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Evidence, ideology and miscalculation : public opinion and the 1987 military coups in Fiji

by

Deryck SCARR *

On 14 May 1987 the Fiji Labour Party-National Federation Party Coalition Government formally led by the multi-ethnic Labour Party's leader, ethnic Fijian from western Viti Levu Dr T. U. Bavadra — but visibly from not far behind the scenes by the lawyer Jai Ram Reddy and his longtime fellow power brokers in the National Federation Party which had always been overwhelmingly ethnic Indian — was overthrown in a coup by the, essentially ethnic Fijian, Royal Fiji Military Forces. The government was a month old. It was, in fact, Indian-dominated ; it had been elected by a minority of overall votes cast, and only a tiny minority of Fijian votes ; and it depended on the assumption that not race but class divided Fiji. It had promised " change " — but when the soldiers burst into the parliament chamber on the third day of the opening session, members were debating a policy speech which could almost have been delivered on behalf of the defeated, multiracial but Fijian dominated Alliance Party of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, high chief of the Lau group in eastern Fiji, Prime Minister since Fiji was hurried into independence by Britain in 1970. In fact the new, mildly left-wing, vulgar Marxism — inspired, supposedly innovatory and certainly rhetorically populist regime, was wisely hedging on the promises with which it had won the election ¹.

But not the least remarkable thing about the coup was that intervention by a Fijian Army officer, in this instance one decorated for service with UNIFIL in Lebanon who had actually looked into the mechanics of military coups during a stint at the Indian Army Staff College, against a government with only about 9.39 of Fijian votes to its credit in the communal seats of the 1970 independence constitution where the ethnicity of voters could be determined, should have taken anyone very much by surprise. The fact that only 71 per cent of Fijians turned out to vote at all might have been taken to indicate weariness with party politics, if not with the whole democratic process — which they had always inclined to feel would make them strangers in their own country. The prospect was receding, though, if they were aware of it, by a decreasing Indian birthrate and a high Indian rate of emigration, itself partly inspired by political insecurity on the Indian side too. Emigration won Indians no credit with nationalists among Fijians : it simply reinforced their image of Indians as essentially migratory people : " they carry their country in their veins ". If the Alliance Party lost power, a coup, following upon Fijian violence that always threatened at election times, had been a strong possibility, given the distance between the two major ethnic groups — Fijians were 46 per cent of the 715,375 population in

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1. See, generally, for the causes and course of the coups, Deryck SCARR, *Fiji : the Politics of Illusion : the Military Coups in Fiji* (Sydney 1988) and " Fijian Chiefs and Fiji Indians : Ethnic reality surfaces in the South Pacific " *World Review*, Vol. 27, n° 4, November 1988, 48-69. Much writing on the coups has been by *soi-disant* academics, actually Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party advisers and active political sympathisers, and slanted accordingly. Not the least remarkable has been the repeated assertion that the Coalition was " not an Indian government ".

1986, Indians 48.7 per cent — in fundamental respects : like religion, preferred language, economic strength and function, educational ambitions and attainments, social and political mores, even residence in many cases, with just a mainly superficial pragmatic working good fellowship at large and, occasionally, warm personal relationships between individuals, which between the sexes might run to affairs but rarely to marriage.

The Indian underlying sense of insecurity, relieved at times as it was by public bumptiousness, was well-founded ; and Fijians often quietly evinced strong resentment at public advice from people outside, like Professor O H K Spate in 1959 and Sir Alan Burns with his colleagues in 1960, who preached “ individualism ”. This was nothing new to them but was not necessarily made more acceptable by reiteration, nor sufficiently diplomatically couched to attract more acceptance than irritation from a naturally conservative people, or from the members of the Great Council of Chiefs whom, criticised as much by Fijians as by Spate and Burns, Fijians at large still saw as their own natural leaders. As the *Taukei* Movement which sparked the coup put it in submission 402 to the mid-1987 Constitution Review Committee, with some ambiguity : “ In 1959 and 1960, the Spate and Burns Report respectively and publicly criticised the Fijian Administration which had been thought to improve Fijians’ lot. It was at this time that Fijians began to realise that their position in their own country was not as invulnerable as they hoped it to be ”.

When I wrote in 1979 that, under the independence constitution, of 1970, “ the protection of Fijian rights has been assured, and the Indians have recognized that their physical safety depends on their accepting a second-class political position ”², I was joining in the common over estimation of the safeguards afforded to Fijian ownership of 82.4 per cent of land in the Islands by section 68 of the 1970 constitution, with its provision that emendation would require assent by six of the eight Great Council of Chiefs nominees in the Senate ; and was at the same time attempting as close to a veiled hint as an occasional foreign visitor should perhaps feel able to go. No one doubted, who listened, that many Fijians regarded the constitutional agreements of 1969-70 as embodying an implied guarantee that after independence they, the *Taukei ni Quele* or owners of the soil, would always have the

government. The Alliance Party has been much criticised for not translating the constitution into Fijian — a course which was naturally always open to the longstanding opposition, the National Federation Party too, a fact curiously often overlooked. But both could conceivably have been restrained by the reflection that translation would have revealed that the ultra-nationalist Sakiasi Butadroka, whose Fijian Nationalist Party won 24.4 per cent of Fijians for his policy of deporting Indians in the April 1977 election, was quite right in his contention : 22 seats each for Fijians and Indians in the House of Representatives, and eight for “ others ” or General Electors, some elected from national, some from communal rolls, and with no provision that Governor General or Prime Minister should be Fijian, did not in fact guarantee Fijians the government. In Coalition thinking, an Indian Governor-General was actually in view when Governor-General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau should retire, so Dr Bavadra has told me : the high chief of the assertive, strong-tongued eastern province of Cakaudrove was to have been followed in office by an Indian lawyer — probably about twenty-five years before it could safely have been attempted.

But it has also been remarkable how often the coups of 14 May and 25 September 1987 have been unconvincingly explained away rather than explained. Political involvement is the usual cause of this. Corruption by the Alliance Government of Fijians, Muslims, and other Indians, and General Electors, during their virtually uninterrupted seventeen years of rule since independence — this was the prime cause advanced by deposed Coalition cabinet ministers, Fijian and Indian, looking for support on, say, university campuses in Australia where their explanations were well received by trusting audiences. There was immediate appeal in the magic name “ Labour Party ” and a natural attraction, there and in the press, for this image of Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, third-in-Command of the Royal Fiji Military Forces but reckoned by professionals the best commander in it, sending his team of armed masked men into the parliament chamber to carry the bewildered Coalition members away to the barracks at the behest of Alliance notables afraid the new government would expose them for corruption. That made it odd that the Army under Brigadier Rabuka (who was promoted post-coup by Ratu Sir Penaia) should launch its own enquiry into

2. Deryck SCARR, “ Movement and Change in the Pacific Islands”, in William S LIVINGSTONE and Roger LOUIS (eds), *Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands since the First World War* (Austin 1979) 186.

the corruption allegations immediately after the second coup on 25 September when it was in absolute control of the government with no Governor-General in the way. Operation Yavato, the Army called this — Operation Woodgrub. Rabuka was very concerned about all the corruption allegations, he had told me on 5 August; he had raised them at once with the Governor-General; and had so far, then, heard no more³.

The other much advanced attempt at explaining away the first coup has come from party-political, sometimes vulgar-Marxist quarters and from a section of the University of the South Pacific in Suva which had provided what passed for the intellectual basis of the Fiji Labour Party⁴, not always much concerned for evidence nor for freedom of speech where it conflicted with propaganda. Six Labour candidates came from the university, three of them elected. Two lecturers' names appeared post-coup on a document depicting imaginary events, including murders that never took place, which was sent to a meeting of Australasian unionists in an attempt to induce them to keep on, in the face of Fiji unions' resolution to the contrary, the trade bans that had been imposed with the object of putting Dr Bavadra back into office in accordance with, as the theory then went, the massed wishes of ethnic Fijians too. For it was clear to the eye of faith and vulgar Marxist analysis that class not race is what drives the world; and it followed that "a narrow class-based minority" must have been "able to hijack Fijian communal sentiments and identifications for its own ends"⁵. The masses are so frequently thought to be unintelligent, and hijackable; and empiricism was held in low esteem by the Fiji Labour Party's academic team.

The empirical evidence was clear. Race-based sentiments to be heard from otherwise perfectly liberal individuals in both the major communities apart, there had been ethnic block voting in all four elections since independence, including the April 1987 election itself. The Alliance then had polled 48.55 per cent of all votes cast, including 15.30 per cent of Indian votes of which up to half would have been cast by Muslims who do not love the Hindu majority; and of course including the greater proportion of Fijian votes — though 5.4 per cent, or more than half as many Fijians who

voted for the FLP/NFP Coalition, did so for the Fijian Nationalist Party. "What Butadroka says openly, we think to ourselves" — so too many Fijians for comfort, urban and educated as well as in the villages, have always broadly hinted. The Alliance lost in 1987 by twenty-four seats to the twenty-eight which the Coalition won with its 46.20 per cent of the overall vote. This was partly the result of an eight per cent swing by General Electors; and partly again — as in 1977 when the NFP had the prospect of power for four tense days while Fijians prepared to start burning towns, one of Dr Bavadra's sons reportedly knocked down in the school playground an Indian fellow pupil who crowed, and young Captain Rabuka by his own account grew very thoughtful — it was because Fijian votes had gone to Butadroka's nationalists.

