RABUKA'S REPUBLIC: THE FIJI SNAP ELECTIONS OF 1994

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Fiji went to the polls in February 1994 following the defeat of the Rabuka government's budget in November 1993. Confounding all predictions, Sitiveni Rabuka and his party returned to power with thirty-two of the thirty-seven Fijian seats and formed a coalition government with the General Voters Party. On the Indo-Fijian side, the National Federation Party returned with twenty of the twenty-seven Indo-Fijian seats and the Fiji Labour Party with the remaining seven. This article examines the background to the elections and the role and motives of individuals and interest groups in precipitating the crisis, discusses the issues raised in the campaign, analyzes voting trends, and looks at their implications. Indigenous Fijian unity is increasingly being frayed by provincial and class tensions. Encouraged to some extent by the gradual erosion of the fear of Indo-Fijian dominance, Fijian people are beginning to air doubts about the efficacy and survival of traditional institutions and practices in the modem political arena. Rabuka promised to use his mandate to promote national unity through the politics of inclusion. How he reconciles this with his staunch advocacy of Fijian political paramountcy will test his mettle as a leader.

FIJI WENT TO THE POLLS in February 1994, eighteen months after the first postcoup elections of 1992 and for the seventh time since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1970. The snap election was called after the defeat of the government's budget in November 1993. Sitiveni Rabuka's opponents on the government benches hoped to use the election to oust him from office. They had miscalculated. Rabuka and his party, the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), returned to power with thirty-two of the thirty-seven seats reserved for ethnic Fijians under the 1990 constitution. His mandate seemingly secure and his personal popularity high,

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Rabuka was unanimously reelected head of his party and reclaimed the prime minister's office, forming a coalition government with the General Voters Party (GVP), which won four of the five seats allocated to that community. On the Indo-Fijian side, the National Federation Party (NFP) increased its representation from fourteen to twenty seats, while the Fiji Labour Party won the remaining seven.

Elections rarely express the full range of issues and concerns of an electorate. This election was conducted under a constitution that segregates the electorates into separate racial compartments, so that issues of national concern such as the review of the constitution, the resolution of the land tenure problem, creeping corruption in public life, and the prospects of a government of national unity were not debated. Forced to appeal to their separate ethnic constituencies, the major political parties had neither opportunity nor incentive to address transracial matters. The campaign, therefore, powerfully reinforced ethnic chauvinism. It also produced unprecedented fragmentation of the Fijian community and audible murmurs of social tensions and regional and provincial rivalries that have distressed and confused a people used to political unity at the national level. Finding solutions to these difficulties remains at the top of Fiji's agenda.

The Constitution and Its Consequences

The elections were held under a controversial constitution decreed by the interim administration in June 1990. It provides for a strong presidency headed by a Fijian chief from one of three traditional Fijian confederacies (Tovata, Kubuna, and Burebasaga), appointed by the all-Fijian Great Council of Chiefs. The president enjoys extensive powers, including the right, acting on his own judgment, to appoint the prime minister. Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau was the first president, succeeded at his death in December 1993 by the long-term Alliance Party prime minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. In declining health and lethargic even at the best of times, Ganilau was largely an ineffectual, if reassuring, head of state. Mara, in contrast, is an experienced politician sometimes at odds with Rabuka.

The constitution also provides for a bicameral legislature. The appointed upper house, the Senate, consists of thirty-four members, twenty-four nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs and ten representing other communities. The chiefs' nominees enjoy veto power over any legislation affecting Fijian interests, broadly defined. The House of Representatives consists of seventy members elected by racial constituencies. The ethnic Fijians have thirty-seven seats, Indo-Fijians twenty-seven, General Electors five, and the Council of Rotuma one. While Indo-Fijians and General Electors have

single-member constituencies, thirty-two Fijians are elected from multi-member provincial constituencies and five from single-member urban constituencies. In addition, the constitution also provides for special recognition of and protection for Fijian and Rotuman rights and interests, and enjoins the government to promulgate policies in their favor. In short, the constitution entrenches Fijian political supremacy in the political process, especially the power of the chiefs, which according to its supporters merely acknowledges and reaffirms the long-held principle of the paramountcy of Fijian interests. But numerical supremacy in Parliament did not quell the resurgent provincial and regional tensions among Fijians. On the contrary, it exacerbated them. These tensions contributed to the parliamentary defeat of the Rabuka government.

The first general elections under the 1990 constitution were held in May 1992, when the SVT won thirty of the thirty-seven Fijian seats and formed a government in coalition with the GVP (Lal 1993). Not having an outright majority of seats in Parliament, the SVT was forced to seek the support of other parties. One of them was Labour, which backed Sitiveni Rabuka over his rival in the SVT, Josefata Kamikamica, after Rabuka agreed to undertake a review of the constitution, resolve the land problem posed by the imminent expiry of leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act, and reexamine the antilabor legislation and the value-added tax enacted by the interim administration that had governed Fiji from 1987 to 1992. However, once ensconced, Rabuka reneged on the spirit of the agreement. The Labour Party could not continue to support a leader who procrastinated on his promises to them, nor could it withdraw its support without appearing petulant. With its plea for dialogue increasingly unheeded, Labour abandoned Rabuka in June 1993 and walked out of Parliament. By then the party's fortunes were floundering; its milestone decision to back Rabuka had become a millstone.

At the other end of the spectrum, Rabuka had to contend with the demands of Fijian nationalists, with five seats, who had also supported him against Kamikamica. They wanted the government to honor its campaign commitment to "realize the aims of the coup," that is, to achieve the ideal of Fijian paramountcy. On a number of occasions, fringe elements of the movement took to the streets and threatened Rabuka with political reprisals, scorning his efforts to promote multiracialism. The nationalists could not be ignored, since they commanded substantial support in Viti Levu.

In May 1993, a group led by Sakiasi Butadroka and Ratu Osea Gavidi of the Fijian Nationalist United Front launched the Viti Levu Council of Chiefs, demanding recognition of the fourth confederacy, the Yasayasa Vaka Ra, and the rotation of the presidency among all four. They also demanded

conversion of all nonnative land to native titles and that landowners' interests be given priority in the exploitation of resources on their land ***(Fiji Times,*** 22 May 1993). The formation of the Viti Levu Council was the latest of many vain efforts by western Fijians to gain a voice commensurate with their numbers and contribution to the national economy.

Labour and the Fijian nationalists were not Rabuka's only problems. He had powerful dissident elements within his own party and in the Fijian establishment generally, who had never accepted him as a legitimate leader, The circumstances that brought him to power weighed against him. He was not forgiven for defeating the paramount chief of the Burebasaga confederacy, Adi Lala Mara, for the presidency of the SVT. Nor, especially, was he forgiven his startling public criticism of Ratu Mara, calling him a ***baka*** (banyan) tree under which nothing grew, "a ruthless politician who has been allowed to get away with a lot," a man who had the temerity to criticize a constitution that had made him vice-president ***(Daily Post,*** 11 Dec. 1992; ***Pacific Islands Monthly,*** Aug. 1990). Nor, again, was Rabuka's expressed preference for basing social status on achievement rather than birth well received among chiefly Fijians.

For his part, Mara ridiculed Rabuka as an angry, simpleminded colonel. Rabuka's rival, Kamikamica, Mara said, "will make a good prime minister" ***(The Weekender,*** 23 July 1993). Mara was also critical of Rabuka's stewardship of the SVT, blaming him indirectly for poor relations with the Great Council of Chiefs ***(Islands Business,*** Feb. 1994). The tension between the two men was not surprising, for they are similar in temperament: authoritarian, autocratic, emotional, and possessed of a sense of personal destiny as saviors of their people. Mara is also conscious of his chiefly role and responsibilities and seems inclined to regard Rabuka as an upstart commoner. The pro-Mara faction of the SVT not only refused to join Rabuka's cabinet but became vocal critics. Among them were Mara's son, Finau, and Kamikamica, who had refused Rabuka's cabinet offer several times. In the Senate, Adi Finau Tabakaucoro, a minister in Mara's interim administration, championed the anti-Rabuka cause.

