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Journal of Pacific History Inc

The Fiji General Election of 1977

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Source: *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1977), pp. 189-201

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25161057>

Accessed: 19-10-2015 00:45 UTC

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PACIFIC

The Fiji General Election of 1977*

AT THE END OF NOMINATION DAY, 3 MARCH, 132 CANDIDATES HAD ENTERED THE contest for the 52 seats in Fiji's elected House of Representatives. The ruling Alliance nominated candidates for 52 seats, the National Federation party (NFP) for 35, and the newly formed Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) for 17 seats. The NFP chose not to contest any of the Fijian or General Elector communal seats and two of the national seats: one Fijian and one Indian. The FNP had candidates for nine of the 12 Fijian communal seats and eight for Fijian national roll seats. Five candidates, all Alliance, were returned unopposed: the Prime Minister, three of his ministerial colleagues (two Fijians and an Indian) and a General Elector back-bencher.

The campaign officially began with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's address over Radio Fiji on 28 February.¹ His request was that the people of Fiji should return his party to power because it had fulfilled its promise of 'peace, progress and prosperity' and in the next five 'testing years' would consolidate its achievements on the basis of 'share and care'. The source of the Alliance's policy would be Development Plan VII (1976-80) which Ratu Kamisese described as 'a dynamic, realistic programme . . . geared to make the whole of the country better off, it aims in particular at assisting those who live in the rural areas and the outer islands'. He emphasized that greater food production would be encouraged and dwelt on his party's record at home and abroad. In this context he mentioned gradual introduction of free education, growth of rural junior secondary schools, the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (1976), Lomé Convention and the Law of the Sea Conferences. He argued that his party had promoted racial harmony: 'We believe in harmony and maintain and promote it for its own sake, and for the happiness and well-being of our people'.

In conclusion he asked for support for the officially endorsed Alliance candidates and stated: 'The Alliance has no intention whatsoever of forming a coalition with any other party, whether it be NFP, FNP, or any other, after the election'.

The address was delivered in a quiet manner but was a clear indication of where the Alliance would take the country if returned to office. It was an appeal to the minds of the people to allow continuity; it was not the offer of a programme to fire people's imagination by advocating change.

Two nights later when Mr Siddiq Koya spoke on behalf of the NFP his approach was different. His speech was a relentless criticism of the Alliance's policies and record but he provided no alternative programme. His address also

* The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of: the U.S.P. Research Committee for funds; Messrs Shiu Singh, Jai Kumar and Ambika Maharaj of Radio Fiji; numerous individuals, including politicians, all of whom provided information and comments without which this paper could not have been written. The views expressed here are, of course, the author's sole responsibility.

¹ Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's speech was published in the *Fiji Times*, 1 Mar. 1977, and Mr Koya's in the issue of 3 Mar. Mara broadcast his speech over Radio Fiji in English and Fijian and it was translated into Hindi; Koya spoke in English and Hindi and his address was translated into Fijian.

contained a special appeal to the Indian community, the majority of whom supported his party. Koya accused the Alliance of failing 'to give an effective and an appropriate assurance to the Indian community' when in October 1975 Mr Sakiasi Butadroka had unsuccessfully moved a motion in Parliament calling for the repatriation of all Fiji citizens of Indian parentage. He added that the Alliance had failed 'to bring about a sense of nationalism among our people and to make them feel that Fiji is their permanent home'. In his final campaign address, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara did however state that the Alliance would not consider proposals such as Butadroka's since they were 'inhuman and intolerable'.

Koya condemned the Alliance for not solving the land problem and ignoring requests 'to embark on a comprehensive plan to reclaim land on a large scale'. He denounced the existing tax structure as excessively burdening 'the middle classes and rural dwellers'. The Alliance record in industrial relations, welfare, education, and its handling of strife at the Emperor Gold Mines were all attacked.

In his turn Mr Sakiasi Butadroka of the FNP concentrated his appeal solely on Fijians.² He set out to convince them that independence had undermined their constitutional rights and denied them adequate control over their country since they possessed only 22 out of 52 seats in the Lower House. For him 'foreigners' ruled Fiji, thus there was 'uncertainty and fear amongst the Fijian people' who were lagging behind others in all spheres of life in Fiji. His party's programme adopted at its convention in December 1976 read:

The interests of the Fijians will be paramount at all times.

The Fijians must always hold the positions of Governor-General, Prime Minister, Minister for Fijian Affairs and Rural Development, Minister for Lands, Minister for Education, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Commerce Industry and Co-operatives.

More opportunities should be given for Fijians to enter business and commerce.

Total opposition to common roll.