And now in 1987, again, the Coalition's support came in the main, as always, from the Indian electorate. There were too few votes from Fijians to do more than win the Coalition the four peri-urban Suva Fijian national seats by margins so narrow as to be unsafe and politically viable only in a culturally homogeneous or genuinely multicultural nation. The latter, Fiji was only in campus theory, party political rhetoric and tourist promotional brochures. Pursuit of power is of course an end in itself, under the Westminster system which was the foundation of the 1970 constitution, result of a process of separation from Britain that Indians had always pressed far more than Fijians, and enshrining ostensibly democratic principles which Fijians revealed at the time that they regarded as alien and, for them, dangerous. The curious anti-personality cult long aimed at Ratu Mara apart, the Alliance was seen as likely to move against unionism if it won again, having a World Bank review to support it in the view that salaries were fifteen per cent too high as result of union activity. This was one strong campus impulse toward Coalition and power before the 1985-formed Labour Party had begun to learn its parliamentary business. For the National Federation Party, with its pragmatic businessmen and dogmatic lawyers leading insecure hardworking cane farmers, one attraction of an essentially ill-matched Coalition was the Fijian, especially urban and supposedly anti-chiefly Fijian, support that might be generated by Dr Bava-

3. See *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 4, 138-144.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

5. Robert T. ROBERTSON and Akosita TAMANISAU, *Fiji: Shattered Coups* (Sydney 1988), 150. This book was published "in association with" the Fiji Independent News Service, a Coalition propaganda outlet, and sold at a reduced rate to supporters.

dra, himself passed over for promotion in the Health Department. Latterly a white collar unionist, he was idealistic, more than a touch credulous, much in the hands of advisers, and accordingly not always well-informed.

"What do the Fijians want of us?" — asked one National Federation Party power broker, whose northern Viti Levu seat had been won nominally for the Labour Party by his son, speaking with all the frustration characteristic of a party determined as of right to form a government one day. "We gave them a Fijian Prime Minister. What do they want?"⁶

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What the Fijians whom Sitiveni Rabuka represented wanted had been made clear enough at about 5 minutes past 10.00 am on 14 May when the soldiers he had been training under the noses of his superiors Brigadier Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and Lieutenant Colonel Jim Sanday for, supposedly, crowd control in case Fijians should riot in the wake of a Coalition victory, burst into the chamber to carry off the Coalition members. This incidentally interrupted a speech by the dockworkers' leader and sometime Fijian Nationalist Party member, now Alliance parliamentarian Taniela Veitata. He was saying very trenchantly, from, to him, the wrong side of the house, that Fijians must rule their country; that Indians having acquired the best of Fijian land through the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act's thirty-year leases were now having the hardihood to kick Fijians in the face; that chiefs — Veitata is a commoner — were born leaders ordained of God; and that the actual mace of the House of Representatives was after all the war club of the Vunivalu of Bau, Ratu Seru Cakobau, who had led the other reluctant major chiefs of Fiji in ceding Fiji to Queen Victoria in 1874⁷. So, Rabuka, Veitata, Ratu Finau Mara the son of the defeated Alliance Prime Minister who was awaiting the soldiers outside the chamber, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola the Secretary of the Bible Society in the South Pacific and Alliance election manager for Cakaudrove, as well as member of the Governor-General's own *mataqali* or clan — so these and other leaders of the newly-formed Taukei Movement wanted the Coalition government removed. Composed, as the Coalition cabinet was, of six Fijian newcomers to the lower house and to, largely, the political

scene, six Indians and a part-European, and with a backbench of thirteen Indians, a Fijian and a General Elector, the government was seen quite inevitably and pretty accurately as being Indian dominated. To put to Fijians the case that Dr Bavadra might after all be or become his own man, was to elicit the reply — "With all *those people* around him?" Most Coalition Fijians were marked by nothing so much as their political inexperience. All had been elected by, substantially, Indian and General Elector votes in national, cross-voting constituencies, with minimal Fijian votes to carry them home.

In fact the Coalition was not returned in a single Fijian communal seat. For all its alleged and actual shortcomings, the Alliance remained the Fijians' own vastly preferred party — though Labour might well have increased its Fijian vote if it had kept clear of the National Federation Party. The bold Fijian who stood for the Coalition in the Lau-Rotuma communal constituency against Ratu Mara, Tui Lau, Tui Nayau, personification of chiefly leadership, lost his deposit. Lauans might privately chafe at the Tui Lau's high-handed conduct of communal affairs but they still voted overwhelmingly for him — and foreign academic observers, for instance, who elicited the grumbling and built theoretical political castles on it against all electoral evidence, were confounded if they expected the customs of respect to be ignored on voting day. Family pressure would not be absent either. The fact that Ratu Mara, grown rich in office, not least perhaps from grateful Indians' donations, owned or was buying a building in Suva which had been advantageously leased to the Education Department, might weigh against him with Fijian urban electors; but even so the electoral reality there, around the capital, had been that the Coalition won its four, national, cross-voting seats in the heartland of working class sentiment, and supposed multiracial sentiment, and resentment against chiefly rule, by 2,945 votes cast, under the multi-vote system, by a fourth of that number of individuals. In the corresponding Fijian communal seats, 2,474 Fijian votes went to the Fijian Nationalist Party — so the Fijian vote was split in the national seats too, probably.

It had been a very narrow victory in the first place, then, dangerous, non-viable; and now the Taukei Movement's leaders wanted an end to the 1970 constitution itself, too. This was confirming the political position of

6. Quoted *Politics of Illusion*, p. 4.

7. *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 89-70; on cession, see Deryck SCARR, *I, the Very Bayonet*, pp. 324-325, 331-333.

Butadroka, whom they had excluded from their planning as being too much the thorough-going racist, and who very loudly blamed Ratu Mara for the coup by making it necessary for the Army to intervene at last, according to Butadroka, by accepting at independence this equality-based constitution. Butadroka has his equally thorough-going supporters now. And while Bavadra, with the help of Australian journalists who were deported for it, was smuggling out letters to the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand seeking military intervention on his behalf, government came, under a strained interpretation of the same constitution, into the hands of the Governor-General. He had had several prior hints both of what the Taukei Movement was planning by way of violence before the coup, and of possible movement by the Army too. Long-time Deputy Prime Minister to Ratu Mara, RFMF commander in Malaya during the 1950s anti-communist campaign there, and still active honorary soldier, he was Rabuka's own chief as well as his personal patron, and had always been seen as warlord in the wings; but he had also put a check, in the past, on his people's inclination to resort to violence in tense elections. Forced now in mid-1987 toward immediate dissolution of the constitution and declaration if need be of a Republic by the Great Council of Chiefs — which was summoned at Ratu Mara's instance when Ratu Penaia seemed to be stalling in support for the regime Rabuka immediately proposed — the Governor-General tried to save links with Crown and Commonwealth by changing the 1970 constitution to meet Fijian demands by some show of legal means via, in the first place, a Constitution Review Committee.

A new constitution had of course been the pre-coup demand of Taukei Movement marchers who, up to some 6,000 strong, had passed through Suva to Government House on 24 April to petition the Governor-General. The petition had originated in western Viti Levu, which rather cuts into the widely touted, essentially false images about strong Coalition support there. Apisai Tora, of whom more below, could always draw more of a crowd of Fijians in the west than Dr Bavadra. And it cut again into the deposed government's post-coup international and very successful, though not always consistent, and never candid, disclaimers of intent to use the Army in support of the civil power, Fijians against Fijians, that the soldiers had in fact been called out to line the

streets that day and to guard the closed-up Government Buildings. Brigadier Nailatikau was waiting at the gates of Government House to sight the Governor-General's signature on the Emergency Regulations, in case the government presented them to him. This, accordingly, the Taukei Movement leaders gave the government no excuse to do: they had already identified in it an inclination to use all resources of the state in support of democracy, as the government and the press put it, when, with Fijians on trial in the Tavua courthouse for blocking the road at Easter in post-election anger, by way of showing who really owned the land of which so much was leased under ALTA to Indian cane farmers, the Fijian police riot-squad had been brought up from Suva in case of trouble. Its members, questioned by fellow Fijians later, had said they supposed they would have had to obey orders. The Fijian officer in charge at Tavua police station had been disciplined for removing the roadblocks by a request *vakavanua*, in Fijian form, to the local *turaga*, the Tui Tavua, incidentally, because this resort to diplomacy rather than force was, in an expressive phrase, "an act which smacked of collusion with the protesters" ⁸.

Brigadier Nailatikau, sounded out by leaders of the incipient Taukei Movement on what line he would order his soldiers to adopt in case of civil disobedience by their own people, had already announced publicly that they must support the government of the day, and, in Cabinet meetings, was assuring the Coalition ministers they would do so: he was himself, perhaps, even a little relieved at no longer having his father-in-law Ratu Sir Kamisese breathing quite so closely down his neck as before. And so if the soldiers felt there was every possibility they might be called out to fire on fellow Fijians, it takes more than later denials by Coalition propagandists and the, perhaps rather unwary, second-in-command to erase the roots of that feeling. Rabuka, he has told me, "was scared" ⁹.

It is equally true the squad he sent into the chamber to carry away the Coalition members had supposedly been trained to control crowds without bloodshed by seizing leaders, though; and still more the case that Rabuka himself, a leading lay member of the Methodist Church in its Old Testament, Fijian Israelite phase, by descent perhaps a *gonedau* or fisherman but by self-identification a *bati* or warrior of Cakaudrove, had from the first actually wan-

8. Brij V LAL, *Power and Prejudice: the making of the Fiji Crisis* (Honolulu 1988), p. 71.

9. My interview with Rabuka, 5 August 1987; and see, generally, *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 64-67.

ted to see the government removed. "Democracy" weighed with him, as with the Taukei Movement leaders, like a feather in the balance against "indigenous rights". And when, on 16 April, three days after the poll was declared, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, Viliame Gonelevu and Jone Veisamasama failed in their approach to Ratu Epeli, they had already, just a few minutes before, on the edge of the parade ground, arranged for Sitiveni Rabuka to meet them in town in the Epworth House offices of the Methodist Church.