Rabuka's own conduct did not help his image or performance. His casual remarks on sensitive subjects and his tendency to think aloud on important policy matters left him open to public ridicule and bewildered his colleagues. His inexperience was apparent. According to critics, Rabuka did not behave in a manner befitting the dignity of the country's highest elected official. One Fijian observer articulated a widely held view: "Rabuka is sometimes unpredictable, tends to be highly emotionally inclined and apparently tries to please everyone. Despite his most valiant efforts, he rushes into important decisions without much consultation or forethought. The end

result of this is more often than not he winds up contradicting himself or his cabinet" ***(Islands Business,*** June 1993). Rabuka came across as a simple man with a decent heart who was locked in a military mind-set of command and obedience, albeit qualified by impulsiveness and at times capriciousness. His openness, accessibility, and eagerness to please, as well as his inability to discipline dissidents, contributed to his parliamentary downfall as much as the machinations of his opponents.

The Rabuka Government: Performance and Problems

On winning office in 1992, the government faced two immediate tasks. One was to consolidate its position among the ***taukei*** (indigenous Fijians), particularly among its potentially explosive fringe. The other was to improve the country's coup-scarred image internationally. The latter was relatively easy. Rabuka made state visits to Australia and New Zealand and represented Fiji at the South Pacific Forum in Honiara. Everywhere he maintained an appropriately low profile. The visits were successful in restoring full diplomatic and defense links with Australia and New Zealand, and reassuring friends in the region. Fiji is still out of the Commonwealth, though rejoining is a long-term goal of the Great Council of Chiefs.[1] Older Fijians also wish to reestablish direct links with the British monarchy, but that is unlikely in the absence of a widely acceptable constitution.

Locally, Rabuka's performance was not as smooth. His power base within the SVT caucus and in the provinces was insecure. To consolidate it, he tried to co-opt potential opponents who had lost in the elections. Many were rewarded with seats in the Senate, diplomatic jobs, or positions on statutory bodies. In cabinet and other appointments, Rabuka worked on the principle of provincial balance. Each province had to be represented in the cabinet and in the higher echelons of government. Indeed, when some members were demoted or dismissed for poor performance, they attacked the prime minister. Viliame Saulekaleka, dismissed assistant minister from Lau, Mara's province, accused Rabuka of being anti-Lauan ***(Daily Post,*** 30 Oct. 1993). Ilai Kuli, mercurial sacked minister of posts and telecommunications, treated his dismissal as a betrayal of the people of Naitasiri. Bua threatened to block the opening of the F$l0 million Nabouwalu Hospital if its representative in the cabinet, Koresi Matatolu, was removed ***(Fiji Times,*** 28 May 1993). Rabuka may have had his mandate, but he had to work with a team whose political loyalties were divided.

In his first few months in office, Rabuka promulgated a number of pro-Fijian policies. In education, the government continued with the special F$3.5 million set aside annually since 1984 for Fijian tertiary education, and

a special Fijian Education Unit was established in the Ministry of Education to monitor progress. The ministry also created special educational media centers in Fijian schools to improve the teaching of science. On the economic front, while continuing its privatization policies, the government proposed measures to propel more Fijians into the commercial sector, where they have been conspicuous by their absence. These included a small business agency to advise and train Fijians, providing loans to provincial councils to increase their shares in Fijian Holdings Limited, giving that investment company priority in buying shares from privatized government enterprises, and proposing income-tax exemption for Fijian-owned businesses for up to twenty years ***(Fiji Times,*** 27 Aug. 1993). The government also set aside a F$2 million fund to provide interest-free loans payable over thirty years to certain ***mataqali*** to buy back freehold land ***(Fiji Times,*** 25 Feb. 1993). Late in 1993, it announced the transfer of the administration of all Crown Schedule A and B lands from the Department of Lands to the Native Lands Trust Board.[2] Eventually, these lands will revert to native title.

Many of the government's pro-Fijian initiatives were cautiously supported by Indo-Fijian members of Parliament, though Labour leader Mahendra Chaudhary asked the government to examine the fundamental reasons why Fijians were not succeeding in certain fields. "There must be something wrong within. the system itself that with all these resources, the results are not forthcoming" ***(Islands Business,*** Aug. 1993). At the same time, they pointed out the blatant discrimination against their community in the public sector. The principle of balance had been ignored, said Chaudhary. Of 9,597 civil servants in 1992, 5,897 or 61.4 percent were ethnic Fijians and only 3,186 or 33.2 percent Indo-Fijians. On the boards of statutory organizations, the paucity of Indo-Fijians was glaring. For instance, there was not a single Indo-Fijian on the board of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, the Fiji Broadcasting Commission, or, incredibly, the Fiji Sugar Corporation.[3] Opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy pleaded with the government for fairness and equity, but the government had no incentive to address concerns of the non-Fijians. Consequently, Indo-Fijian disenchantment grew. Rabuka was indifferent.

No one felt more betrayed than the Fiji Labour Party, whose support had made Rabuka prime minister. The conditions for that support were not observed by the government (Lal 1993). The 10 percent value-added tax on most goods and services was retained as part of the government's progressive tax-reform package. The labor-reform legislation, whose ultimate intention was to cripple trade unions, was unenforced though it remained on the books ***(Fiji Times,*** 14 Apr. 1993). And though there was some talk, there was no action on the pressing issues surrounding the renewal of leases after the

expiry of the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act. On his promise to initiate a review of the constitution, Rabuka retorted: "To review means to look at what has been done. It does not mean that we have committed ourselves to making any changes or abolitions" ***(Pacific Report,*** 28 June 1993).

Government of National Unity and Constitutional Review

In fact, the government had commited itself to a review within five years but did not regard it as a matter of any urgency. Then, suddenly in December 1992, Rabuka mooted the idea of a government of national unity. Rabuka's proposal caught the country by surprise. The idea has a long history. Some form of coalition government was mentioned in the negotiations leading to independence, but nothing came of it. In 1977, the Alliance Party mooted the idea, only to withdraw it when the NFP criticized it as the party's effort to bolster its sagging image as a multiracial organization (Lal 1992a:243-245). Rabuka's concept was equally vague and emotional ***(Fiji Times,*** 5 Dec. 1992). In May 1993, Rabuka elaborated:

> What I and those who support my idea envisage is a style of government that brings the communities together, that enables all ethnic groups to cooperate jointly in the affairs of government and the work of legislature. I want the leaders of Fijian, Indian and General voters to define the middle ground, the political centre, where they can pool their wisdom and their abilities in the national interest. I want to see them united in pursuit of defined national objectives--objectives that serve the interests and welfare of us all, Fijians, Indians and General voters. In my vision of what I consider to be the ultimate good of the country, I see very clearly that it is in all our interest to develop a social and political partnership that transcends suspicion and distrust, that elevates us as a nation and gives us a combined sense of common destiny and purpose. ***(The Weekender,*** 21 May 1993)

This statement was hailed as a major declaration by the government, though, in truth, it was much the same as what Rabuka had stated in 1990:

> I would like to have a government of national reconstruction. First we look at what Fiji needs first. You won your seats on these policies, we won our seats on these policies. You have extreme left views, we have extreme right views. Let's forget about these extremities and let's work on this sort of grey areas in our policies

> where they sort of merge. That's where we run Fiji for the next five years. ***(Pacific Islands Monthly,*** Aug. 1990)

Rabuka's national unity government would have eighteen cabinet members, twelve from the ruling all-Fijian SVT, two each from NFP and Labour, and one each from the Nationalists and the GVP. In this respect, Rabuka's offer differed little from the Alliance Party's offer in 1977.