Strengthen Fijian Administration and the Government should give it financial backing and support.

Establishment of a Fijian Institute to teach Fijians in business.

Pensions for ex-servicemen.

Indians should be repatriated to India after Fiji gained full independence.

More Government development projects should be concentrated in rural areas.

Expansion of the Royal Fiji Military Forces' trade section to help ease unemployment.

The return to Fijians of all land that was illegally sold.³

At the end of the first week of the campaign it seemed that the 1977 General Election might be one without any significant issues. But this soon proved not to be the case. There developed, in fact, two elections: one between the traditional rivals, Alliance and the NFP, among Indians, and the second, between the Alliance and the FNP, among Fijians. The Alliance found itself attacked on two flanks, one expected, the other unexpected, and with a ferocity it had completely underestimated. In the end the second proved to be of greater consequence for the Alliance.

² Sakiasi Butadroka broadcast his appeal in Fijian only and refused to provide Hindi and English translations. Subsequently Radio Fiji broadcast an English summary of his comments to enable a discussion of it in one of its election campaign programmes.

³ *Fiji Times*, 20 Dec. 1976.

On the surface the Alliance appeared the best organized: it had a central campaign headquarters as well as three others at district level, all manned by persons of wealth and experience and at least \$100,000 to spend, an amount collected well in advance. The NFP had been bedevilled for some time by factionalism and the differences were patched for the General Election, but the antagonism between rivals remained and was consistently given prominence by the press. The FNP, a newcomer, seemed to have no source of funds beyond the ordinary people who supported it. Nobody took the independent candidates seriously as they had been of no consequence either in the 1972 General Election or in a number of town council elections where, too, party politics were becoming entrenched.

Yet the final results, available after two weeks of polling and two days of counting, surprised most people. The Alliance lost nine seats: seven to NFP, one to FNP and one to an independent. It found its Indian support reduced from 24% in 1972 to 16%. Its Fijian support fell from nearly 83% in 1972 to about 67%.⁴ What was most significant was that FNP had collected 25% of the Fijian votes cast and in doing so it had destroyed the Alliance monopoly of Fijian communal seats established in 1966 and consolidated in 1972. Only among the General Electors had the Alliance remained untroubled. The three communal seats had all come to the Alliance again: one without a contest, the second with a token fight, and the third with some anxiety because of internal strife. The final tally read: 26 for NFP, 24 Alliance, one FNP, one Independent.

The defeat of the Alliance might best be explained by examining briefly each constituency where loss resulted and then commenting on the general causes.

One might begin with the adjacent Fijian communal seats of Rewa-Serua-Namosi and Nadroga-Navosa. In the first, Butadroka (FNP) polled 4,640 against Tomasi Vakatora's (All) 4,044, with 221 votes being informal. Butadroka obtained a majority of 596 in a constituency where 3,354 or 28.5% of those on the electoral roll did not come to vote, but the percentage polled here (71.5%) was a little better than the average of 70.9% poll for the Fijian communal seats. But in Nadroga-Navosa, where an independent, Ratu Osea Gavidi (3,709), unseated an Alliance minister, Peniame Naqasima (2,886), with Apakuki Sasaroka (FNP) getting 572 votes and 246 being informal, the poll was 59.69%, the lowest among the Fijian communal constituencies. Gavidi was a popular local chief, like Naqasima a university graduate, but with a record of achievement particularly in the pine plantation scheme.

The other losses sustained by the Alliance were in national roll seats. In the Fijian seat in the South Eastern constituency, Fiji's former ambassador to the United Nations and a very experienced politician, Semesa Sikivou, standing for the Alliance polled 7,540 to Ro Asela Logavatu's (NFP) 8,726 and Jone Kama's (FNP) 4,493, with 744 informal. Sikivou lost by 1,186 votes where in 1972 the Alliance had defeated Logavatu by fewer than 200 votes. The Alliance candidate and sitting member, K. S. Reddy, in the Indian seat in the same constituency lost by 120 votes: Reddy 8,942, Kanhai (NFP) 9,062, informal 3,378 (mainly Fijian votes). The FNP had in this constituency deprived the Alliance of those Fijian

⁴ For a study of the 1972 Fiji General Election see the present author's article on the subject in the *Journal of Pacific History*, VIII (1973), 171-80.

votes which had been essential for giving it national seats and thereby keeping it in power. The beneficiary of the FNP tactics was not the FNP itself but the NFP.