What degree of collusion then and later developed between the soldier and the Alliance notables in the Taukei Movement is debated, with Rabuka in his own ghosted version of events *No Other Way* shielding others, Ratu Sir Kamisese among them, and mentioning meetings by chance rather than design. So far as Ratu Mara is concerned, the possibility is that he was informed of the unfolding plans by his son and, seeing no prospect of talking the plotters out of it, kept quiet. He may have been letting events take their natural course, as he had said in 1968 when, after by-elections in western Viti Levu brought on by one of the National Federation Party's recurrent walk-outs from parliament, Fijians rioted because Indian voters there belied all the NFP rhetoric about "one nation" by voting for NFP not Alliance Indian candidates. Possibly Ratu Mara was further moved by the probability that the new Minister for Education Dr Tupeni Baba was looking into the possibility of removing his department from Marela House ¹⁰. When, at a meeting of the Pacific Democratic Union, down at the Fijian Hotel in which his wife, herself a high chief, has been a controversial trustee on behalf of her maternal clan ¹¹, Ratu Sir Kamisese was seen to pale and sway as he took the telephone call telling him from the Alliance party room about the coup, he may conceivably have been moved by horror that the coup had indeed gone ahead; relief that it had been bloodlessly successful; and relief, again, that the Taukei Movement would not now go ahead with their plans for violence. With the troops faced by the prospect of being called out after the 1968 by-elections the then RFMF commander, a New Zealander, playing golf with Ratu Mara, had thought the then Chief Minister was striking the balls with addi-

tional vigour as though they were Indian politicians' heads ¹². Now the Taukei Movement, their determination not seriously to be doubted, had been planning at the very least to burn down Suva. And Rabuka, pressed as he was by other Cakaudrove people, his relations, his Bible class, and fellow Old Boys of Queen Victoria School of which he was once head boy, had no reason to doubt the Taukei Movement's will or ability to go to extremes in support of their objective — which was also his own.

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Their real motive was clear to their opponents, in hindsight, just as it was clear to Coalition propagandists and international conspiracy theorists that the CIA must have been involved, a politically useful illusion, on present evidence, that has been dying hard and reluctantly ¹³. "Prejudice, pique and personal ambition rather than principle propelled the *Taukei* leaders" ¹⁴, declares one Coalition-connected Fiji-Indian university lecturer with equal conviction and lack of access, surely, to those meetings of Alliance notables — the overtly racist Butadroka was deliberately excluded, to his later chagrin — in the week before Easter when the decision to overthrow the government and the constitution too was taken.

The principle the *Taukei* themselves immediately appealed to in justification was, of course, the overriding right of the indigenous people, with a presence in the Islands extending back archaeologically to around 500 BC, to rule the country whatever the number and contrary aspirations of the descendants of those indentured labourers from India who first began arriving on, quite coincidentally, 14 May 1879. "The Fijians appear to have lost their country", the former Alliance minister Apisai Tora had said at a meeting attended by perhaps 3,000, perhaps 5,000 Fijians on the western margin of Viti Levu on 21 April. They had been called in by another Alliance minister, the Tui Vuda, high chief along the coastal stretch around his village of Viseisei where they gathered to consider the causes and implications of the Alliance's loss of power. Viseisei was Dr Bavadra's own village. But he had taken care not to offer himself for election

10. *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 43-48, 67-69, 73, 74-75.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

12. Frank RENNIE, *Regular Soldier : a Life in the New Zealand Army* (Auckland 1986), pp. 285-287.

13. *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 49-54, for international dimensions; and see also Michael Danby, "Fiji : the trail of disinformation", *IPA Review*, November-January 1987-88, pp. 42-46.

14. LAL, *Power and Prejudice*, p. 75.

there, in the Fijian communal seat. His chosen candidate predictably lost it, with 1,221 votes to the 8,569 polled by the Tui Vuda. Bavadra himself was returned in a Fijian national electorate containing almost twice as many Indian voters as Fijian. As for Tora, he had been sponsored in his seat by the Tui Mogodro whose signature appeared on the petition for constitutional change, itself originating in western Viti Levu. And Tora won by 5,271 votes to the 2,597 polled by the Tui Magodro's son, Simone Durutalo, one of the six coalition candidates from the University of the South Pacific, and one of the lecturers in the University's School of Social and Economic Development who provided both what passed for the Fiji Labour Party's "intellectual" basis and the impulse to coalesce with the NFP. Its result was, again, electorally a disaster for the Coalition itself, accurately speaking. In the Nadroga-Navosa Fijian communal seat, for instance, home of the dissident Fijian splinter group led by Ratu Osea Gavidu — and home also of Dr Bavadra's high-ranking wife and, after his premature death in November 1989, successor as Coalition leader Adi Kuini Vukaba — Ratu Osea lost too, with 3,791 to the Alliance candidate's 4,929. If Fiji was indeed divided not by ethnicity but by class — as the Marxists at the university had been teaching since, foreigners with a political missionary zeal and Fiji citizens taken from the staff of secondary schools in the name of "localisation", sometimes to their pupils' amazement, they began to predominate in social science teaching after about 1982 — then the class division was not and never had been substantially, directly and, for political purposes, usefully reflected at the polling booths. Nor had the western-eastern divide. "We are tired of being used and discarded", said Tora, again, at the Viseisei, western Viti Levu meeting, referring among other things to the land leased under ALTA. Close to one million hectares of the most fertile country were leased, at moderate to low rentals, for thirty years, to 24,000 individuals of whom 18,000 were non-Fijians. Leases would not be renewed when they fell in during the late 1990s, Tora threatened; shops on leased land too would gladly be taken over, since Indians had not recognised the Fijian right to rule. "Upon us is imposed a new colonialism, not from outside but from within our own country... We cannot become strangers in our own land".

It was easy enough to try to write Tora off,

quite apart from the fact that he was not the author of his own speech; but it could not be done convincingly. He had been for years, himself, until the late 1970s, a spokesman for that western Viti Levu dissatisfaction with eastern Fiji's "domination" of the national scene on which the Coalition put so much rhetorical emphasis but which the ballot box had never yet made significant. He had done time — but so had a Coalition minister and a Coalition parliamentary candidate. Tora was alleged by Dr Bavadra and the *Sydney Morning Herald* to have built a house for himself with US aid funds instead of the village multicraft centre the funds were earmarked for; but the multicraft centre was there at Natalau village, a substantial building invisible to Dr Bavadra who lived a few miles away¹⁵.

The possibility that Tora was in fact articulating deep-seated widely held Fijian sentiment became strengthened when, post-coup, not merely the Great Council of Chiefs resolved in favour of the constitution's being changed to provide for a unicameral legislature of 71 seats, with a Fijian majority, but all the provincial councils demanded change to ensure Fijian predominance also (they were not turned from this course by a letter in the *Fiji Times* on 9 July 1987 from Pandit Kesha Prasad Sharma of Adelaide, South Australia, to the effect that Fiji had been chosen by Lord Krishna for the snake god's residence, according to Hindu scripture, and was therefore a divinely ordained Hindu homeland). Though Adi Kuini's small inland Navosa district asked to become a province in its own right, the combined province of Nadroga-Navosa which had failed to return its anti-Alliance leader Ratu Osea moved in favour of Fijian political predominance through forty seats, to be filled by communal voting on a provincial basis. And, as I have written elsewhere, the council of Ba province, largest of all the provinces, with 55,296 Fijians to 137,051 Indians, and the largest cane rentroll of all, which might have been expected to concentr'ate Fijian minds on political compromise for the sake of continued economic well-being, "disturbed the image of amiable economic symbiosis and of rural good neighbourliness leading to political toleration by coming out strongly for a republic and no Indian representation in the future Parliament at all"¹⁶.

It was, of course, open to question how representative these councils actually were. "From 1967 provincial councils had been elec-

15. *Politics of Illusion*, p. 41.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

tive from within districts but in March 1987 their membership composition was changed : now the provincial councils are made up of delegates from the old, theoretically kinship-based district councils, on the grounds that the post-1967 system was actually less representative because the people elected tended to come from the most populous district " 17. The chiefs, it was easy to assume, though more difficult to demonstrate, were ruling the expressions of opinion : an assumption which itself indicated how strong chiefly influence might be. Individuals, though, had both written and oral access to the Constitution Review Committee which sat at the Governor-General's invitation in July and August 1987. Dr Bavadra, not quite in keeping with the Coalition's pre-election precept that chiefs should stay out of politics, sent as one of his team Adi Lady Lala Mara's half-brother Ratu Mosese Varasakete Tuisawau, reformed former President of the Fijian Nationalist Party and, pre-election, Bavadra's channel into Rewa province where Adi Lala, born in wedlock, is the installed high chief and Ratu Mosese, born out of it, would like to be. The numbers on the committee lay with the Taukei sympathisers ; it reported, accordingly, in favour of the Great Council of Chiefs', own, Ratu Mara-inspired compromise. The Queen was to remain head of state, and there was to be a 71 member unicameral parliament with eight General Electors, one Rotuman, 22 Indians and 28 Fijians, all elected from communal rolls ; plus eight Great Council nominees and up to four prime ministerial appointees ; and with priority to legislation alleviating Fijian concern about recognition of customary law, ownership of reefs and foreshore and mineral rights, and " protection of the traditional cultural heritage " 18.