Rabuka's proposal received a mixed response. The SVT caucus complained of not being consulted. The Fijian nationalists supported the concept, but only on condition that their program for Fijian supremacy "will still be maintained through the government of national unity" ***(Fiji Times,*** 11 Dec. 1990). The violence-threatening faction of the Taukei Movement urged all Fijian members of Parliament to "completely reject and throw out of the window with precipated [***sic***] haste the devilish concept of government of national unity" ***(Fiji Times,*** 22 Dec. 1992). They postponed their protest marches only when Rabuka assured them that "promoting national unity should never be misinterpreted or misconstrued by anyone to mean that he and his government were giving away the special position conferred on the Fijians and Rotumans, as the host communities in Fiji, under the 1990 constitution" ***(Fiji Times,*** 19 Feb. 1993).

Many in the opposition treated Rabuka's proposal cynically Labour's Simione Durutalo argued that the unity proposal was nothing more than an attempt "to repackage his 1987 image of an anti-Indian" ***(Fiji Times,*** 19 Feb. 1993). NFP leader Reddy was skeptical but gave Rabuka the benefit of the doubt. Again, as in 1981, he raised probing questions. There had to be some consensus on the basic principles before the proposal could be discussed further. "I am not going to nominate numbers," he said, but "at the end of the day in a government of national unity, Indians should be fairly represented. We should have a figure that bears some resemblance to their numbers, contribution and work, and not just a token number" ***(The Review,*** Mar. 1993).

In March 1993, the government did what it should have done in the first place: it presented a paper to the Great Council of Chiefs, adding that the proposal was not of "paramount importance" ***(Fiji Times,*** 18 Mar. 1993). In the council many chiefs, including Mara, questioned the prospects for a government of national unity under the 1990 constitution. Mara's public doubts and his advice that the government "should not overly make their intention known to others" ***(The Weekender,*** 28 May 1993) sealed the fate of the issue. The council decided on more grass-roots consultation and sent the proposal to the provincial councils. The chiefs' decision was puzzling. A ***Fiji Times*** editorial commented:

> Consultation is a good thing. But somewhere along the line someone has got to be able to make the decision. In this case it is the Great Council of Chiefs. If it cannot deal with the issues that it has been entrusted to deal with, then it should reconsider its role. Why do the chiefs need to refer back to the people? The people have picked their representatives to the Council. The people should have discussed these things before the meeting. ***(Fiji Times,*** 29 May 1993)

At the time of this writing, the proposals are still with the provincial councils.

With these proposals languishing, Rabuka was forced to address the issue of constitutional review sooner than he had anticipated. As the first step, he set up a cabinet subcommittee to draft the terms of reference for an independent constitutional commission. Chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Filipe Bole, the committee was expanded to include four members of the opposition, including Jai Ram Reddy. After several meetings, the committee agreed on a broad set of guidelines. The review would take place before the 1997 general elections, which would be held under a new constitution. Moreover, the review would not be confined to the electoral provisions of the 1990 constitution, "but would be of a broad nature, covering the 1990 constitution as a whole," and it would also include a consideration of the system of government deemed most appropriate for Fiji. The aim would be to produce a homegrown--autochthonous-- constitution that addressed the needs of the country. Finally, the constitution would reflect some basic principles "that would serve as the foundation for the promotion and reinforcement of national unity in Fiji" (Reddy 1993a). The new constitution, Rabuka said, "is to be an agreed statement of our national purpose, an agreed covenant binding all our different communities and citizens of Fiji to a solemn commitment to work for the peace, unity and progress of our country and to promote the welfare and interests of all its people."[4]

After intense private negotiations, the subcommittee prepared draft terms of reference. Bearing in mind the need to promote "racial harmony and national unity and the economic and social advancement of all communities and bearing in mind internationally recognised principles and standards of individual and group rights," the commission would

> Take into account that the Constitution shall guarantee full protection and promotion of the rights, interests and concerns of the indigenous Fijian and Rotuman people . . . Scrutinise and consider the extent to which the Constitution of Fiji meets the present and

> future constitutional needs of the people of Fiji, having full regard for the rights, interests and concerns of all ethnic groups of people in Fiji . . . Facilitate the widest possible debate throughout Fiji on the terms of the Constitution of Fiji and to inquire into and ascertain the variety of views and opinions that may exist in Fiji as to how the provisions of the Fiji Constitution can be improved upon in the context of Fiji's needs as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society [and] . . . Report fully on all the above matters and, in particular, to recommend constitutional arrangements likely to achieve the objectives of the Constitutional Review as set out above. (Ministry of Information press release)

These terms caused controversy. Labour thought them too restrictive and called in its campaign literature for specific reference to the "internationally recognised principles and standards of civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants." The interests of indigenous Fijians and Rotumans should be protected "without sacrificing the rights, interests and concerns of all other people in Fiji." The 1970 and not the 1990 constitution should form the basis for future constitutional review. The commission, the Labour Party said, should report within twelve months. Labour also argued that the terms of reference should have been drafted by a parliamentary committee, not by a lopsided cabinet subcommittee.[5] The government had, in fact, changed the sequence of the review process and authorized the cabinet subcommittee to draft the terms of reference for and appoint the independent commission. Labour was being effectively marginalized in a process it had helped initiate. The procedures for the review and Reddy's participation in it became an issue in the campaign among the Indo-Fijians.

Strikes, Scandals, and Tony Stephens

Unfortunately for the government, many of its initiatives were overshadowed by scandals conveying the impression of disarray and discord. There was the strike in Fiji Posts and Telecommunications department in 1992 over the sacking of the chief executive, which led to the relegation of Telecommunications Minister Ilai Kuli. Fijian Holdings Limited was facing allegations of insider trading by leading members of its management board. Similar allegations surrounded the awarding of a tender to upgrade the Nadi International Airport to a company, Minsons Limited, in which Rabuka and his wife and Civil Aviation Minister Jonetani Kaukimoce had shares.

The Ports Authority was rocked by a report that uncovered excess expenditure on overseas trips by its board members, irregularities in sales of equipment, personal insurance discrepancies, and misappropriation of funds. And questions were asked about the purchase of the prime minister's new residence (owned by the Ganilau family's Qeleni Holdings) for F$650,000 when the government valuer had estimated its value at F$465,000.

These incidents epitomized a general culture of corruption in public life that seemed to have "reached alarming proportions," made even worse by "the lack of action taken by the authorities on some of the more serious misappropriation cases involving hundreds of thousands of dollars" ***(Fiji Times,*** 21 Aug. 1993). Politicians and civil servants demand bribes openly; greasing the palm is becoming an accepted fact of life in contemporary Fiji. Jai Ram Reddy raised some of these issues in his budget speech in November 1993:

> When a quarter of a million dollars go missing from our police force, when exhibits seized by police from suspects go missing from police stations, when stolen goods exhibited in a court of law disappear; when frauds and dubious political hangers-on can get into key positions in important public sector organisations, then it is time for the people of this country to sit up and think about the rot and it is time 'for this House to do something for this state of affairs. ***(Hansard,*** Nov. 1993)

But these allegations paled into insignificance beside the so-called Stephens affair. Anthony Stephens, adviser to the Fijian nationalists, a businessman with previous brushes with the law, was arrested in 1988 in connection with the importation of pen pistols and detained for forty days. Discharged, he sued the government for F$30 million in damages, but agreed to settle for F$l0 million. Under the terms of a deed of settlement agreed on between him and the attorney general, Stephens was to be paid F$980,000 cash in an out-of-court settlement. For the remaining amount, the government would pay off two mortgages under Stephens's name with the Home Finance Company and the National Bank of Fiji, settle claims with the ANZ Bank for a guarantee to Stephens's company, Economic Enterprises, dismiss a bankruptcy action against him, transfer the Soqulu Plantation in Taveuni, under mortgage control of the National Bank of Fiji, to Stephens, and settle all matters relating to three land titles owned by Stephens's family. According to Stephens and his associates, money from the settlement would be used to arrange a F$200 million loan from a Kuwaiti source to further Fijian business interests.