The Alliance was similarly affected in the North Eastern constituency. The sitting member and cabinet minister, Sakiasi Waqanivalagi who in 1972 had won the seat with 52.5% of the votes, in 1977 could only poll 7,451 or 36.3% while his rivals Vukitu (FNP) obtained 2,417 (11.8%) and Naco (NFP) 10,018 (48.7%), with 669 (3.2%) informal. And the poll percentage which in 1972 had been 89 was down to 81 in 1977, again to the disadvantage of the Alliance. In the Indian seat the Alliance lost by 523 votes: Bajpai (All) 8,936, Ram Narain (Indep) 491 and C. A. Shah (NFP) 9,459, with 1,669 informal. While in 1972 the Alliance had obtained 57.5% of the votes to NFP's 40.5%, in 1977 the NFP increased its share to 46%, enough for victory, while the Alliance's share diminished to 43.5%. Again in 1977 the large number of informal Fijian votes had worked to the Alliance's detriment. These two seats Alliance knew would be close but it could have retained both but for the advent of FNP and a lower poll than in 1972.

The personal popularity of the Alliance contestants in 1972 for the North Central seats had been important if not crucial in giving them narrow victories. Again the Alliance recognized at the outset that the 1977 results might be different. The sitting members failed to win. For the Fijian seat, cabinet minister Josua Toganivalu received 8,054 (36.9%) votes, Tuiwainikai (NFP) 11,886 (54.4%) and Walisoliso (FNP) 1,339 (6.13%). In the Indian seat Govind (All) obtained fewer votes than in 1972; he polled 9,050 (41.4%), Surendra Prasad (NFP) 11,703 (53.6%), and there were 1,077 (5%) informal. The decisive factor in this constituency was not the FNP but the Indian vote which had also swung away from the Alliance. Here in 1972 Govind had polled 52.4% to his NFP rival's 45.7%; in 1977 his share dropped by 11% and though his opponent's increased by only 7.9% that was enough for Govind's defeat. Significantly the poll in this constituency was 80.3% in 1977 compared to 78% in 1972, and the percentage of Indian voters 69.7% compared to 72.2% in 1972. The Indian poll in 1977 averaged 76.7% but in the region of the North Central constituency and its neighbouring North Eastern one, it was above 80%.

The North Eastern and North Central Indian and Fijian national constituencies combined to form the Northern General constituency, and since the Alliance had suffered a reduction in both its Indian and Fijian strength there it was inevitable that it should lose this General seat. For the Alliance, D. Costello polled 17,769 (42%) to Boyan Crampton's (NFP) 21,939 (54%). In a total of 52,615 voters on the roll for this constituency, there were 18,786 Fijians, 33,139 Indians and only 690 General Electors. Alliance had no hope of holding this seat given the 1977 trend.

While there were local factors such as recognition of Osea Gavid's popularity and achievement in Nadroga-Navosa, there were general causes that toppled the Alliance. In two seats, the Northern Central ones, the decline of Indian support had been crucial. The remaining six were lost through the emergence of FNP as a political force of significance among Fijians.

One should explain why Butadroka, originally elected on an Alliance ticket

in 1972, then appointed an assistant minister and finally expelled from the party in 1973, was able to entice into his camp 25% of those Fijians who cared to vote in 1977. To begin with Butadroka did not resign from Parliament and used it as a forum to air his views and obtain publicity for them. No sooner was he ousted from the Alliance than he began organizing at the grass-roots level—this in 1973 when the Alliance, just victorious, had no thoughts on the 1977 General Election. Between 1972 and 1977 Fiji, like elsewhere, was affected by an economic recession where prices spiralled hurting the pockets of consumers. In such a situation many Fijians, most of them in rural areas, where factors such as transport added to the price rises, felt that in Fiji's ostensibly growing economy all but they prospered. Like people elsewhere they questioned their government's efforts and Butadroka laid all the blame on the Alliance. In addition he was provided with an opportunity by the breakdown in communication between Fijian parliamentarians and their electorates, aggravated by a weakening of the Fijian Association organization at grass-roots level. The vacuum that was being created was filled by the message of Butadroka and his handful of dedicated emissaries. Given that it had won comfortable victories in 1966 and 1972 the Alliance between 1972 and 1977 grew complacent and its parliamentarians assumed that their Fijian support would continue indefinitely. Essentially this support was based on Fijian solidarity founded on a rather negative premise: that it was necessary to counter Indian aspirations as voiced by the NFP. It was, therefore, unity with a fragile base.