The Coalition members put in a well-argued minority report on the theme that the future of the country " cannot be built on any principle which is racist in character and unduly penalises one half of the population for no other reason than their racial origins " ; and announced that " Of the individual Fijians who made submissions, well over 60 per cent did not favour any change to the 1970 constitution " 19. That claim had great appeal to their old advisers and current sympathisers and propagandists, who have swallowed it 20. So far

as the 161 oral submissions by Fijians was concerned, it was a surprising claim to the committee's secretariat and the independent constitutional adviser sent by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. And the 830 written submissions are mostly there in the archives for the reading, giving the lie to continued illusions and attempts to mislead. So did the popular response to the Back to Early May Movement's circulars to its, often expatriate, founders' belief in a strong groundswell of multiracialism in the country at large : 96,973 Indians, 9,139 Fijians and 1,607 other respondents wanted a return to early May.

The written responses to the Constitution Review Committee will bear more detailed analysis ; they reveal the conflicting opinions, perceptions and aspirations which, in the electoral circumstances and the social and economic conditions leading up to April-May 1987, had made military intervention an odds-on favourite.

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The Part-European General Elector whose submission was the first one received, wanted a sixty member House of Representatives with forty Fijian members, fourteen of whom should be the ranking chief from each of the present fourteen provinces ; ten Indian members, eight General Electors, one Rabi representative and one for Rotuma ; together with a Senate much like the 1970 one, with eight nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs, seven by the Prime Minister, and six by the Leader of the Opposition. And the Part-European General Elector, unionist, and sometime elected member for a constituency with the second-largest body of Indian electors, whose submission came last, feared, among other things, what the military might resort to again once Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara, with their essentially moderate position and undoubted charisma, had been removed by time ; seemed to think that, under a Republic, the Army might actually take over all land ; emphasised economic dependence on Australia and New Zealand, which had at that moment put on strangling trade bans ; doubted the capacity of the Great Council of Chiefs with its Fijian parliamentarians, hereditary titleholders and provincial nominees ; felt pro-

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Report of the Constitution Review Committee July-August 1987*, Parliamentary Paper N° 21 of 1987, pp. 84-89.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 82, p. 67.

20. CF, for instance, ROBERTSON and TAMANISAU *Shattered Coups*, p. 132 and LAL, *Power and Prejudice*, p. 94 ; the reality is set out in *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 108-120, and " Fijian Chiefs and Fiji Indians ", pp. 65-66, which are based on all the written submissions, further analysed here.

vincialism would be raised to a significant level if Fijians had guaranteed political predominance; wanted civil servants out of politics; and, by way of specific constitutional change, proposed to tinker with the General Electors' representation. The intervening 828 submissions ran the gamut from strong *Taukei* to contemptuous Indian, with some excursions into history. These were often revealing of perceptions held, which might overestimate, say, the ambitions of the labour leader, Mahatma Gandhi's first emissary to Fiji, the lawyer Manalal Doctor, deported for "sedition" in 1922. As the second submission put it, received from Ratu Serupepeli Naivalu of Lautoka, western Viti Levu:

The problem of the Fijian people was the protection of their identity in their own native country, composed of land, people and heritage that includes leadership. It was not simply land. The Fijians know that one of the Indian leaders decades ago advocated that all the Fijians on Viti Levu be moved to Vanua Levu, leaving the entire main island to the Indians. During the Ratu Sukuna era they wanted to become Bulis and Turaga-ni-Koros and be leaders in the villages. In the 1920's an expatriate Indian lawyer whose name sounded like "Manalal" was given a 24-hours notice to leave and return to India for organising a coup to take over the government and control of Fiji from the governor. The large group of local Indians who listened to him was attacked and stopped by the Police at Laqere, carrying firearms and marching to Suva. It was believed that the lawyer was associated with the Gandhi movement in India.

After the Indian population outstripped the Fijians in 1946, it added an unwelcome phenomenon to their fear of foreign domination, knowing their characteristic acquisitiveness. The Fijians are also aware of the incalculable damage caused by an immigrant race to the Maoris of New Zealand, or to the Hawaiians and Aborigines of Australia, without looking far afield for examples. The 1970 Constitution manipulated by Britain did not effectively safeguard Fijians but simply papered up the cracks on a mountain that was concealing a growing volcano. When the NFP-Labour Coalition Party dominated by Indians won the last General Elections from the Alliance, predominantly Fijian, the Indian threat to Fijian identity that had exercised the mind of many people for half a century erupted into violence at last. There is some justification in Colonel Rabuka's explanation that he launched the military coup to pre-empt massive loss of lives or properties knowing full well the combat skills and ability of Fijians who are known to be the greatest jungle fighters in the world. To turn a blind eye to the fact is to turn a blind eye to a house on fire. The naked fact outweighs all excuses.

As to the future, this submission was for moderation, in Fijian terms: Fijians' seats up from 22 to 28 under the existing constitution, Indians' down from 22 to 18, General Electors' from eight to six. The Indians could console themselves with the barbed reflection that, with the present communal and national voting systems both retained, "they will still be represented by Fijian National Members like Dr Bavadra and Dr Baba who were actually elected as such Members in the last General Election". The Senate, also retained, should have ten instead of the present eight Great Council of Chiefs' nominees, six instead of seven Prime Minister's, five instead of six Leader of the Opposition's, and one Council of Rotuma's as now. As for the Great Council itself, it required detailed reconstruction "permitting the natural leaders of the Fijian people to play a more active role in the welfare of their communities". The Governor-General must always be a Fijian high chief because "A Tui is the apex of a vanua hierarchy which intactly comprises land, people and heritage and it is an appointment that has an aura of sacred and mystical spell". (You could hear common soldiers in the streets saying the same). "The chiefly institution has been a strong stabilising factor in our plural society, when people try to meddle with it chaos can result", said Ratu Serupepeli. The same applied to the Prime Minister, which meant that the Minister for Fijian Affairs need not be a *Taukei ni Vanua* but the Chief Justice must be, and so must the Attorney-General, Director of Public Prosecutions, Governor of the Reserve Bank, Chief Executives of the Fiji Sugar Corporation and of the Civil Aviation authority and the Commissioner of Police. This was a moderate submission, again, by and large, as its author was aware: 'No doubt you will find in my submission that it was not influenced by that famous Indian pre-independence call "India for the Indians" because it created a river of blood on the sub-continent, but rather by a wise Muslim saying that says "If you rub my back, I will rub your back"'. And he had some immediate agreement from the submission by Prince Vyas Laksham, son of a former union leader and longtime pre-independence Indian Member of Legislative Council, who believed return to stability could be achieved by ensuring that "whichever political party which has the blessing of the Great Council of Chiefs will always be in political power"; this would, "in view of the deep-rooted respect and traditional allegiance of the Fijian people for their Chiefs and Chiefly Sys-

tem, bring about a solidarity amongst the Fijian people which will never be able to be infringed by any Fijian or any person or persons of any other race", while ensuring other communities their existing constitutional rights.

No change at all in a constitution that had provided seventeen years of stability, said Semiti Taoui, Fijian from Suva. Let the original Girmitiyas or indentured labourers be favourably remembered, said Saimone Tuisausau, Naitasiri school-teacher — the India-Fiji Girmit Council itself was asking that it alone should control Indian parliamentary representation — but let there be forty Fijian members and ten others. The Chairman of the Cicia District Council and Tui Cicia, representing the Island's 1267 people, wanted the constitution changed. The Rotuma Island Council, four hundred miles to the north, accepted the need for the military takeover and a new constitution, so long as there was special protection for Rotuma, including provision for Rotuma to secede on demand. The Rotuman community of western Viti Levu could not condone the illegal overthrow of the duly elected government by force of arms, nor support that government's non-alignment foreign policy either, nor its proposed creation of a body to control land above the Native Land Trust Board; and wanted the Crown link retained, reduction of or end to cross-voting, and more representation and autonomy for Rotuma. Fijians should have 39 seats, Indians eight, Rotumans one, General Electors four, submitted a Part-European General Elector, all to be communally elected. The Fijian principal of Nakauvadra Junior Secondary School wanted a Fijian majority. B. Prasad from Seaqaqa on Vanua Levu, in the heart of a cane-district, wanted equal land rights for all citizens. Mrs Lema Low wanted no political parties of any kind and only communal rolls. As for Anil Kumar: "I would strongly advise to you all to repatriate the Indians from Fiji. Let the blind lead the blind". "If any changes are to be made then one should bear in mind that we the Fiji born Indians should have an equal share of the national cake", according to a Labasa representative. And Muslim organisations and individuals largely wanted separate representation for themselves because, as they often said, they were "not Indian". S K Korocoiwa wanted predominance, as did Malakai Louwalu, both Fijians from country districts; and Samanunu Vudriabola from Tamavua, Suva, was of Taukei Movement frame of mind in requiring Sunday devoted entirely to the Christian God. So

was a Moala representative on the Great Council of Chiefs who added — "It is now time for the Fijians to wake up and work for their right and for the future of their children and grandchildren". He rang to say so the same day that the President of the Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group, a University of the South Pacific lecturer who since then has appeared to advocate the suppression of freedom of speech, on the principle of "academic freedom", led some 140 other signatories from the university, about 123 of them Indian, in arguing "no change" to the 1970 constitution on the grounds, human rights apart, that it was already feasible by normal legislative means to add to existing constitutional safeguards on Fijian ownership of 83 per cent of the land. Safeguards currently meant that Fijian ownership could not be changed without a 75 per cent majority in the House and the votes of six of the eight Great Council of Chiefs nominees in the Senate. The Great Council's membership can of course be manipulated by the government of the day.