Astonishingly, the attorney general signed the deed, which was exempt

from income tax, land-sales tax, and the value-added tax. As became clear later, Stephens's connections evidently reached the highest levels of government. But before the deed could be executed, it was exposed in Parliament by Jai Ram Reddy. The deed was merely an attempt to defraud the government, said Reddy. A public uproar greeted the revelations, and people wondered who else, besides the attorney general (Aptaia Seru), was implicated. As a ***Fiji Times*** editorial said, "the sorry mess suggests powerful forces, answerable to no one but themselves, are at work to undermine constituted authority. . . . What remains to be seen now is government's commitment to honest and clean government. Will the Stephens' claims be properly investigated or swept under the carpet?" (1 Oct. 1992). Faced with public pressure, the government agreed to a commission of review. Sir Ronald Kermode, retired Supreme Court justice, was appointed to head the inquiry.

Kermode presented in July 1993 a report that was damaging to anyone even tangentially involved (Kermode 1993). Etuate Tavai in the prime minister's office, the nationalists' contact there, "was not a truthful witness" and had "deliberately misled parliament." Attorney General Seru was a weak man who had strayed from the path of rectitude under pressure. Most seriously, Kermode found Sitiveni Rabuka's conduct wanting. The prime minister had ignored advice from his legal officers and opted for that which supported Stephens's claims; he had interfered in the attorney generals "area of responsibility by sending him a minute which directed him to settle a claim that he must have known was outrageously high"; he "had conspired with Stephens to obtain an overdraft from the National Bank of Fiji by false pretences or by fraud"; and he had deceived Parliament. In a sentence that was widely quoted, Kermode wrote: "In my opinion the Prime Ministers actions as regard the events leading up to the execution of the Deed were not only improper but prima facie illegal" (1993).

The opposition asked Rabuka to step aside until an independent inquiry cleared him. Rabuka refused to act at all on the grounds that Kermode had exceeded his terms of reference, but agreed reluctantly to a judicial review of the commission's findings when some of his backbenchers threatened rebellion. Ilai Kuli, in fact, filed a no-confidence motion in Rabuka's government in September 1993, which he withdrew under pressure from the Methodist Church leader Manasa Lasaro. For its part, the Taukei Movement, or what was left of it, threatened to take to the streets in support of the beleaguered prime minister, only to be told that those who planned to take the law into their own hands should "prepare themselves to face the consequences of their actions" ***(Fiji Times,*** 27 Nov. 1993). The judicial review is still in process, but it is unlikely to be taken seriously now that Rabuka has been returned with a secure mandate. Nonetheless, the whole saga was damaging for Rabuka's personal reputation.

Budget Debate and Rabuka's Defeat

The Stephens affair provided the opportunity to topple Rabuka during the November 1993 budget session, when his opponents voted with the opposition Indo-Fijians. The substance and direction of the budget was consistent with the government's broad philosophy of economic development, which included deregulation of the economy and structural market and labor adjustments to increase Fiji's international competitiveness. The government proposed to reduce duties on most imported goods to 20 percent (from 50 percent in 1989); remove license control on basic food items such as fish, rice, and powdered milk, with butter and panel wood targeted for zero tariff in the near future; increase duty on alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and fuel; and extend tax concessions to companies exporting 30 percent of their products. The defense force would be returned to its pre-1987 levels over two to three years and the public sector pay package kept to 3 percent of the GNP Government expenditure was expected to be F$800 million and revenue to be about F$644 million, providing for a net deficit of F$105 million or 4.8 percent of the GDP This was "an unacceptable level" of government spending, Finance Minister Paul Manueli said. "We must start to control the size of the deficit, early, before it starts to control us" (Manueli 1993).

For Jai Ram Reddy, that was the heart of the problem. "The Government has been strong on rhetoric but weak on action. There is a yawning gap between what this Government says and what it does, raising serious questions both about its competence and ability to manage the nation's economy" (Reddy 1993b). He and others criticized the high level of expenditure and deficit, misguided expenditure priorities, and socially regressive aspects such as higher fiscal duties on basic consumer items and transportation goods. The overall picture of economic management was disturbing. Government expenditure had increased from F$723.4 million in 1992 to F$829.9 in 1993 revised estimates and was projected to increase to F$847.2 million in 1994; the gross deficit had increased from F$120.9 million in 1992 to a F$184.5 million revised estimate in 1993 and was projected to F$150.2 million in 1994; net deficit after loan repayment had increased from F$68.7 million in 1992 to F$105.3 million in 1993 and was projected optimistically to F$84.0 million in 1994. Government expenditure as a percentage of GDP had increased from 35.1 percent in 1992 to 38.0 percent in 1993 and was projected to increase to 36.9 percent in 1994.

Reddy's criticism was not surprising; that of government backbenchers was. Kamikamica led the charge. He did not question the broad direction of government policy, for he had, as the interim finance minister, been the author of many aspects of it.[6] He agreed that government's direct involve-

ment in economic activity should be steadily wound down. And he urged the government to do more to promote specifically Fijian projects in the educational and economic sectors ***(Hansard,*** 17 Nov. 1993). The thrust of his criticism was that the government lacked financial discipline to implement correct policies, At least Kamikamica was consistent. Finau Mara acknowledged that the finance minister had "very little choice in this budget," but he was instrumental in orchestrating the Fijian vote against it though he was away in Australia when the vote was taken. Cabinet minister Ratu Viliame Dreunimisimisi was "not convinced that the budget should be abandoned" ***(Hansard,*** 29 Nov. 1993), but six hours later he voted against it.

Emboldened by mild criticism, the government rejected the opposition's offer to help it revise the budget. Even the prime minister's confidential memorandum to his two deputy prime ministers and the minister of finance to decrease the deficit by F$35 to F$39 million, increase the police allocation by F$2 million, and reduce the duty on basic food items was ignored. The government's complacency was misplaced. Knowing that the twenty-seven Indo-Fijian members of Parliament were going to vote against it, Rabuka's opponents saw their chance. When the budget came up for the second reading on 29 November, it was unexpectedly put to the vote. To the government's consternation, six Fijian members and one GVP member (David Pickering) joined the twenty-seven Indo-Fijians in voting against it. Miscalculation and misplaced trust had cost the government dearly Rabuka accepted part of the blame. "I think my military officer mentality came into focus and led me to believe that once a directive is given, everybody would toe the line, which they did not" ***(Fiji Times,*** 3 Dec. 1993).

The manner of the defeat was surprising. In normal parliamentary practice, the second reading is regarded as procedural. It is followed by the committee stage (in this case 30 November to 3 December), when the whole house would constitute itself a committee and scrutinize the proposed legislation. At this time members of Parliament can propose changes and amendments or seek explanation of particular parts. The substantive vote on a bill then takes place. But in this case, the budget bill was defeated before it reached the committee stage. It seems certain that the Fijian dissidents had not planned to use the budget to bring down the Rabuka government. Their plans materialized only as the debate proceeded and only when the position of the Indo-Fijian parties became clear. They thus seized the second reading of the budget "as their best politically credible opportunity to bring down the government" ***(The Review,*** Dec. 1993).

Rabuka questioned the dissidents' motives in his address to the Great Council of Chiefs on 15 December. Those in his party who voted against the budget could have voted for the government at the second reading,

while warning it to make changes before the bill came up for the substantive vote. This would have been consistent with the decision of the parliamentary caucus meeting of the SVT. The government had been deprived of the opportunity to consider amendments at the third reading (committee stage). Perhaps, Rabuka told the chiefs, "there might have been other considerations that lay behind their determination to vote against their own Government" (Rabuka 1993). Indeed there were. As some Fijian dissidents told Manueli, "they were going to challenge the budget not because they were opposed to it, but because they wanted to change the leadership" (ibid.).