Butadroka provided an alternative: the removal of Indians. And when he did not press this point, he advocated the reservation of parliamentary membership for Fijians only. His policy was a simple one: Fiji for the Fijians, paramountcy of indigenous interests in a manner whereby they received preferential treatment in Fiji in all matters. The philosophy was not new; it had been voiced, with at least equal popularity, some 60 years earlier by Apolosi Nawai and subsequently by others. In October 1975 Butadroka had unsuccessfully moved a motion in Parliament requesting Government to repatriate all Fiji citizens of Indian parentage.⁵ Though this motion had been defeated it had provided Butadroka with extensive radio and press coverage, especially as the debate lasted two weeks. Butadroka followed a policy of deliberately arousing racial sentiments. That he had some success was due in no small measure to the fact that not only were Fijians a numerical minority in Fiji but found themselves absent from various sectors of the economy and failing to make rapid progress towards narrowing the gaps between themselves and others, especially Fiji Indians. Butadroka, the former co-operatives' officer who had spent a great deal of his time with grass-roots Fijians, well understood the Fijian psychology and chose to prescribe his own remedy. He sought to capitalize on prejudices and phobias that many disadvantaged groups in plural societies tend to have. It was admitted by an Alliance minister, Ratu David Toganivalu, that Butadroka was not completely astray in his tactics when during the October 1975 debate the former told Parliament:

⁵ For a discussion of this debate see Ahmed Ali: 'Fiji Indians and the Politics of Disparity', *India Quarterly*, XXXII: 4 (1976), 413-32. This article also considers in some detail disparities between Indians and Fijians and their implications for politics in Fiji.

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Ethnic feeling or rivalry is very real. One must be very honest in saying that all Fijians consciously, but mainly unconsciously, feel at times in terms of what is expressed in the motion; this is how we feel at times; at certain moments, in times of anger, that is what we say.⁶

Butadroka assessed that there was disenchantment among Fijians and he set out to turn this to his advantage.

In the Rewa area he wooed the support of groups opposed to the wife of the Prime Minister, Adi Lady Lala, the paramount chief of the province. In Namosi-Serua Butadroka raised questions about the lack of development in that region. He claimed that the real beneficiary of the Alliance Government's rural development programme was the Prime Minister's home province, Lau, which had in the Prime Minister's own village on Lakeba both an airport and electrification. Personal attacks on the Prime Minister were an important aspect of Butadroka's campaign against the Alliance.

In their denunciation of the Alliance and the Indians, Butadroka and his FNP used concrete and effective examples:

It is not legally prohibited to have an Indian as Commander of the Royal Military Forces although he happens to be a member of the race which refused to join our army during the war with Japan from 1941-45.

And more, it was an Indian who held the post of Principal Immigration Officer in Fiji, so, went on Butadroka, it was an Indian who determined who entered into or left Fiji. He continued:

We Fijians own the fishing grounds but foreigners do not have to pay us any lease money regardless of the amount of fish they catch.

On looking around we find that non-Fijians still maintain their advanced pace through the equality basis of Alliance leadership. The only Fijians who seem to be getting ahead are those who do not do any useful work, these are Government Ministers. As the Fijian saying goes: 'E votavota 'o Tuirara . . .' (translated: 'The village headman who usually divides a Fijian feast normally leaves the largest proportion for himself').

Fijians are far behind as regards owning those things which stand as symbols for social and economic development, e.g. bus, house, car, telephone and industries. This is due to the weakness and blindness of the Alliance Government.⁷

Butadroka's message had meaning. The old knew of Indian refusal in 1943, the young had been told of it. Indian negligence contrasted with the sacrifice of their own parents. As they looked around and saw who owned and drove buses, who constructed and lived in new middle class homes in the new suburbs, whether in Simla in Lautoka or Namadi Heights in Suva, it was always Indians; in the streets of the towns of Fiji the shops bore names such as Patel, Bhai and Lal. Indians would say the shopkeepers are Gujeratis; but to Fijians they are all the same, all are Indians.

In towns when Fijians seek premises to rent the houses belong to Indians, and every poor tenant thinks his rich landlord extortionate and rapacious. Moreover there have been cases where Indians have utilized their legal rights to the fullest as landlords to obtain their dues and/or evict their Fijian tenants. And some

⁶ *Fiji Times*, 15 Oct. 1975.

⁷ Translation of an FNP election hand-out.

tenements are ramshackle but let at high rentals. Fijians coming into towns from villages do not miss the point that Indians are persistent in demands for longer leases, and frequently delay their rent payments (as the Native Land Trust Board's arrears illustrate), yet when they own houses which Fijians seek to rent Indians do not reciprocate with the charity they demand for themselves. The stereotype image strengthens of the Indian as greedy, mean and selfish, as one who always wants to take but never to give. With such people political partnership was not possible, and Fijian racial solidarity under FNP was the only alternative. Using such tactics FNP attracted support, thereby rendering the Alliance vulnerable where its position previously had been unassailable.