The President of the General Electors' Association, writing next day, thought that this veto should probably be extended to a wider range of statutes affecting Fijian land, and possibly to Fijian political rights also. And the Grog, or *Yaqona*, Club of the Housing Authority — a government department remarkable for not collecting rents, if not for corruption, so the Army was to discover — recalled the dominance Indians had acquired in middle-range retail business and the professions by 1970, which had not encouraged Fijians to want independence at all; emphasised the naivety of harping on the alleged legislative safeguards, because "Basically, the survival of Fijian chiefly leadership and institutions and culture is at risk" and the Coalition had already downgraded the Minister of Fijian Affairs from Cabinet to Minister of State status; and insisted on the fundamental need to change the constitution because, "by placing the political rights of Fijians and Indians on an even pedal, it is the cause of present day problems". "It is destructive to Fijian culture and chiefly authority as not only is it divisive, through the concept of popular vote, it totally destroys Fijian consensus and dialogue, the very basis of Fijian political leadership". A Republic was the Housing Authority Grog Club's answer, with Fijian the official language but English a compulsory school subject, a lower house of 120 members of whom 22 should be communally elected Indians and 80 should be Fijians, elected from the 20 old provinces of 1945 but including one urban repre-

sentative for each province and one each who might, through his mother, be part-Fijian. "For continued Fijian solidarity... the Fijian chiefs should be encouraged to support a political grouping such as the Fijian Association or the Taukei Movement".

"I as an Indian can never live in Fiji again. If I were made a second Class Citizen of Fiji and if I found necessary I will sought help from India as my Mother land", wrote Ramendra Narayan from Sigatoka, uttering just the self-identification that underwrote much of the Fijians' own self-perception, not to say their perception of too many Indians as being "Fijian" only in the sense that they required equal access to land and power: their birth-right, as Indian submissions said.

G. C. Singh required the constitution, "The birthright of the whole nation", to continue to be "based on the solid grounds of *justice for all*"; but wanted changes to both Houses including 50 per cent of Senate seats reserved to Great Council of Chiefs nominees. Indar Singh wanted all land to be called Fijian land, agricultural rent to be lower than all other, and no-one to be called "Indian". And P and I Cokanasiga noted "that the strength of this nation does not merely lie in the land that Fijians own, nor the hard work and perseverance and dedication of our Indian community, but... firmly and squarely in the plurality of its population and humaneness of its people and intercommunity goodwill" — yet they still wanted change. Filed immediately after them, another Fijian wanted an immediate Republic, founded on revocation of the Deed of Cession, since it was at that point, 8 July 1987, doubtful whether the Coalition would even attend the review committee. There would be no parliamentary opposition; laws would be passed by consensus. Trade with Australasia must be reduced, with China, Malaysia, Japan increased. Thousands of Fijians thought and felt as he did. "Fiji to become a Republic is the **ONLY** solution!" Or as a Namata, Tailevu, man put it, at first with strict historical accuracy:

When the Indians were first brought to Fiji, they came here to work, but not to lead. They came for the economical and financial development of Fiji. There is no written agreement in any circumstances that they are to become leaders or members of Parliament or even to contest in any election of any kind for the nation at any time. So let the Indians make business or and develop lands which they lease as much as they can and make money, but they should not contest in any of the seats in the Parliament.

In the Deed of Cession Fiji was quoted to be always a Christian country. Why do the Indians bring their idol gods and Fiji has to give them special holidays to celebrate when we are having our living God who do not like any other God to be served other than himself.

By 15 July 1987 when as the representative of 244,388 Fijian Christians, vastly the majority in the Fijian population, the Methodist Church in Fiji made its own submission, 340 other groups, institutions and individuals had done so before it; and the Coalition viewpoint had received some support in them from individual Fijians who may well themselves have attended Methodist Church from sunrise until after sunset on *na Siga Tabu*, the Lord's Day. The "bloody Lauans" were to blame for the coup, wrote Iliesa from Lautoka, and "that Coward Mara" "should realise that he was defeated by public Majority". "You only made rich people more rich but nothing for the poor". But after all Ratu Mara was "a bloody Tongan", although he "is Jesus" to Fijians. As for the review committee's own secretary, the longtime public servant Lavinia Ah Koy, wife of an Alliance-supporting self-made millionaire, "Tell her to go and stay in the kitchen" — which perhaps indicates the Coalition's women's rights wing would have had their own difficulties even under their preferred government in implementing the constitutional improvements to women's legal status which their submission later required. Iliesa had other Coalition-supporting Fijian counterparts among mass signatories to multi-racial, predominantly Indian petitions from the sugar districts. A Fijian bank employee in Lautoka, writing individually, saw indigenous rights, in land and power both, as well enough protected by the present constitution; the Nasomo villagers whose claim to mineral rights below their freehold land Dr Bavadra had championed against Emperor Goldmines, on debatable legal grounds, likewise found that it "fully protects the rights of Fijians, regarding our land, our culture and traditions"; and six signatories from Ba province agreed with them. Neither change the constitution nor fail to return Dr Bavadra to power immediately, was another Fijian's demand from Ba, in the west. And a *turaga* — a chief — from Tunuloa, Cakaudrove province, in the east, wanted democracy restored and Christianity applied. "The present constitution... more than adequately provides for the rights of individuals in Fiji, irrespective of race, colour or religion, as persons with dignity and respect", to four other Fijians, while an elected member of the

former Ba provincial council, of the same opinion, hoped "your esteem committee will not be childish and be swayed by former upper echelon now Taukei Movement kind of thinking". "Remove Slavery Bondage of village laws by Chiefs, the only factor stopping Fijians to move into Business and Developments", wrote a critic of the so-called "communal system" who wanted an end to provincial taxes and freedom to lease land, under Native Land Trust Board oversight, regardless of the owning social unit's views. "If a government is toppled by a cue, no amnesty should be given to the cue leaders and his aides", wrote another Ba Fijian. "They should be hanged". And Simeone Ledua of Lautoka, a strong Alliance Party supporter until the coup, felt his country might now become as hated as South Africa for its racism. But they along with a man from Viseisei village, who was in opposition to an Alliance-supporting Viseisei *turaga*, were far in the minority of ethnic Fijians wanting to stand by the multi-racial principles of the 1970 constitution and content to rest on its entrenched clauses along with the Great Council of Chiefs' nominees' veto in the Senate to protect Fijian land ownership. And if the Methodist Church was later to split on the issue, but still with a large majority favouring Fijian predominance, Viseisei village, say, was split before the election, like Dr Bavadra's own circle of relations : it was one of Bavadra's nephews who was charged with setting fire to Reddy's law office. The majority in the church proved overwhelmingly against its multiracialist, New Testament President Rev Jiosateki Koroi, and sided with its General Secretary, the fundamentalist Rev Manasa Lasaro, who signed the church's submission to the review committee. "Except the Lord God build the house, they labour in vain who build it", so the church believed, said Lasaro. And, being evidently assured the Lord builds for Fijian Israelites, the church wanted 30 Fijians in the House, 22 Indians, eight others, with the Great Council of Chiefs' representatives in the Senate raised from eight to 13, at least three of whom should be high chiefs of the pre-session eastern-based confederacies of Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata ; and the Senate, for the rest, was to be composed of eight Indians, two General Electors, one Rotuman, and one Rabi Islander. Minimum rights must be guaranteed. Cross-cultural understanding must be fostered. And "based on the fundamental conviction that a just order is not necessarily founded on what is legally right, as this may appear in western forms of democracy, we ask for the

recognition and proper administration of customary ways of dealing with crime and criminal".

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Fiji for the Fijians — this had been and remained the theme-call of most Fijian submissions. "The Coalition Prime Ministership was never a Fijian guaranteed leader since the Coalition may and can, through a vote of no confidence among themselves remove the Prime Minister at anytime convenient to the members of the Indian dominated party", wrote Jone Naeqe Nakautoga from Lautoka, whose perception on the longstanding tension between the major races which had helped to make the National Federation Party hesitate to form a government when they won an election in April 1977 was profoundly accurate : "they were hesitant foreseeing the consequences of not having Fijian leadership". Or as the point was made, from the other side of the political spectrum, by the leader of the electorally extinguished small rump of the National Federation Party which had refused to go into the Coalition for the 1987 election : "We recognized the reality of the situation that, *race was a fact of life* and that all races in Fiji could not at this stage be *custom-blended* on ideological lines. In the heat of the election mood, our voices went unheard". And so there was "obvious Fijian resentment against "back-door" tactics adopted by the Indians in the 1987 Election". That phrase was apt. The tactics had been imperfectly concealed by the rhetoric of the many and the genuine idealism of the few. And the resentment continued to be made clear by submissions to the review committee, along with a new-found attachment to the Crown among Indian respondents and much expressed eagerness from them to join the Royal Fiji Military Forces. For its part, the Fiji Indian Alliance, rump that it now was, praised its leader Ratu Sir Kamisese for his multi-racial principles displayed over seventeen years of government — certainly part of the party's platform, and sufficiently displayed for him to incur Fijians' hostility, it could have said — and hoped any change would be through dialogue and to no individual or group's disadvantage.