Before informing the SVT caucus, the dissident group had informed Mara of their intention so that "he would have more time to prepare himself for the outcome of the voting" ***(Fiji Times,*** 8 Dec. 1993). How the dissidents wanted Mara to behave is unknown, but this is what the Fiji Labour Party wrote to Mara:

> It is quite evident to us that the defeat of the 1994 Budget had other quite compelling reasons than the unacceptability of the Budget itself. Over a period of last few months, the credibility of the Rabuka Government has been brought [in]to serious question. The government has been rocked by one scandal after another. . . . However Prime Minister Rabuka seems to have cared very little, if at all, about these matters and has carried on in the fashion of business as usual. These incidents have seriously eroded the confidence of the Opposition members and a number of government members of parliament in Prime Minister Rabuka. We feel Prime Minister Rabuka no longer enjoys the confidence of a majority of members of parliament and should therefore be asked to tender his resignation, following which Your Excellency should appoint a new Prime Minister who has majority support. The new Prime Minister should then appoint his cabinet and carry on the task of governing Fiji. We, Sir, would urge you to explore the above suggestion should it be constitutionally possible for you to do so.[7]

Whatever the Fijian dissidents and the Labour Party proposed, the constitution gave the prime minister three options. Within three days of a crisis, he could advise the president to dissolve Parliament and call for fresh general elections. Second, he could tender his and his government's resignation and allow the president to choose another (Fijian) member of Parliament. Only if the prime minister failed to act within the stipulated three days could the president pursue his own initiative.

Rabuka acted expeditiously. At 7:30 on the night on which the budget was defeated, he advised Mara to prorogue the Parliament from 19 January and call for a general election within thirty days. Reddy, himself a lawyer, endorsed Rabuka's decision, which led Mara to say somewhat opportunistically, "Mr Reddy saved my day." The Fiji Labour Party used this comment in the election campaign to hitch Reddy to Rabuka, insinuating that Mara would have replaced Rabuka had it not been for Reddy's contrary advice. In truth, it was not Reddy but the constitution that saved Mara's day, for any other decision would not only have been unconstitutional, but would have implicated him even deeper in the machinations of the anti-Rabuka faction. That said, it was in Reddy's interest to go to the polls to capitalize on his party's strong showing in public opinion polls.

Political Parties and the Campaign

Eight major political parties contested the election, four of them Fijian. These included the SVT, the Fijian and Rotuman Nationalist United Front, Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua (STV), and the Fijian Association Party. Non-Fijian parties were the General Voters Party and the All National Congress, and, in the Indo-Fijian community, the National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party. We will look briefly at the platforms of the various parties, though it is hard to say whether manifestos mattered much in voters' minds.

The SVT was the main Fijian political party, sponsored by the Great Council of Chiefs and formally launched in 1990. Sitiveni Rabuka was its president and parliamentary leader. But although sponsored by the chiefs and intended to be an umbrella organization for Fijians, the SVT was not supported by all, as was evident in the 1992 elections when it got only 66 percent of all the Fijian votes and a substantially lower figure in important regions of Viti Levu. Others disliked Rabuka's leadership of the party and had not forgiven him for his "flagrant flouting of tradition and chiefly protocol" in defeating Mara's wife, herself a high chief, for the post of party president ***(Fiji Times,*** 4 Dec. 1993). There were problems, too, in the party's organization. Theoretically the management board ran the party's affairs, but what was the role and responsibility of the fourteen provinces that subscribed to its coffers? Should not the Great Council of Chiefs have been consulted over major policy decisions before the government embarked upon them? These issues were raised in the campaign. The SVT fielded candidates in all the thirty-seven Fijian constituencies.

Soon after the defeat of the budget, the SVT attempted to forge a coalition with other Fijian parties. It proposed not to contest seats already held by the nationalists "if the favour was reciprocated" ***(Fiji Times,*** 6 Dec. 1993).

Butadroka did not respond. Similar negotiations with the All National Congress also collapsed when the SVT refused to reconsider the Sunday prohibitions and the idea of the fourth confederacy. The SVT then decided to contest the elections alone on a platform that stated, among other things, that cabinet members would be chosen on merit, not on provincial affiliation; there would be a minister of national planning to coordinate developmental activities; shipping to the outer islands would be improved; the value-added tax would be reviewed; deregulation would be balanced against the interests of local manufacturers; there would be more effective support for law and order; efficiency in the public sector would be improved; and an SVT government would give priority to the promotion of national unity. Where the SVT's fortunes looked uncertain, such as in Rewa, Rabuka contradicted himself by promising a seat in his cabinet ***(The Review,*** Mar. 1994). Elsewhere, he hinted that the country could explode if his party was not returned to power.

Rabuka reminded the Fijian electorate of his many pro-Fijian initiatives. He admitted that he had still a lot to learn, and he asked for forgiveness. His opponents had criticized his leadership, Rabuka said, but "no leader could really be effective if from within the ranks of his or her team there were people who were not prepared to show their loyalty to the team leader and commitment to play their role as team members" (Rabuka 1993). Could such people be trusted to safeguard the future of the Fijian people? He may have erred, Rabuka said, but "what I have never been, and what I will never do, is to be disloyal to the Fijian and Rotuman communities, and to give away what I had personally sacrificed myself to achieve in 1987--and that is to secure and to safeguard the interests of the Fijian and Rotuman people." He was astounded at the disloyalty of his colleagues who "almost handed over power of effective control of the national Government of Fiji to the other communities." Fijian people were at the crossroads, and the only way forward for them was to remain united. Loyalty was a virtue that Rabuka emphasized over and over again. "We must be unremitting in our loyalty to each other, to our Chiefs, to this highest of all Fijian councils, the Bose Levu Vakaturaga" (ibid.). And Rabuka, the uncompromising Fijian nationalist, was the people's savior.

The SVT's chief rival for Fijian votes was the Fijian Association, the vehicle of the dissident, anti-Rabuka Fijians, headed by Josefata Kamikamica and quietly supported by Ratu Mara. The idea of reviving the old Fijian Association as an alternative to Rabuka's SVT had been mooted as early as January 1992, two years before this election, though nothing came of that initiative ***(Daily Post,*** 17 Feb. 1992). The Association's founding principles were a mixture of the precoup Alliance Party's platform and that of the

Mara-led interim administration (1988-1992) in which Kamikamica was a key figure. The party would respect multiracialism but in the context of promoting and safeguarding indigenous Fijian interests, it would seek reentry into the Commonwealth, and, following World Bank initiatives, it would pursue privatization and corporatization of profitable enterprises. In truth, the Fijian Association's policies differed little from the SVT's.

On the campaign trail, the Association had only one issue: Rabuka was an unworthy leader. Said Kamikamica: "The SVT leader, over the last 18 months, has followed a path full of broken promises, contradictory statements, reversal of policy, and dishonourable behaviour. Fijian and national unity cannot be achieved through cheap political point scoring just for the sake of rallying together, or for any other selfish vested interest" ***(Fiji Times,*** 21 Jan. 1994). He pointed to Rabuka's involvement in the Stephens affair, his close association with Butadroka's brand of nationalism, his administrative inexperience. "Another five years of this style of leadership and it will be very difficult for the country because the network of interests that feed upon each other in a situation like that will be very difficult to break" ***(The Review,*** Feb. 1994). It was thus in the national interest to stop Rabuka now. The Fijian Association was not disobedient toward the Great Council of Chiefs, as the SVT alleged. It pointed to a number of high chiefs among its party leaders, including Ratu Apenisa Cakobau (son of the late Vunivalu of Bau), Ratu Wili Maivalili of Cakaudrove, and Ratu Aca Silatolu from Rewa. Moreover, it attempted to promote itself as the true servant of the Great Council of Chiefs. If elected to government, the party would work hard to reestablish the chiefs' links to the British monarch. Rabuka appealed to another tradition in Fijian society. "The sooner we realise we are out and out, the better it will be for us rather than crying over spilt milk. We are a proud race. We won't go crawling back to the British and the Commonwealth" ***(The Review,*** Feb. 1994). In this stance, Rabuka echoed the sentiments of ordinary Fijians.