With FNP directing its onslaught against Indians and the Alliance one might have thought the two would unite against a common foe threatening to disinherit both. For its part the Alliance expected increased Indian support: its advocacy of multi-racialism, high sugar prices and the passage of the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (1976) offered Indians, in the Alliance view, both prosperity and security. The Alliance miscalculated because it was even more out of touch with Indian opinion than its Fijian counterpart.

The Fiji Indian Alliance has always been the weakest of the Alliance's three constituent bodies and in 1977 it was barely in existence if not in complete disarray.⁸ In some districts it had not met for two or three years, in one not since the 1972 General Election; its branch committees merely appeared at election time and had little contact with their parliamentarians. To a degree this was the result of the Alliance not having won a single Indian communal seat, thus lacking in any district the chance of creating a firm base for continuing interaction between a leader and his community. Trying to achieve rapport with Indians through Indian parliamentarians elected on national seats with Fijian support and utilizing them in building a party with an ardent Indian following was like attempting to erect an edifice roof first.

Disunity was also marked in the failure of Sir Vijay R. Singh to win endorsement for a national seat in the primary, and in M. T. Khan being unsuccessfully prosecuted for corruption followed by his withdrawal from the party. Factions developed around these two men, and these deprived the Alliance of the dedication needed to woo and maintain Indian support, especially when it became subjected to attacks by NFP, similar to those mounted by the FNP on its Fijian flank.

The issue that did the Alliance cause most damage among Indians was education. The election campaign began during the first week of the resumption of lectures for 1977 at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. By the end of that week it became public knowledge that the Fiji Ministry of Education required Indian candidates who had passed the New Zealand University Entrance to have obtained 261 marks before being eligible for a scholarship to enter the university's preliminary or foundation (pre-degree) programme. Fijian counterparts were awarded scholarships if they had 216 marks or more. Because of a query in the press the Permanent Secretary for Education, early in the campaign, released figures which showed that of the 140 pre-degree places available to Fiji at the

⁸ Based on interviews with some Fiji Indian Alliance officials and supporters in several districts of Viti Levu.

University of the South Pacific 137 had been taken when the university re-opened on 1 March. In the Physical Science programme there were 44 Fijians and 40 others; in the Social Sciences 18 Fijians, 35 others; in medical and dental courses 20 Fijians and 24 others; and first year degree 30 Fijians and 46 others on government awards.⁹ Of those studying abroad through government assistance at first year degree level, there were nine Fijians and 15 others. The official statistics did not indicate the policy of balance being tilted grossly in favour of Fijians.

Even if everyone saw these statistics, apparently not everyone was prepared to accept them. And seeing that they might use the issue to their advantage the NFP did not hesitate to interpret the whole episode as representing blatant discrimination. And this interpretation reached a new peak when Koya in his final campaign speech described it as the university's policy endorsed by the Prime Minister of recruiting students on the basis of double standards. He added: 'It is bound to produce recriminations, frustrations, bitterness, the destruction of the image and the reputation of the university and indeed the Government of the day in the eyes of the world'.¹⁰ Koya chided the Alliance for resorting to discrimination not only in education but also in the military forces.

The alleged discrimination against Indians in education was not allowed to lapse into the background and the NFP was helped, whether deliberately or unwittingly is debatable, when Indian students at U.S.P. decided to boycott the university's Pacific Week programme, held during the last few days of voting, to express their opposition to the government's scholarships' selection procedure. They received extensive publicity which kept the education issue in the forefront of the news.

At every meeting throughout the country the NFP made capital out of this issue.¹¹ And equally at every meeting the Alliance stressed that this step was necessary to rescue Fijians from their disadvantageous position in various spheres of life. It was also suggested that since Fijians had generously agreed to guarantee leases for Indian farmers through the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act (1976) Indians might reciprocate by accepting preferential treatment for Fijians in education. Apparently Indians found such answers unacceptable. Those in the NFP countered by asking why the government was not relaxing its requirements for entry into the armed forces to facilitate the recruitment of Indians, which would rectify the imbalance there since Fijians were overwhelmingly favoured. Others saw government action as the beginning of the end: what was being permitted at tertiary level would soon filter down to secondary schools and even further. Though the policy of reserving 50% of scholarships for Fijians had been accepted by the NFP as well as the Alliance in Development Plan VII, Indians were generally alarmed when they were informed of the disparity in marks required for scholarships in 1977.

Education has always been a subject very close to the Indian heart. It has been the means of improvement of a community descended from illiterate and semi-literate indentured labourers. Indian parents have always been prepared to make immense sacrifices to provide their children with western education; they

⁹ *Fiji Times*, 5 Mar. 1977.