Mainline NFP voters held fast. Labasa Indians were petitioning for the democratically elected Coalition parties to be put back and for "all people born in Fiji to be called Fijians and the laws of the land to be equally

spelled to all". "The Indians have worked hard to make Fiji what it was until May 14th, 1987... ", said Indian teachers of Baulevu High School, Nausori. "They have *never* ever encroached on any of Fijian land rights, customs, culture or tradition". "The success of this country is witness of our shedding of sweat, blood and tears in it and we should be treated equally", affirmed the Koronubu Indian community in the common litany in which no forebear was ever represented as having been anything but the duped victim of labour recruiters — unless it became convenient to instance the "Salisbury Despatch" of 1875, which had actually had no direct or legal as opposed to moral reference to Fiji, and was not accepted by the Government of India, nor marked on any indentured Indian emigrant's travel documents, as promising equal rights. The Ba family who felt Fijians should have eight more seats in the lower house were almost as exceptional as those Fijians who favoured the existing constitution. The more common Indian theme was that it "has worked satisfactorily for the last 17 years and provided security stability and peace in this peaceful country", from eleven members of the Malele Mahila Mandal at Tavua, in this instance; while deposed Deputy Speaker Dean with others reckoned Fijians were mere rentiers, overpaid for the land. The extreme case was put by Jaswant Singh from Suva:

Indians have worked hard to make Fiji what it is today. The economy of this Country is in the hands of Indians. As such the Indians should have greater representation in the parliament.

Indians were legally brought into Fiji whereas Fijians came here by chance. Since both races came from different places then no race can claim to be the indigenous race of Fiji. As such both Indians and Fijians have equal rights.

Fiji may have belonged to Fijians before 10th October 1874 but when it was ceded to Great Britain on this date the Fijians gave away their rights. After Independence all races living in Fiji have equal rights. Last but not least I want to make it very clear that we Indians were born here, will stay here and will die here. No one on this earth is going to remove us from our place of birth. If the Fijians cannot compete with the Indians and are envious of success then they should feel free to go and settle in the country of their choice. Probably Africa will accept them and we Indians have the money to compensate them.

But a fairly common cry in his community came with the immediately following submission,

number 382, from an evident cane farmer: he wanted not only interest-free loans and 50 per cent of Indians in the armed forces and Dr Bavadra put back in government, but 99-year leases. That was an ambition of 30 Ba farmers in submission 385, too. Another common cry from Indians was that Fijian land ownership was safe under existing legislation: a claim, going near though not quite to the heart of the issue, much taken up overseas, largely by commentators familiar with the letter of the constitution, which had actually been put at issue on the eve of the coup itself by a Coalition sympathiser writing from overseas who announced in the press that land tenure changes could in fact be carried out without a Senate majority²¹.

This issue was certainly more open to contention than the common superficial or politically involved commentary has allowed. On the one hand, as I have pointed out elsewhere, ALTA itself "has nothing to say about what happens when the thirty-year leases expire in the 1990s. Very well informed people believe interpretation of the compensation clauses — which might involve a landlord buying a tenant's irremovable concrete house — would be for political decision"²². So would extension of the leases, currently a matter of very grave anxiety to Indians. Dr Bavadra's Prime Ministerial Senate appointee, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice — not to say his barely-concealed *eminence gris* — Jai Ram Reddy, former leader and recurrent inspiration of the National Federation Party's more intransigent wing, had a particular constituency among farmers wanting longer leases. And legal opinion in the Native Land Trust Board, advanced in submission 386, was or claimed to be that the vital Section 68 of the constitution was open to circumvention by legal process under the Crown Acquisition of Land Act and the Local Government Act. These empowered the prescribed authorities to acquire land for "any public purpose" by application to the Supreme Court. And, said the NLTB's lawyer.

The decision whether or not to exercise these powers and what "public benefits" are to be promoted by such acquisition very much depends on the policies of the Government of the day. For instance, two weeks after assuming office, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests in the deposed government announced that his Government was going to "acquire" land for reafforestation purposes. Although it was not disclosed in that press release,

21. *Fiji Sun*, 28 April 1987; *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 59-60.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

it is a foregone conclusion that only native land can accomodate such a programme as reafforestation.

The Supreme Court would be the arbiter — but perhaps the NLTB legal expert's confidence in the courts was reduced because, as he pointed out, in 1985 the Court of Appeal had ruled that the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act must be upheld in its section 58 (2), which made the Native Land Trust Board's own discretion in "the granting or withholding of consent to alienate or deal with native leaseholds" subject to the decisions of the Agricultural Tribunal; while several of the nine statutes reserved in section 68 of the constitution itself for alteration only by a Council of Chiefs' Senate majority, enabled the executive to make regulations with the force of law which, without any need for parliamentary approval, had already, under Alliance governments, dealt "in detail with important matters such as the form and term of leases, distribution of rents and purchase monies, re assessment of rent, conditions and covenants implied in a lease, renewal of leases, resumption of possession, arbitration and other matters". In short, to a lawyer, as to Dr James Anthony writing in the newspapers pre-coup, government might have wider discretion in land matters than was immediately clear if section 68 was taken at face value. And so, according to this writer, Etuate Vugakoto Tavai, one of the few Fijian lawyers, himself from western Viti Levu :

If the present Constitution is not changed, the nominees of the Great Council of Chiefs in the Senate could find themselves holding-section 68 of the Constitution while Fijian land is being taken away from under their feet.

Section 68 is not really as protective of Fijian interests as many people would like us to believe.

In fact, the Crown Acquisition of Land Act and the Local Government Act do seem to provide the possibility of finding loopholes in section 68, given the notorious unpredictability of courts; but the regulations that could be issued under the Native Land Trust Act, which he was referring to here, are surely controlled by the purposes of the Act itself, which are fairly narrowly governed by the phrase "for the benefit of the Fijian people". Either way, some of the Native Land Trust Board's staff were distinctly hawkish. Tavai's solicitor confrère, Kitone Vuataki, agreed and added that there were other lands, not covered by section 68 at all, which Fijians considered as their own — including land that now

reverted to the Crown when the owning *mataqali* became extinct but should, according to much Fijian thinking, go instead to the *yavusa* of which the *mataqali* was a constituent; and land unclaimed before successive Native Lands Commissions; and even some freeholds, like the land where the capital stands, which Fijians still regarded as improperly acquired by the Crown or inequitably awarded to European claimants by the colonial government's lands claims commission in the 1880s.

The club is now covered by emblems of peace and Ratu Seru Cakobau said that he had laid down the old to take up the new — which is the rule of law. This is the new club that will be used and if it fails the old club will be taken up again. The only difference is that it will not be a club — it will be an M16A2 or better.

A local replication of the Waitangi Tribunal of New Zealand would be the best outcome, he continued; and it would have to look also into the whole, to Fijians anomalous, question of Crown ownership of foreshore and reef, minerals and offshore fishing rights; while unless Fijian rights in intellectual property like traditional motifs were recognised, businesses trading in them would be burned down.

That was the climate in which, in the following submission, number 388, the Suva Retailers' Association and Suva Indian Chamber of Commerce begged for a government of national unity followed perhaps by a royal commission and a referendum on constitutional change; and the Indian-dominated Fiji Teachers Union, in 389, urged emendation to the constitution to the extent that all of the Great Council of Chiefs' nominees' consent should be required for change to the land clauses — and parity in the armed forces. This was not to the taste of the Fijian writing for the Scripture Union who, following on, additionally required the Great Council to be given right of veto over the Senate and the Governor General too, along with strengthening of the chiefly system, protection of all races' constitutional rights, and possibly increase in Fijian representation in the lower house by eight seats, along with "justice and fairness in the treatment of peoples of all races in the country". And three Fijians signing on behalf of "the Fijian members of the Suva Branch of the Labour-NFP Coalition" wanted eleven Great Council nominees in the Senate, though a proposition that only chiefs should sit in parliament struck them as retrogressive; as urban dwellers, they opposed the desire of provincial

councils to appoint members to the lower house; and the Army should go back to barracks. Dr Bavadra's strength in Rewa province, and even in a wide cross-section of the associated Burebasaga confederacy — according to another submission's writer, a former deputy chairman of the Rewa provincial council, though he wrote from Lautoka — was summed up in the comment that: "it would be an insult to the intelligence, integrity and self-worth of the Fijians as a people to obtain majority representation in Parliament if this engineered politically". This signatory probably represented other Fijians who would have agreed with the next submission, from the Fiji Girmit Centenary Council, owners of the Girmit Centre in Lautoka where Bavadra had held his major Labour Party meetings, in holding that the Fijian "leaders and the Council of Chiefs must critically study, evaluate, recognise and bring about changes to those traditions and/or culture which are not compatible with modern and progressive aspirations of their people". According to the Girmit Council, representing in its own eyes a hundred years of Indian endeavour in Fiji, this prescription meant that Fijians individually "will have to ... become self motivated, exercise self discipline, hard work and perseverance in anything they undertake". And Dr Bavadra's own submission was clear: the Taukei Movement which was rejecting the 1970 constitution outright actually "represents elements who are being used by vested interests to maintain their elitism through control and influence of politics in this Country. This is the real reason" — for the coup, that is — "and we all know it".

The "vested interests" of the "eastern aristocracy", he meant — to doubt, on rational grounds as against ideology, the overwhelming influence, greed and all-pervading wickedness of which, as almost the entire explanation for the coup, was to become its mouthpiece, according to some of his more ardent ex-parliamentary and university supporters. But Fijian respondents at large overwhelmingly thought that they, as the indigenous people, had the right to rule the country, whether they approved of the coup or not. They did not display overwhelming trust in Dr Bavadra's independence or political judgement, either. And they had very likely been hearing from counterparts of the Labasa Indian who demanded "more seats to the Indians as they are the backbone of the Country" and "give Indians more land rights so that Indians will have more interest to invest in the Country". Other Indian respondents wanted all crown

land and any land reclaimed to be given to Indians on a long term basis as a priority. In fact, of course, it was the Indians' sense that they controlled the economy that had blinded them all along to the possibility of a military coup. According to longstanding theory and much recent political rhetoric, there should have been heavy emphasis from Fijian respondents, particularly literate and critical because educated Fijians, on the shortcomings of the *turaga* or chiefs at large. And a particularly egalitarian ethos should have come from western Viti Levu which Dr Bavadra — himself a small *turaga* as a *tokatoka* head, and drawing support too in virtue of his wife's rank not only in Navosa but also, matrilineally, in the east — liked to portray as Melanesian, or "egalitarian", in contrast to the "aristocratic" Polynesian east. Certainly, easterners had long done very well in jobs, not least because schooling was concentrated there, partly as a result of local initiative early this century. And certainly there had never in the recorded history of Fijian societies been any want of complaint against individual members of the elite, eastern or western. *Turaga* had become far less amenable to commoners' opinion once the final sanction, revolt, was largely though not entirely removed by British rule, post-1875; and less able to fill leadership roles, apparently, post World War II, when leadership required modern scholastic education. But review committee respondents were far less likely to dwell on chiefs' shortcomings than to insist on traditional values — even when, occasionally, like the Coalition-supporting K S Qiqiwaqa, they believed that a Coalition government would have had to bid as hard for Fijians' support as the Alliance in its 17 years of government had bid for Indians'; or when the Fijian member of a multi-racial triumvirate believed traditional leaders should not be exposed to political currents and, by implication, indignities, but should stay out of politics.