The third Fijian party in the election was Sakiasi Butadroka's newly renamed Fijian and Rotuman Nationalist United Front. Butadroka's fortunes had fallen on hard times. Once an Alliance Party assistant minister dismissed for his anti-Indian remarks--that Fiji's Indian population should be repatriated to India--Butadroka had launched his Fijian Nationalist Party in 1975 and was elected to Parliament on his extremist platform on several occasions. He had formed a coalition, the Fijian Nationalist United Front, with Ratu Osea Gavidi's Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua (STV), but that coalition collapsed weeks before the 1994 election and contested the elections separately. Butadroka championed his causes in Parliament in his own inimitable style. He opposed any review of the constitution until non-Fijians

unconditionally accepted the principle of Fijian political supremacy. Butadroka had been one of the founders of the Viti Levu Council of Chiefs, but his reputation for integrity had been tarnished by the Stephens affair and his base weakened by the desertion of his former coalition partner. Ratu Osea Gavidi had fallen on hard times, too, his STV a pale shadow of its 1980s counterpart, the Western United Front. Gavidi's platform was identical to Butadroka's, except for the high frequency with which Gavidi invoked God's name. He was an advocate of western Fijian interests and cofounder of the Viti Levu Council of Chiefs.

Apisai Tora's All National Congress, launched in 1992, was a Fijian-based party with a multiracial philosophy. A onetime self-styled "Castro of the Pacific" and coleader of the 1959 strike, Tora had been a strident Fijian nationalist in the 1960s before entering Parliament on a National Federation Party ticket. A decade later, he joined the Alliance Party and served as a minister under Mara. In 1987, he was one of the leaders of the Taukei Movement, orchestrating Fijian support for the coup. Subsequently, he joined Mara's interim administration but was sacked when he founded the All National Congress. Tora's political credibility became an issue for his opponents.

A few key issues characterized the All National Congress platform. One was its repeated view that the Great Council of Chiefs should not endorse any one Fijian party, but should stay above the electoral fray. Unless the disengagement was effected, said Tora, the traditional usefulness of the Great Council of Chiefs would be destroyed: "Their reason for existence will be questioned in an increasingly hostile manner. Their survival will for the first time be a matter of serious conjecture. We foresee that their decline will gather such momentum that they will be unlikely to survive as an institution beyond the next ten years" ***(Fiji Times,*** 11 Jan. 1993). Tora was also a strong, longtime advocate of greater restructuring of power within Fijian society to give western Fijians more voice in national affairs. He made "no secret of his desire to end the political dominance of eastern Fijians" ***(Islands Business,*** Oct. 1991). He was one of the principal architects of the fourth confederacy platform. Before the elections, Tora had explored cooperation with the SVT, but the talks collapsed when the SVT refused to accept his demand, among other things, for the recognition of the fourth confederacy. His multiracial proclamations, coming from a founding member of the Taukei Movement, did not ring true.

These divisions caused much anguish among ordinary Fijians. They were puzzled. How could a constitution that entrenched their political supremacy have produced so much division and bitterness among their leaders? they asked. One answer was obvious. The removal of the threat of Indo-Fijian

dominance had opened up space to debate issues relating to the structure and processes of power within Fijian society that had remained hidden from the public arena. The absence of the once unifying leaders such as Ganilau, Cakobau, and Mara encouraged democratic debate among Fijians. Rabuka was no Mara. He lacked Mara's mana and knowledge of the mantras of national politics. And he was a commoner.

Nonetheless, the extent and significance of the division and discordance should be kept in perspective. In the end, although the Fijian parties may have differed about the formula for the distribution of power and resources among the ***taukei,*** they agreed that Fijians must always retain political control. Kamikamica and Tora espoused multiracialism, but only on terms acceptable to the ***taukei.*** They advocated (token) Indo-Fijian participation in government; none wanted a full partnership.

The Fijians, however, were not the only ones who were politically divided. There was internal friction among the category of General Electors, which includes all non-Fijians and non-Indo-Fijians, though it was not as publicly aired. The General Voters Party had done well as SVT's coalition partner, securing two senior cabinet positions. However, its parliamentary leader, David Pickering, a known Mara supporter and a Rabuka critic, had refused to join Rabuka's cabinet in 1992. He was a vocal critic of Rabuka's "inconsistent statements and indeterminate stance" ***(The Review,*** Aug. 1993). Not surprisingly, Pickering left the GVP to stand, and win, as an All National Congress candidate in the 1994 elections, defeating his former party by 893 votes to 554. The real cause of friction seems to have been the extent of the party's support for Rabuka. Many General Electors were pro-Fijian but not necessarily pro-Rabuka. A faction of the GVP wanted greater independence, while the party leaders, whatever their personal misgivings about Rabuka's character and consistency, supported him. In the end, despite internal differences, the GVP won four of the five General seats and returned once again as the SVT's coalition partner.

Among Indo-Fijians, the divisions were deeper and more public, with both the National Federation and the Fiji Labour parties running fierce campaigns to claim the leadership of a drifting, disillusioned Indo-Fijian community. The NFP was the older of the parties, formed in the early 1960s and the main opposition party in Fiji since 1970. It had been in the vanguard of the anticolonial struggle but had fallen on hard times under Siddiq Koya, whose confrontational style disenchanted supporters. Under Jai Ram Reddy's leadership since 1977, a semblance of party unity returned, though still scarred by deep cultural and religious divisions. The Fiji Labour Party, with democratic socialism as its founding creed, was launched in July 1985 to combat the World Bank-inspired economic policies of the Alliance

government. Led by Dr. Timoci Bavadra as president, Labour joined forces with the NFP in 1987 to defeat the Alliance Party but was deposed by a military coup a month later. Bavadra died from spinal cancer in November 1989 and was succeeded temporarily by his wife, Adi Kuini, who left the party to contest the elections under the All National Congress banner. The former coalition partners had drifted apart since 1987, the rupture coming in 1992 when they fought the election separately. In that election, the NFP had won fourteen seats and the Fiji Labour Party thirteen (Lal 1993). The two parties parted company on a number of issues.

One was disagreement over participating in the 1992 elections. The NFP decided to fight the elections under protest, arguing that boycotting it would be futile. The Indo-Fijian community's future lay in dialogue and discussion with Fijian leaders, and Parliament would provide the forum. Labour favored boycott. How could it participate in an election under a constitution that it had roundly condemned as racist, authoritarian, undemocratic, and feudalistic? To do so would accord legitimacy to that flawed document and undermine the party's credibility internationally. International pressure was the only way to change the constitution. However, a few weeks before the election, the party revoked its decision and took part in the elections.

Another issue was Labour's decision to support Sitiveni Rabuka in his bid to become prime minister; the NFP had backed his rival, Josefata Kamikamica. Labour explained its action as a strategic move. When Rabuka, once in power, disavowed the spirit of the agreement and disclaimed any urgency to address issues Labour had raised, Labour's credibility in the Indo-Fijian community was severely tested. To salvage its reputation, Labour walked out of Parliament in June 1993 only to return in September, using the terms of reference for the review of the constitution as a pretext. The NFP exploited Labour's misfortunes. Chaudhary, it said, had committed the "third coup" by supporting Rabuka in 1992, its agreement with him "neither politically feasible nor legally enforceable" ***(Fiji Times,*** 15 Dec. 1993). Labour had practiced "flip-flop" politics. Labour countered that the "problem with the NFP [is that] it never struggled in its lifetime and buckles under pressure" ***(The Weekender,*** 4 Feb. 1994). For the NFP, the main issue was credibility and integrity. It portrayed itself as a party following a steady course on an even keel. Its trump card was its leader, Jai Ram Reddy. A seasoned politician, Reddy had, especially since the last election, emerged as a responsible, statesmanlike figure. A national poll gave him an astounding 80 percent approval. His moderate yet insistent stance on important issues and his performance in Parliament worked to the party's advantage. Fijian leaders, including Mara and Rabuka, spoke approvingly of him. But that, to his opponents, was the real problem. Conciliation and compromise to what

end? they asked. Reddy's moderation they saw as weakness and timidity, reminiscent of the acquiescent politics of the Indian Alliance. They sought to discredit his political record by blaming him for the years of divisive and factional infighting in the National Federation Party. For the NFP, Chaudhary epitomized "inconsistency, unreliability and unpredictability both in substance and style."[8]

But personalities aside, there were some fundamental differences in approach and political philosophy that remained submerged in the campaign. One important difference between Reddy and Chaudhary lay in their approaches to the pace of political change. Gradualism was Reddy's preferred course of action, the favorite words in his political vocabulary being conciliation, consensus, dialogue, moderation. Expeditious change was Chaudhary's path; sacrifice, struggle, boycott, and agitation the key words in his lexicon. When asked how long Indo-Fijians might have to wait for political equality, Reddy replied: "I don't think time is important in politics; it is what you do." Indo-Fijians had suffered a great deal, but "life goes on because of hope, that somehow, some day things will turn around and everybody will realise that we are all Gods children and we're all meant to live and let live" ***(Islands Business,*** Jan. 1991). Reddy's philosophical, even fatalistic, approach acknowledges the limited options available to his people.