¹⁰ *Fiji Times*, 18 Mar. 1977. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's final campaign address was also published in the same issue.

¹¹ Based on information from both Alliance and NFP supporters.

built their own schools and even today Indian organizations, religious and secular, finance their schools, though with generous government assistance. The progress of the Indian community, its economic diversity, its social sophistication, its political position all derive from the acquirement of Western education. In fact, education is to Indians what land is to Fijians, the source of their existence. Indians argue that without education their children would be fit for nothing but manual labour. Hence they could not support a party that seemed intent on disinheriting their progeny. Salvation then lay in their ensuring that NFP, which was an Indian party, obtained enough seats to speak with strength on their behalf. They must unite behind it lest the Alliance increase its hold and perhaps thereby gain 75% of the seats, which would enable it to amend the constitution with impunity and to their detriment. And NFP campaigners were not slow to suggest that the treatment of Vijay R. Singh and M. T. Khan indicated that the Alliance did not want Indians of calibre within its ranks who might inhibit its freedom of action. The Alliance's education policy kept Indians firmly with the NFP and prevented desertion to the Alliance.

The NFP also emphasized how the Alliance was overtaxing farmers. In this it was assisted by cane farmers receiving notification of their income tax deduction during the fortnight's polling. Many were being taxed for the first time and resented it, even though the taxes resulted from the high prices they had been receiving for their cane. Their anger was assuaged by the NFP offer to reduce taxes coupled with promises of free education, free medical services and reduced rents for their leases. A party that promised them Utopia was preferable to one which offered continuity containing what was unpalatable and menacing to Indian security.

The traditional issue of land, however, did not receive the emphasis of the past. Part of the reason lay in the fact that the NFP had been divided on the subject, one faction having voted in favour of the Agricultural Landlords and Tenants Act while the other led by Koya had opposed it. Too much attention to it might arouse animosity within the party. Where it was raised it was to attack the rental/valuation as unfavourable to Indians.

The NFP set out to convince Indians in the way that FNP did the Fijians that the Alliance would betray them. Indian security could be safeguarded only by NFP. The NFP exploited the sense of insecurity that had been plaguing Indian minds for some time. Elements in the civil service, for instance, were apprehensive that race not qualifications and performance were becoming the criteria for promotions: those Indians in the middle of their careers were particularly anxious.

The Alliance was unable to counter either NFP or FNP propaganda at the grass-roots level. It put too much weight on advertisements in the press, which were too sophisticated to register with a majority of the electorate who were simple men and women. The NFP believed in a direct approach. For instance, in its Hindi broadcasts it directed its appeal to Indians by dwelling upon issues which specifically related to their well-being; Alliance candidates tended to be general, mentioning what the government had done. To a future-oriented community dissatisfied with the status quo, continuity was less attractive than change. The NFP also had a ready force of volunteer workers prepared to go from house to house, village to village, pressing fellow Indians to remain loyal to their

own kind. This personal approach was more effective than public meetings where one could not cajole support or encourage racial unity.

Then there was always Butadroka and his FNP in the background demanding the expulsion of Indians. To Indians the Alliance seemed either indifferent to their plight or incapable of enacting measures to end this threat which in the light of Indian experience in Africa was considered a very real one. Against Butadroka Indian solidarity was imperative and how else might it best be deployed but through NFP. While the Alliance underestimated Butadroka and insisted that his demands could not be realized Indians nevertheless grew more anxious.

Yet it is ironic that Indians flocked to NFP for succour against Butadroka and his FNP. The NFP made no concerted attack on FNP and there were claims that it even helped it by providing transport. The two were fighting a common enemy, the Alliance. By destroying the Alliance's base of Fijian support the FNP was aiding NFP. The FNP was contesting only 17 seats and even if they won all of them they would not have been able to form a government. Besides the FNP was concentrating on the Alliance and therefore posed no threat to the NFP which therefore saw no reason why it ought to assist the Alliance whose loss offered it an opportunity to form the next government.

The NFP sought and obtained Indian support. The political atmosphere helped it since Indians dissatisfied with the Alliance wished to register their protest by making explicit that they could not be disregarded and spurned in Fiji. The appeal to race that NFP made to Indians found the same response that FNP obtained among the Fijians. The only difference was that NFP found favour with 75% of the Indian voters and FNP with only 25% of the Fijians. Nonetheless race was again the single most important determinant in the country's voting behaviour as in 1966 and 1972.

Once the final results were known, late on Monday 4 April, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara announced his intention of resigning the next day and called upon the NFP as having a 'right and duty' to govern Fiji. When approached by the press Mr Koya indicated that he was in no position to make a statement but advised that his parliamentarians would meet at 4.15 p.m. the next day in Suva.