It was a *turaga* very active in the world, sometime civil servant, present cane farmer, who insisted, in terms much heard around the country, that "land people and culture are inseparable and inalienable from each other" and that "the chief is the embodiment of the VANUA". But it was a member of the *lewewanua*, the commoners, familiar with Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock*, who wrote that "the Fijian people must always have the political leadership, the type that is part of their way of life, i. e. through communal, tribal and chiefly leadership". And the Fijian Teachers

Association — which wanted 42 indigenous Fijian and four Indian members in the reconstructed House of Representatives — was for the Senate to be replaced by a House of Chiefs, with all 22 members belonging to the Great Council of Chiefs. As for the *yavusa* Dogotuki, of Macuata, on Vanua Levu, numbering they said about a thousand Fijians, they wanted not just the upper house but the lower house and the cabinet to be composed entirely of chiefs — with well-educated Fijians to help them in their deliberations.

Against the heavy weight of Fijians opinion expressed in these written submissions, then, there was little hope for the Indians who pressed common roll as the answer; nor for the massed Indian petitions from Ba for longer ALTA leases; nor, again, for the concerted Hindi petitions from Labasa urging reinstatement of the Coalition government, any person at all to be eligible to be Governor-General, multiracial Army recruitment, and asking that “Those born in this country should be called “Fijians” and every person should have equal rights under the laws relating to land matters”. Nor was there much shared perception revealed in Fijian submissions for the images of multi-racial harmony projected by another Indian common roll enthusiast — a second generation descendant of indentured labourers speaking, he said, for people around Vitogo in western Viti Levu, farmers on ten acre Native leases, intermarried with Fijians, lending bullocks and horses to Fijians until tractors were introduced, learning Fijian traditional medicines, accepting election results with good grace, possessing no assets but the leased farms they now feared they might lose, and being “made into scapegoats for the failure of the indigenous Fijians in business and farming”.

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There was, again, then, no great upsurge of the multiracial feeling the Fiji Labour Party theorists, in particular, had based their excursion into national politics on, to be found in the 830 written submissions to the constitution review committee. The Back to Early May Movement — with its belief in a multi-racial Fiji, a national government formed from the present parliament, the Army returned to barracks, a royal commission into the 1970 constitution and any changes to be put to a referendum — proved by the nature of the signatures it acquired that about as few Fijians believed in this course of action as had voted

for the Coalition in the first place. With very few people remaining anonymous in their submissions, there was no great upsurge of working class fervour for the Coalition expressed, say, from the Raiwai-Raiwaqa working-class housing estates on the outskirts of Suva, either. Nor was there much pressure for preference to be given to the western cane belts which some self-confessed experts overseas were predicting might even want to break away from the rest of Fiji. Four western Viti Levu Fijians living in Raiwai wanted Nadroga to Ra to have the preponderance of Fijian seats, for economic reasons; a Fijian Prime Minister from the west; and electoral equality for Indians in recognition of their good citizenship and economic skills. But shrill racial animosity came from the Fijian Youth Movement, Raiwaqa, with a clear underlying resentment at Indian economic success, urban professional affluence in particular.

And the one thing on which the two broad, ethnically defined sides opposed to each other on the constitutional question were agreed, was that the political solution espoused by Fijians at large was not in itself an answer to what the Fijians accurately identified as their economic inferiority. There was no Fijian entrepreneur writing in to say, like the Coalition minister Navin Maharaj, that their businesses had contracted under the impact of the trade bans and the general loss of confidence following the coup. In fact the consensus among Fijian respondents who dealt directly with the economic issue was that to compete — so the matter was largely conceived — Fijians required positive economic discrimination in their favour, underpinning their proposed parliamentary majority and control of key portfolios.

This was very much part of submission 402, the Taukei Movement's, which stereotyped racial attitudes in terms echoed in some Indian submissions too :

... Indians are individuals with greatest loyalty to the self in pursuit of material gain, and show little respect for anyone who tries to obstruct their intention. On the other hand, Fijians are devoted to their communal social structure with obedience and respect for their chiefs, and their loyalty to authority is generally unquestionable.

It drew on or itself influenced a draft endorsed in part by the Lau provincial council — their subcommittees had overlapping personnel, which did not mean the Taukei leaders were by any means Lauan-dominated — rejecting democratic principles because

a democracy does not guarantee the paramountcy of Fijian interests, rights, and aspirations. It however, provides this guarantee to the interests, rights and aspirations, of non-Fijians. This situation has arisen in Fiji because the two principal ideals of democracy — *liberty* (or freedom) and *equality* are foreign values, and are indeed contrary to the Fijian way of life where liberty exists only within one's own social rank and equality is strictly constrained by a fully developed social hierarchy.

The contrast between democracy and the values of the Fijian way of life is much too strong for the former to be the basis of Government in Fiji. In practice, democracy has meant the subservience of Fijian indigenous values, customs and tradition to the foreign values of democracy.

The Taukei Movement, then, wanted "to place as the foundation of our political, social and economic life and enshrine in our supreme law the constitution, the culture, tradition and values of the *Taukei*... Fiji must be Fijianised". Foreign values had led to the slow disintegration of Fijian society : a society which "although moulded by changes within Fijian society is unadulterated by reference or comparison to any other original source" — except Christianity, evidently, since Christian values were also to be enshrined in the new state's foundation. The chiefly system was to be a basis of national leadership, balanced by a leadership code ; only companies with majority Fijian shareholding were to be exempt from the prohibition on issuing new leases to land to non-Fijians and every future commercial venture must have 40 per cent Fijian ownership ; an institute similar to Malaysia's MARA institute must be set up to assist Fijian participation in the economy ; and the new constitution itself "should spell out a policy to achieve this purpose" by ensuring that political control would always be with Fijians. There should be an Upper House, *Bose Vaka Turaga*, composed of chiefs or their nominees or elected members with complete power of veto ; and the *Mata Ni Vanua* or Lower House should be elected from the 20 old provinces, with candidates representing only their provinces and membership of social units as named in the Native Land Register comprising the electoral roll. This meant town dwellers would need to maintain links with their natal provinces, to be elected, and was calculated to put paid to the chances of most of the Fiji Labour Party's indigenous candidates. As the submission had it :

A particular benefit of provincial voting is that it will discourage the development of party politics. Such political developments fester in urban areas.

The close family and traditional relationships that form the basis of the Vanua or old province will tend to frustrate party politics.

Legislation would require a 70 per cent majority — and submission 402 made no provision for any parliamentary representation but Fijian.

The drafters of submission 402 were themselves, at a guess, urban dwellers and often university graduates, though they were writing with as much reactive resentment as practical foresight ; but it was a senior Fijian civil servant, a moderate man, whose submission put the fundamental question — "should Fiji be more Fijian or should it become more Indian ? Put another way, the question can be, should Fiji promote a Fijian image or an Indian image ?" His answer was a House of Representatives with fourteen Fijians representing the new provinces, four Fijians for Suva and Lautoka, eight Great Council of Chiefs nominees, 20 Indian members, four General Electors, one member each for Rotuma and Rabi ; a Fijian majority in the Senate including at least three high chiefs of Kubuna, Burebasaga and Tovata ; and resuscitation of the aborted 1971 proposal for a Fijian Development Institute because, as he said, "the higher the rate of economic growth in Fiji the greater appears to be, the gap in Fijian participation in the economic sector" — and "political power and numbers alone, will not ultimately produce the results sought by the Fijians".

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This was precisely the line of thought in a background paper that had been put up by the Alliance Party to the National Federation Party during the 1969-1970 negotiations leading to independence under the now repudiated constitution : "They used to be poor men in a poor country ; now they are poor men in a relatively rich country". This paper had made the warning very clear even then, seventeen years before the coup :

Today, the Maori people stand as political and economic underdogs in their own country. The Fijians would resent such development in their own country. It appears that their main grievance in this period of political awakening relates to the fact that their status is falling from that of a nation to that of a mere community wherein they would have to take a place along with the others.

