone like me, the descendant of an immigrant indentured labourer, came to an occasion such as this, not as the leader of the Indians but as a representative of us all.*

*My own heart is full and the burden of sorrow remains heavy as I come to the final wrenching moments of farewell.*

*Goodbye, Sir, and thank you, thank you for everything. I turn to Rabindranath Tagore for the words I cannot find:*

Peace, my heart, let the time for the parting be sweet.

Let it not be a death but completeness.

Let love melt into memory and pain into songs.

Let the flight through the sky end in the folding of the wings over the nest.

Let the last touch of your hands be gentle like the flower of the night.

Stand still, O beautiful end, for a moment, and say your last words in silence.

I bow to you and hold up my lamp to light you on your way.

NOTES

1. Quote from the transcript of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau's address over radio.
2. *Weekender*, 30 Oct. 1993.
3. For an overview, see Andrew Eleck and Hall Hill, *Fiji: Economic Reforms and Performance since 1987* (Canberra: ANU Trade and Development Seminar, 1991; also Mark Sturton and Andrew McGregor, *Fiji: Economic Adjustment, 1987-1991* (Honolulu: Pacific Islands Development Program, 1991).
4. Although there was talk of a broader base to include timber processing for furniture and fittings, light manufacture of technical equipment and assembly plants, production of leather goods, none of which materialized to any significant degree.
5. For an overview see Claire Slatter, 'The Trade union movement Since the Coup [1987] in Satendra Prasad (ed.), *Coup and Crisis: Fiji a year later* (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 1989), 22-26.
6. Nand had been an NFP parliamentarian but contested the 1987 elections against the NFP-FLP Coalition.
7. All quotes come from the report of the Fiji Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee.
8. FCIAC: 9
9. FCIAC: 10-11
10. Hafiz Khan would later become the President of the Fiji Muslim League.
11. This was published later by the Coalition's Sunrise Press as a pamphlet titled *Fraud on the Nation*.
12. *Daily Post*, 8 June 1992.
13. *Hansard*, 24 July 1992, 726.
14. *Fiji Times*, 18 Aug 1991.
15. *Fiji Times*, 21 Aug 1991, see also *Islands Business*, Jan. 1991, 25-26.
16. *Fiji Times*, 16 Aug. 1991.

17. *Daily Post*, 19 May 1992.
18. *Fiji Times*, 7 May 1992.
19. *Fiji Times*, 3 Feb. 1992.
20. *Daily Post*, 11 May 1992.
21. *Fiji Times*, 28 Aug 1991.
22. *Daily Post*, 21 May 1992.
23. *Daily Post*, 25 May 1992.
24. *Daily Post*, 27 Apr. 1992.
25. *Islands Business*, Mar 1992.
26. *Daily Post*, 11 May 1992.
27. *Daily Post*, 11 May 1992.
28. *Daily Post*, 12 May 1992.
29. *Daily Post*, 14 May 1992.
30. *Islands Business*, Jan 1991, 25.
31. *Fiji Times*, 12 May 1992.
32. *Daily Post*, 21 May 1992.
33. *Daily Post*, 22 May 1992.
34. *Daily Post*, 7 Jan. 1992.
35. *Daily Post*, 4 Feb. 1992.
36. *Daily Post*, 5 Feb. 1992.
37. *Fiji Times*, 20 Jan. 1992.
38. *Fiji Times*, 5 Feb. 1992.
39. *Fiji Times*, 7 Feb. 1992.
40. *Daily Post*, 20 Jan. 1992.
41. *Daily Post*, 6 Mar. 1992.
42. *Fiji Times*, 5 Feb. 1992.
43. *Daily Post*, 14 May 1992.
44. *Fiji Times*, 2 May 1992.