Tuesday 5 April brought no decision from NFP. It did not even choose a leader; the party's constitution required that after a general election NFP parliamentarians should assemble to elect a leader. The Alliance, however, met that day and re-elected Ratu Sir Kamisese as their leader and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau as his deputy.

After victory NFP first informally, later formally, began making overtures to Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to form and head a coalition.¹² He remained firm on his pre-election stance of no coalition. Why did NFP seek a coalition? To begin with, they had 26 out of 52 seats, hardly an effective majority. They were confronted with unexpected success, and in their hour of victory genuinely did not know what to do; there was some confusion, if not shock, among their ranks. They were apprehensive as to how the country might take to a government wherein Indians had a majority, and probably with an Indian Prime Minister. There were genuine fears that the reaction would be such as to make their efforts to govern

¹² *Ibid.* *Fiji Times*, 6 Apr. 1977.

not worth while, particularly as some of the NFP felt that ruling at any stage would have been difficult, and with only 26 out of 52 seats the attempt would be doomed to failure which might herald racial strife. Moreover there was concern, whether rightly or wrongly is difficult to discern, that they might not be able to command the loyalty of the army and civil service to the degree obtained by the Alliance. And as one of them stated publicly, they did not have among themselves a leader of stature able to inspire national confidence.¹³ Some NFP members it seemed were prepared to enter into a coalition in which the Alliance provided both the Prime Minister and the deputy Prime Minister. Finally, there was the fear of Butadroka, the mileage he would obtain from an NFP government and the mischief he would certainly create.

Given that NFP had 26 seats and Alliance 24, and recalling that in 1971 and 1972 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had himself suggested that in plural society situations prone to crisis a coalition was the best way of governing, since it made possible the representation of diverse viewpoints, one might ask why Alliance did not show flexibility in agreeing to form a national government?

The Alliance explanation was that to enter into a coalition with an Indian dominated party would only strengthen Sakiasi Butadroka and his Fijian Nationalist Party.¹⁴ An Alliance-NFP coalition would cast Butadroka in the role of official opposition and thus the alternative to the coalition government. He would then be able to canvass support in the villages throughout Fiji and establish everywhere branches of the FNP. He would go to the Fijian people with the message that his charges against the Alliance and Ratu Sir Kamisese in particular had been proven; that the Prime Minister was power hungry and determined to keep himself in office even with the aid of a party where Indians were supreme. In these circumstances a coalition with NFP implied political suicide for the Alliance and it would have none of it. For its political survival Alliance saw any co-operation with NFP as anathema.

There was another reason, unstated, or at least not made public. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was unwilling to associate himself politically in any way with Koya. After independence the two men had worked well together but about 1974 they gradually drew apart and the breach reached a climax in February 1976 when Ratu Sir Kamisese refused to permit Mr Koya an opportunity to meet officially with the United National Secretary General during Mr Waldheim's visit to Fiji.

On Wednesday 6 April Koya visited the Governor-General on his own initiative. What exactly transpired we were not informed beyond the following from a press statement from Koya:

- (1) On Thursday 7 April representatives of the two parties would meet to discuss the formation of a government for Fiji; this would take place under the Chairmanship of the Governor-General.
- (2) The Alliance representatives would be Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Mr Jonati Mavoia, Mr Mohammed Ramzan, Mr Charles Stinson. The NFP four were to be Mrs Irene Narayan, Mr K. C. Ramrakha, Mr Jai Ram Reddy and Captain Atunaisa Maitoga. All four were members of the anti-Koya faction in the NFP.

¹³ The Hon. Jai Ram Reddy in a Radio Fiji interview, 5 Apr. 1977.

¹⁴ *Fiji Times*, 7 Apr. 1977.

(3) Beyond mentioning the possibility of a caretaker government Koya would not elaborate.

This was announced in the 7 p.m. Radio Fiji News in English; but at about 7.20 p.m. as the recitation of the day's political events neared an end a message was read from Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. It stated that the Governor-General had informed Ratu Sir Kamisese that Koya had indicated to the Governor-General that Koya's party would be able to form a government, and Ratu Sir Kamisese had therefore decided that a conference between the Alliance and NFP would be to no purpose and his delegation would not attend. Later that evening Koya described this action as 'a dirty trick' and added that the conference would still take place as far as his party was concerned.

The same evening Ratu Sir Kamisese told a *Fiji Times* reporter that any caretaker government must be an Alliance one. The press report did not make clear whether Ratu Sir Kamisese ruled out the possibility of a NFP caretaker government or the Alliance caretaker government would be formed after the NFP had failed to form a government on its own. Most people went to bed in Fiji on Wednesday confused or still guessing.