It was a mark of the Alliance's early commitment to multiracialism that, with its enabling bill already printed, the Fijian Development

Institute was dropped. It was too reminiscent of Malaysia's own determination to advance indigenous Malays at the expense of Chinese, which had in fact inspired it. On the same multiracial principle the Alliance's strongest campaigners, Ratu Mara among them, had been away seeking more Indian votes in the west during the 1987 election itself, neglecting Suva where the Alliance could have won and to some Indians' private derision. And it was in parallel with the highly regulatory Alliance policies, with their emphasis on import substitution, from which Indian merchants profited, that marketing strategies in the agricultural sector benefited mainly sugar, which with its assured Lomé-guaranteed markets remained after tourism the bedrock of the economy. The rest of the rural economy was stagnating. And the bulk of Fiji's cane farmers were still Indian, with the *Taukei* or landowners drawing rents that were in many cases reckoned below market rate (and have been raised post-coup by a multiracial committee sitting in the ordinary, routine course). The Native Land Trust Board's statutory division of 30 per cent of rents to three levels of chiefs, 25 per cent for its own administrative costs and the remaining 45 per cent to individual members of the owning *mataqali*, has long been reckoned to give too little to the ordinary Fijian and was due for revision, according to Coalition promises. But there was not a great deal to divide in the first place, comparatively speaking : or \$F6,726,000 in rents and royalties in 1986²³. And there was little probability the Coalition government would have found it politically possible, even if it had been eager, to raise rents — without concessions from lessors to lessees under some such amendment, or, to them, favourable extension of ALTA's lease conditions, as so many of the Indian cane farmer respondents writing to the constitution review committee wanted. Copra, always the main Fijian village cash crop, had been moribund for years, whether international markets were favourable or not. And while *yaqona* has a fairly assured local market, cocoa, ginger and tobacco are chancy items internationally in the relatively small quantities Fiji can produce. They in no sense rank with sugar even though they do provide incentive for individual Fijians to move from nucleated village life, not to swell the ranks of the urban unemployed and, conceivably, generally disaffected, but to become lessors of the land of their own or other *mataqali*. This they often do infor-

mally rather than via the cumbersome NLTB bureaucracy — bringing themselves closer in economic ambition and, in landholding terms, insecurity, to their Indian brethren ; sharing seasons and labour with them, and even kin-ties occasionally ; but with absolutely no certainty, as has been seen, that they would vote for the NFP or Coalition with them. Since 15.30 per cent of Indians voted for the Alliance, some of these rural Indians were actually following their Fijian friends' political preference. Either way, the fact was that, however many economic and vestigial caste divisions it is possible to discern in or construct for the Indian community — varying as it does from, say, Gujerati shopkeeper to Sikh cane farmer to the individuals who had lost track of their forebears — still the greater part of the Indian community felt and actually asserted its sense of being Indian, sometimes of being actually banished, and voted accordingly. That meant — for the National Federation Party and for their sense of their inalienable bithright, equality, which included the right to rule.

When they voted for the NFP-Labour Coalition in April 1987 they had, presumably, some expectation too of the increased prosperity promised, first, in the Fiji Labour Party's manifestos and then in the joint Coalition electioneering manifesto. The latter, they may have noticed, dropped the profitable Indian-owned bus companies from the Labour Party's initial ritual enthusiasm for nationalisation. But they would surely have been disappointed on the economic front generally, as would the Coalition's small share of Fijian voters too, if the new government had actually kept to the promises which had won it the election — which, again, the policy speech it produced for the opening of parliament indicated it was hardly going to do. Pre-election policies would have undermined an economy that was actually recovering, and with all its limitations, was basically sound, though hampered by the relatively high wages it was constrained to pay to the Fiji Labour Party's own major constituents — the urban salaried workers and, specifically, the members of the highly political Public Service Association. In short, this was middle-class doctrinaire socialism of the 1960s rampant but not much expecting to win the election, and faced with promises very difficult to fulfil. As economists long familiar with Fiji put it :

Expectations of immediate increases in the standard of living were being raised without regard to econo-

23. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

mic realities. The beneficiaries, moreover, would have been largely middle income urban ethnic Indians. Ethnic Fijians and poor "underclass" ethnic Indians would probably not have benefited ²⁴.

The same lack of homogeneity is sometimes alleged for the Fijian community, too, though usually by those seeing with the eye of faith significant political divisions between western and eastern Fiji, Lauans and most others, chiefs and commoners. The geographical or so-called "tribal" issue raises internal grumbling but causes no more than tactical manoeuvring within the Fijian community — which is a real entity. As to the "class" issue, I have suggested elsewhere.

The chiefs represented, and even embodied, fertility gods, before the Western world intervened last century. Ancient methods of enforcing accountability have been lost. Nowadays, Fijians tend to say they "respect" their chiefs. Quite often the respect is paid more to the institution than the particular individual. And sometimes exception taken to individuals has been seen as exception to the system. The reality was rather that to attack the system was to be seen to attack the society. In the old days, Europeans had always done this, facing Fijians with their chiefs' shortcomings and proposing to take their place as national leader. In the 1987 election the Coalition had done the same. Each time, the effort was self-defeating ²⁵.

When Ratu Mara had the chairman Ratu Viliame Toganivalu call up the Great Council of Chiefs, with its hundred or so hereditary members and delegates, *turaga* and *lewenivanua* both, in May 1987, because under pressure from the judges the Governor-General seemed to be backing away from endorsing the coup, the greater part of the Fijian community at large saw this council as the proper forum to debate and decide the issue. The "natural locus of sovereignty", the Taukei Movement called it in a warning letter to the Indian High Commissioner on 7 August 1987. The Fijian parliamentary leaders of the Labour Party went along to be heard too, probably with almost equal scepticism on both sides — though one of them immediately afterwards seemed to believe he had won support for his view that chiefs should stay out of politics. One of the more liberal minded invitees to the last meeting of the council, pre-election, which had shouted down Dr Bavadra, was excluded this time. National crisis tended to override the common and well-founded sense that, with

primogeniture established by British colonialism, and the absolute requirement on chiefs to perform removed, too few have risen to the modern occasion, and too many have made merely an ornament of rank that their forebears had been obliged to earn. The mistake had been to write them off too soon, even to the extent of ignoring the clear warning issued by the Great Council in 1982 : after a hard-fought election, with bloodshed being authoritatively predicted in private if the Alliance lost, the Great Council had demanded constitutional change to give Fijians 75 per cent membership of the lower house.

The Fijian community at large had already been accorded privileges by the national community — for instance in Fiji-Indians' own chosen area of particular achievement, education, through access to scholarships for Fijians beyond demonstrated achievement. They had not much risen to these opportunities, judging by examination results. But any self-accusatory reflections they may have been indulging in did nothing to reduce their own sense of insecurity when, say, Bavadra successfully begged Reddy to fulfil all Ratu Mara's public predictions, take a Senate seat and become Attorney-General and Minister for Justice — with Indian tenant farmers seeking access to Crown land and longer, if not unending ALTA leases behind him ; or when the Fijian Affairs portfolio appeared to be downgraded ; or when the Coalition's supporter Dr Anthony told them through the local press that their ownership of the land could indeed be changed without going to the Senate. The Taukei Movement leaders were in fact divided among themselves whether this was so or not ; and so may lawyers be. It was not an issue a sensitive government would have put to the issue but the Coalition, unexpectedly elected and rejoicing, was promising over the radio to use all the powers of the state against marchers ; was actually using law and police to punish the Tavua roadblockers when conciliation had already cleared the road ; and called out the army to watch the march through Suva. It did not actually much demonstrate conciliation, and it was an Indian government in electoral backing, finance, and leadership experience, in a country whose Indian politicians, determined to enforce their own sense of their birthright, were equally conscious that Indian emigration and a falling Indian birth-rate would by the late 1990s have reduced

24. Rodney COLE and Helen HUGHES, *The Fiji Economy, May 1987 : problems and prospects* (Canberra, 1988), p. 6.

25. *Politics of Illusion*, xv.

Indian electoral preponderance and reduced their chances too or removed them. In 1985 Bavadra himself, as Assistant Director of Primary and Preventative Health Services, had ascribed the higher Fijian birthrate to the fact that "The Fijians, especially in rural areas, are afraid of political domination by other races" ²⁶. The only thing that had changed between then and 14 May 1987 was that disenchanted Alliance members and their people in the Army had decided to put an end to that fear, as they hoped, for ever — or as far into the future as constitutional change backed by increased economic advantages if not entrenched economic privileges for the *Taukei ni Qele* could ensure Fijian dominance.

When the political objects seemed likely later that year to be compromised by the Deuba Accord, reached between political leaders, Alliance, Labour and National Federation whom many people regarded as politically dead, the Army intervened again with 25 September's almost automatic second coup; but only to discover that running the country according to something like extreme Taukei Movement principles was potentially dangerous, on several fronts, and then in December to bring back the two high chiefs Ratu Penaia and Ratu Mara ²⁷. That, said some Fijians privately, had been the sole object of the first coup anyway. In the background, though, still stands the Army — *Royal Fiji Military Forces* no longer

since Ratu Sir Penaia's sense of honour and obligation to the Queen led him to resign as Governor-General after the second coup, effectively putting Fiji outside the British Commonwealth. And the Army may be willing to move back in again, whatever national reception may be given to the new Fijian-dominated constitution, when time has finally removed these two elderly statesmen, both over 70 years old now. But the opportunity — and as some Fijians saw it, the need — for the Army to move in the first place, was given by the fundamental political miscalculation represented by the very naive neophyte Fiji Labour Party's going into coalition with the ambitious and embittered National Federation Party and, predictably, carrying such slight ethnic Fijian backing into government with them. Concern that the Alliance would restrict union powers reportedly encouraged the FLP into the Coalition — which is to say, concern essentially for its own well-paid white collar urban constituents. Class was otherwise a red herring. And to believe that a community which saw itself as a nation would accept to be ruled by less than ten per cent of its own number in tow of the mass of another community whom it often distrusted and sometimes disliked, verged upon fantasy. The poverty of theory when imposed upon rather than springing from observation was exposed once more.

26. Quoted, *The Fiji Economy*, p. 19.

27. *Politics of Illusion*, pp. 129-143.