45. *Daily Post*, 6 May 1992.
46. *Daily Post*, 11 May 1992.
47. From NFP media release. In my possession.
48. *Daily Post*, 9 May 1992.
49. FLP statement, 11 May, 1992.
50. *Daily Post*, 12 May 1992.
51. *Daily Post*, 13 May 1992.
52. *Fiji Times*, 10 Oct. 1991.
53. *Fiji Times*, 4 Nov. 1991.
54. Quoted in *Age*, 7 Aug. 1991
55. *Islands Business*, July 1991.
56. *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Aug. 1991.
57. *Fiji Times*, 1 Nov. 1991.
58. Quoted in *Matangi Tonga*, Nov. 1991.
59. *Washington Pacific Report*, Mar. 1992, 5.
60. *Daily Post*, 11 Dec. 1991.
61. *The Weekender*, 23 July 1993.
62. *Fiji Times*, 21 Mar 1991.
63. *Fiji Times*, 1 June 1992.
64. *Daily Post*, 2 June 1992.
65. *Daily Post*, 9 June, 1992.
66. *Fiji Times*, 8 June 1992.
67. *Fiji Times*, 8 June 1992.
68. Copies of the correspondence were published in the local media.
69. *Daily Post*, 2 June 1992.
70. *Fiji Times*, 8 June 1992.
71. *Daily Post*, 3 June 1992.
72. *Daily Post*, 4 June 1992.

73. *Fiji Times*, 4 June 1992.
74. *Fiji Times*, 17 June 1992.
75. *Daily Post*, 8 June 1992.
76. *Hansard*, 5 Mar 1998.
77. *Hansard*, 5 March 1998.
78. *Daily Post*, 24 June 1992.
79. *Hansard*, 5 March 1998.
80. *Daily Post*, 24 June 1992.
81. *Daily Post*, 20 June 1992.
82. *Daily Post*, 21 Aug. 1992
83. *Daily Post*, 8 June 1992.
84. *Daily Post*, 22 June 1992.
85. *Pacific Report*, 28 June 1993.
86. *The Weekender*, 21 May 1993
87. *Pacific Islands Month*, Aug. 1990.
88. *Fiji Times*, 22 Dec. 1992.
89. *Fiji Times*, 19 Feb. 1993.
90. *Fiji Times*, 5 Apr. 1993.
91. *The Review*, Mar. 1993.
92. *Daily Post*, 4 Mar. 1993.
93. *Fiji Times*, 18 Mar. 1993.
94. *Weekender*, 30 Oct. 1993.
95. *Hansard*, 22 Sept. 1993.
96. *Fiji Times*, 23 Sept. 1993.
97. What follows draws on the *Hansard* of the Sept. session.
98. Rabuka said the FLP's 'decision to withdraw its support for government was meaningless.' See *Review Magazine*, Sept. 1993, 122.
99. Among those whom Professor Yash Ghai consulted included Soli Sorabji, a

former Solicitor General of India, and other legal luminaries.

100. *Weekender*, 25 June 1993.
101. See Richard Naidu, 'Three Years of Turmoil,' *Review Magazine*, Aug. 1995, 17.
102. *Fiji Times*, 21 Aug. 1993.
103. Jai Ram Reddy, *Reply to the Budget*, a copy in my possession.
104. *Fiji Times*, 3 Dec. 1993.
105. *Fiji Times*, 16 Oct. 1993.
106. *The Review Magazine*, Dec. 1993.
107. From a copy of his address to the Great Council of Chiefs, in my possession.
108. *Fiji Times*, 8 Dec. 1993.
109. *Daily Post*, 11 Dec. 1993.
110. *Fiji Times*, 9 Dec. 1993.
111. *Fiji Times*, 10 Dec. 1993.
112. *Fiji Times*, 21 Jan. 1994.
113. *Review Magazine*, Feb. 1994.
114. *Review Magazine*, Feb. 1994.
115. *Daily Post*, 4 Apr. 1994.
116. *Fiji Times*, 15 Dec. 1993.
117. *Weekender*, 30 Oct. 1993.
118. *Daily Post*, 3 Feb. 1994.
119. *Daily Post*, 3 Feb. 1994.
120. *Daily Post*, 7 Feb. 1994.
121. Address at Albert Park, 8 Oct. 1993.
122. Reproduced from *The Review*, February /March, 1993, 13–18; slightly truncated.
123. 31 Dec. 1993.