On Thursday morning the Governor-General made it explicit to the NFP delegation that they must form a government 'forthwith'; they indicated that they would and advised that they would also elect a leader and cabinet.¹⁵ They requested the Governor-General to be available to swear them in; he replied that he would.

Some time between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Koya was chosen leader on the second ballot. The first ballot was a tie of 13 each between Koya and Captain Maitoga; the second resulted in 14 for Koya and 12 for Maitoga. Once elected Koya decided to select his cabinet before going to Government House.

Apparently there was considerable discussion and some dissatisfaction with the selection. A newly elected General Elector member demanded the Ministry of Finance, and threatened to cross the floor when not obliged. Another, a Fijian, made clear that he wished to be deputy Prime Minister as well as hold several portfolios; he would either have all he wanted or nothing. It seems also that Koya received an intimation from three of his most able parliamentarians that they preferred not to be in his Cabinet, though they would remain in the party.

About 3.15 p.m. the NFP informed Government House that Koya had been chosen its leader and was ready to be sworn in as Prime Minister. About 3.45 p.m. Ratu Sir Kamisese was asked to go to Government House and he was sworn in as Prime Minister for another term at about 4.15 p.m. At 4.15 p.m. also, Koya left the Government Buildings for Government House assuming that he would be sworn in as Prime Minister. Subsequently Ratu Sir Kamisese told the press that the Governor-General's call 'really came out of the blue' but he 'took it as a command from the authority administering this country', and he was therefore quite happy and pleased to carry it out.¹⁶

On the other hand, Mr K. C. Ramrakha, Secretary of the National Federation Party, was indignant that the Governor-General had acted without prior reference to either Koya or the NFP and he noted: 'We have a written constitution and it

¹⁵ *Fiji Times*, Election Special, 7 Apr. 1977.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

is a pity that the constitutional processes were not allowed to take their due course'.¹⁷

For his part the Governor-General informed the people of Fiji:

In the recent elections the people of Fiji did not give a clear mandate to either of the major political parties. It therefore became the duty of the Governor-General under the Constitution to appoint as Prime Minister the member of the House of Representatives who appeared to him best able to command the support of the majority of the House. The Governor-General has not been able to act sooner as it was not until this afternoon that he was informed who had been elected leader of the National Federation Party. The Governor-General, after taking all relevant circumstances into account, has come to the firm conclusion that the person best able to command the support of the majority of members is the leader of the Alliance Party, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. In compliance with the Constitution and acting in his own deliberate judgement, the Governor-General has accordingly appointed Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is now in the process of forming a government.¹⁸

Thereafter the reasons behind the Governor-General's action became a matter of conjecture and debate. But that is another issue, complex and contentious, requiring separate consideration.

AHMED ALI

¹⁷ Ibid. *Fiji Times*, 9 Apr. 1977 contains an accurate chronology of events of Thursday 9 Apr. as they led to the appointment of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara as Prime Minister.

¹⁸ *Fiji Times*, 9 Apr. 1977. The relevant clause, 73(2), of the Fiji Constitution on the choice of Prime Minister reads: 'The Governor-General, acting in his own deliberate judgement, shall appoint as Prime Minister the member of the House of Representatives who appears to him best able to command the support of the majority of that House'.

ABORIGINAL HISTORY

A NEW journal designed as a vehicle for the presentation of articles and information in the area of Australian ethnohistory will be available in late 1977. While the first concern of *Aboriginal History* will be with post-European contact history of the Aboriginal people, it will welcome articles of a historical nature in such fields as anthropology, pre-history and sociology. Articles on other non-European ethnic groups in Australia (e.g. Islanders, Malays, Chinese and Afghans) will be considered by the editors. It is also hoped that each issue will contain regular features including recorded oral traditions, vernacular narratives with translations, manuscript accounts not previously published, a resume of current events, archives and bibliographical articles and book reviews.

The first issue will run to 170 pp and will be illustrated with photographs, prints and maps. Articles include a history of early contact by W. E. H. Stanner, a study of Part-Aborigines in Tasmania by Lyndall Ryan, 'Tales of Nadu-dagali (Rib-bone Billy)' edited by Luise Hercus and a study of the pearling industry and the Torres Strait Islanders by Jeremy Beckett. A select bibliography will also be a feature of the first issue while the review editor looks at recent trends in Aboriginal historiography. Enquiries should be directed to the Chairman of the editorial board, *Aboriginal History*, c/o The Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, PO Box 4, Canberra, ACT, 2600.