Chaudhary is an intrepid, indefatigable fighter who entered national politics through the trade union movement; he is the long-serving general secretary of the Fiji Public Service Association. He is temperamentally different from Reddy. To him, power concedes nothing without a struggle and time does count for a lot in politics and in the life of a community. Change must come and, for Chaudhary, the sooner the better. "We have to do something about this [racial constitution]," he said, "because if we live under this constitution for the next 5-10 years, then they [Indo-Fijians] will end up as coolies" ***(Islands Business,*** Mar. 1994). The same urgency--recklessness in the opinion of his detractors--informs his approach to the land issue. "I don't believe in transferring the problems of our generation to the next generation," he said. "We should try and resolve this issue. If it is not possible to have long term leases . . . then we better start talking about compensation. And Indians will have to accept the reality that they must move away from the land and find a livelihood elsewhere" ***(The Review,*** Aug. 1993). This militant Chaudhary is an anathema to his opponents, but, in an ironic way, he appeals to the dominant radical tradition in Indo-Fijian politics that has long been the province of the NFP.

The NFP seems to have accepted the realities of communal politics and proposed to work within its framework. Said Jai Ram Reddy in Parliament in July 1992:

> Let us each be in our separate compartments if you like. Let communal solidarity prevail and I do not begrudge Fijian leaders for wanting to see that their community remains united. That is a very natural desire. Let the General Electors be united. Let the Indians be united; let everybody be united, but from our respective positions of unity let us accept that we must co-exist and work together and work with each other. That is a more realistic approach. ***(Hansard,*** 24 July 1992)

Labour's position differs. Today it is only a shadow of its 1987 form, denuded of its multiracial base, its leading Fijian lights having deserted the party, but Labour still seems to subscribe to the philosophy of multiracial politics, as opposed to communally compartmentalized politics of the type entrenched by the present constitution. To that end the party fielded General Elector and Fijian candidates. It was a token gesture, and the Fiji Labour Party's non-Indo-Fijian candidates polled miserably; but it still represented an act of protest against the racial constitution, whereas the NFP contested only Indo-Fijian seats.

In sum, the 1994 campaign was a curiously quiet, uneventful affair, with the ethnic groups locked into racially segregated compartments, debating issues of particular concern to their communities. There were few large rallies and virtually no campaigning through the media. Most people seemed disinterested and disenchanted. This parochial, tunneling vision that rewarded ethnic chauvinism and communalism rather than multiracialism is one of the more deleterious effects of the 1990 constitution.

Voting Figures and Future Trends

Polling occurred from 18 to 27 February. The SVT got 146,901 votes or 64 percent of Fijian votes, a decline of 7 percent from its 1992 figures. Its nearest rival was the Fijian Association with 34,994 votes or 15 percent. The Fijian Association won all three Lau seats and the two in Naitasiri. Butadroka's Nationalists polled poorly, too, capturing only 14,396 votes (6 percent), compared with its 1992 share of 10 percent of all the Fijian votes. The All National Congress, which had won 24,719 votes (10 percent) in 1992, won only 18,259 (8 percent) of Fijian votes. Gavidi's STV also recorded a loss, from 9,308 (4 percent) votes to 6,417 (3 percent) in 1994. Labour, which fielded just a few Fijian candidates, got only 555 Fijian votes in 1994. Independents did poorly, except the SVT-allied Ratu Jo Nacola from Ra, who won his seat comfortably

It is reasonably easy to explain why some Fijian parties did poorly. The

Nationalists' agenda was appropriated by the SVT. Butadroka could claim with some justice that his trademark pro-Fijian policies had been hijacked by the party in power. Butadroka's running mate in the 1992 elections, Ratu Mosese Tuisawau, stood as an independent. But Butadroka had also lost ground and respect in his constituency with his antics in Parliament (he was expelled for his virulent criticism of Mara's administration), his strident and now curiously antiquarian anti-Indianism, and his involvement in the Stephens affair. Gavidi's STV lost ground for similar reasons. His political integrity was in tatters over the Stephens affair, and his pro-western Fijian agenda was silently incorporated into the SVT's program. Tora's loss, and especially his loss of ground since 1992, was a surprise. Tora's sudden conversion to multiracialism was unconvincing, and the SVT fought hard to regain its strength in the west.

The real surprise among Fijians was the poor showing of the Fijian Association, except in Naitasiri (because of Kuli's rapport with his grass-roots supporters, the indifference of Tui Waimaro, Adi Pateresio Vonokula notwithstanding) and Lau. Among those who succumbed to the Fijian Association in Lau was the SVT's Filipe Bole. His support for Rabuka despite Ratu Mara's well-known disregard for the man cost him his seat. Mara is the paramount chief of the region. As president, Mara maintained outward neutrality, but as one Fijian observer put it, "Neither the acting chairman [Tevita Loga, Mara's traditional herald] nor Finau Mara [eldest son and a Fijian Association candidate], nor others would have dared move without prior consultation with Mara in his capacity as paramount chief" ***(Islands Business,*** Feb. 1994). Why did the Fijian Association fail in its birthplace, Tailevu? Traditional politics probably played a part. The SVT lineup included Adi Samanunu Talakuli, the eldest daughter of the late Vunivalu of Bau (Ratu Sir George Cakobau), and Ratu William Toganivalu. The Fijian Association's lineup of chiefs lacked stature and authority. Some Fijians also suggest that Kamikamica was damaged by Mara's endorsement. They believe that Mara harbors dynastic ambitions and will support Kamikamica, or anyone else, only until his son, Finau, is ready to assume the leadership. Others suggest that Tailevu is a traditionally conservative constituency, whose people found it hard to vote against a party sponsored by the chiefs. The SVT's allegation that Kamikamica had engaged in a "calculated act of political sabotage" in his "continuing remorseless and unbending ambition for political power in Fiji" ***(The Weekender,*** 2 Feb. 1994) seems to have stuck.

All this says little about the SVT's strengths, which were considerable. It fielded better or at least better-known candidates and, as the party in government, used the politics of patronage to its great advantage. The support of the Methodist Church in the rural areas proved crucial. But without

doubt, the SVT's trump card was Sitiveni Rabuka, who was returned by his electorate with one of the highest votes among Fijian constituencies. Many ordinary Fijians responded to him as one of their own, a man who had sacrificed much to promote their interests. They forgave him his lapses of judgment and inconsistencies. They saw him as a man who had suffered from disloyalty, bad advice from colleagues, and intrigue from powerful forces outside government. Rabuka asked for a second chance, and the electorate responded.

Among Indo-Fijians, the total number of registered voters was 159,480. The NFP won twenty of the twenty-seven Indo-Fijian seats and captured 65,220 votes or 55.5 percent. The Fiji Labour Party got 51,252 votes or 43.6 percent. In the 1992 elections, the NFP had captured 50 percent of the votes to Labour's 48 percent. The NFP made a clean sweep of all the Vanua Levu seats and the urban seats. It also made gains in the sugar belt of western Viti Levu, to some extent because of the mill strike in September 1993 by the Sugar and General Workers Union, which angered farmers. Other farmers turned to the NFP because they were suspicious of a compulsory insurance scheme proposed by the Labour-allied National Farmers Union. However, Labour managed to retain its core support there. Part of Labour's problem was of its own making, but the NFP increased its support on the strength of its own performance, especially that of its leader. Many Indo-Fijians responded to his quiet tenacity.

The election returned both the NFP and the SVT with stronger mandates. The Indo-Fijians have not renounced Chaudhary's style of agitational politics; they have merely suspended it for the time being in favor of Reddy's more accommodationist approach. In that sense, Reddy's mandate is conditional: if his approach fails to produce timely results, the Indo-Fijians will return to Labour. A similar dilemma confronts Rabuka. The SVT leader told his campaign audiences that he will never compromise on his goals to realize the aims of the coup. At the same time, he promised to promote national unity through the politics of inclusion. How he reconciles these two goals will test his mettle as a leader. And his task is all the greater, for people in his own party will use every opportunity to depose him. Rabuka may have taken his revenge, but will he have the last laugh?

Facing the Future: The Fijian Dilemma

Besides his own political survival, Rabuka will have to address urgent issues. Among these are the land issue and the review of the constitution. The Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act will have to be renegotiated soon, under conditions more confused than ever before. Some Fijians want to link the

renewal of leases with Indo-Fijian acceptance of the principle of Fijian political dominance. Some landowners want sharecropping to become an integral part of any future lease arrangement. Western Fijian landowners want to dilute the power of the Native Lands Trust Board to enable them to negotiate directly with tenants. There are others completely opposed to renewal of leases. And, at the other end of the spectrum, twelve thousand Indo-Fijian tenants understandably want to escape the tyranny of short-term leases. If leases are renewed, on what basis will rents be assessed? If not, will the tenants be resettled or receive compensation for the improvements they have made? Similarly, difficult questions haunt the constitutional review. Will the Great Council of Chiefs give up the inordinate power they enjoy under the present constitution? Will the Indo-Fijian people accept the principle of Fijian political paramountcy? Will the racially segregated voting structure be maintained or dismantled in favor of some form of multiracial electorate?

The underlying goal of the Rabuka government is the promotion of Fijian interests. The task was once seen as simple: the removal of the fear of Indo-Fijian dominance. That threat no longer exists: Indo-Fijians (343,168) now constitute 45.3 percent of the population, while Fijians (377,234) make up 49.7 percent.[9] With emigration and a lower birth rate in the Indo-Fijian population, Fijians will continue to represent a greater percentage of the population. Ratu William Toganivalu, a longtime Alliance Party politician who died on the eve of the elections, said: "We, the indigenous people of this country, should not be tempted into the notion that by suppressing the Indian people, it would enhance our lot. If you do that, we are all suppressed" ***(Hansard,*** 30 June 1992). The threat to Fijian (chiefly) power comes not so much from the activities of non-Fijians as from the "disintegrating effects of the breakdown of Fijian communal structures in the countryside, the decay of the villages, and the radicalisation of the urban unemployed" (Macnaught 1977:16).

Such comments used to be dismissed as the uninformed and insensitive ravings of unsympathetic outsiders. But in fact, Fijian leaders and intellectuals themselves are now airing doubts about the efficacy of traditional institutions and practices in the modern arena. Here is a small selection:

> ***Sitiveni Rabuka:*** I believe that the dominance of customary chiefs in government is coming to an end and that the role of merit chiefs will eventually overcome those of traditional chiefs: the replacement of traditional aristocracy with meritocracy. ***(Fiji Times,*** 29 Aug. 1991)

> ***Ropate Qalo:*** [Traditional authority] is a farce, because Fijians want the new God, not the old traditional Dakuwaqa or Degei. The new God is money and the new chapel is the World Bank. Like all the rest of the world, traditional authority has to go or be marginalised. ***(Islands Business,*** Jan. 1991)

> ***Asesela Ravuvu:*** The new political system emphasises equal opportunities and individual rights, which diminish the status and authority of chiefs. Equal opportunities in education and equal treatment under the law have further diminished the privileges which chiefs enjoyed under colonial rule and traditional life before. . . . Although village chiefs are still the focus of many ceremonial functions and communal village activities, their roles and positions are increasingly of a ritualistic nature. (Ravuvu 1988:171)

> ***Jale Moala:*** [The Fijian people] are now facing so many issues that challenge the very fabric of traditional and customary life. Things they thought were sacred have become political topics, publicly debated, scrutinised and ridiculed. The Fijians are threatened and this time the threat is coming from within their own communities where the politics of numbers are changing loyalties and alliances, For the first time in modern history, the Fijian community is in danger of fragmentation; democracy is taking its toll. The chiefs are losing their mana and politicians enjoy increasing control. ***(Fiji Times,*** 21 Mar. 1992)

> ***Simione Durutalo:*** If the average Fijian worker doesn't see the bus fare coming down and his son has graduated from USP and doesn't have a job, he's not going to be very amused. No matter how much you talk about tradition and the GCC [Great Council of Chiefs], you can't eat them. ***(The Review,*** Dec. 1993)

The economic policies of the Rabuka government, with its unwavering commitment to a World Bank-inspired belief in the efficacy of market forces, will only compound the problems. The SVT's manifesto aims to encourage greater economic freedom and competition and to allow world market forces to determine prices and production for export and local markets through an efficient and productive private-enterprise sector. Under an SVT government, "incentives to expand energy and take risks in pursuit of business success will be introduced to support Fiji's able and energetic business-

men to produce results." Furthermore, such a government would "direct incentives to focus attention on the pursuit of international competitiveness and international markets which require deregulation so that businessmen respond to world prices." To that end, "a more rapid movement from subsistence activities to commercial enterprises and paid employment will be encouraged."[10] These policies, if successful, will undermine further the structure and ethos of Fijian village life, which is already beginning to disintegrate.

For some the way out of these dilemmas is to return Fijians to their "semi-feudal, semi-self-sufficing society" (Macnaught 1977:24). Ravuvu suggests rejecting democracy in favor of some form of traditional authoritarianism, because "the best decisions come from entrusting the responsibility to make them to a few well-meaning and knowledgeable people" (Ravuvu 1991:x). After all, democracy is a foreign flower unsuited to the Fijian soil. But foreign or not, democracy is there to stay. What ***is*** required is a massive rethinking about the kind of development that is appropriate, that will not come at the expense of culture and tradition. In addition, Fijian leaders need to promulgate policies that seek "to advance those who have missed out somewhere down the line of history but [not] to deprive those who have succeeded of the fruits of their success" (Einfeld 1994). This delicate act of balancing rights and obligations provides Rabuka with his greatest challenge as well as his greatest opportunity.

NOTES

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1. The opposition to Fiji's readmission is led by India, which insists that a constitution acceptable to all communities in Fiji should be in place before the question of admission can be entertained.

2. These lands, which were either unoccupied at the time of Cession in 1874 or whose landowning clan, the *mataqali,* had become extinct, were state property administered by the Department of Lands.

3. The statistics are revealing: two Indo-Fijians on the nine-member Fiji Posts and Telecommunications Board, one of six on the board of the Housing Authority, two of seven on the Fiji Electricity Authority Board, one of eight on the Fiji Development Bank, one of seven on Rewa Rice, one of seven on the National Training Council, five of ten on Air Pacific, two of ten on the Fiji Trade and Investment Board, one of ten on Pacific Fishing Company, and one of nine on the board of the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji. None of these boards was headed by an Indo-Fijian. Figures provided to me courtesy of Sayyid Khayum, who raised the whole issue in Parliament on 24 November 1993.

4. This quote is from a file of unpublished constitutional review papers in my possession.

5. From Labour campaign literature in my possession

6. Paul Manueli remarked that removing licensing of milk powder, rice, and tinned fish was "a continuation of the deregulation policy instituted by the interim government and the leader of the Fijian Association Party [Kamikamica] was the architect of that." Manueli "was at a loss to understand his criticism" *(The Review,* Mar. 1994).

7. From a copy of the letter in my possession,

8. All this is based on my close observation of the election campaign.

9. These are 1992 figures supplied by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

10. These quotes are from the SVT manifesto, a copy of which is in my possession.

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